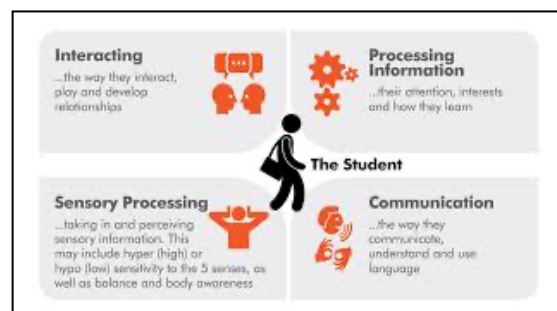


SEND Bulletin No. 17



Autism and ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Autism is a term used to describe a neurological difference in brain development that has a marked effect on how a person develops. There are four areas of difference that are particularly important to understand and pay attention to because most children and young people on the autism spectrum will have individual educational needs to be met in these areas.

The Four Key Areas of Difference:

Social understanding

Differences in understanding social behaviour and the feelings of others, which informs the development of friendships and relationships.

Sensory processing

Differences in perceiving sensory information. Hypo (low sensitivity), hyper (high sensitivity), touch, sight, hearing, smell, taste, vestibular inner ear (balance), proprioceptive (body awareness)

Interests and information processing

Differences in perception, planning, understanding concepts, generalising, predicting, managing transitions, passions for interests and ability to absorb auditory or spoken information.

Communication

Differences in understanding and expressing communication and language, with skills ranging from individuals who are highly articulate, to others who may be non-verbal. Good language skills may mask a deep level of misunderstanding.

These four areas of difference create high levels of stress and anxiety, and this can have a profound impact on an individual's performance and behaviour.

Understanding the social interactive style and emotional expression of staff and peers

Most children and young people with autism find social interaction with adults and peers difficult and tiring. Children and young people with autism are not easily able to understand commonly used implicit social messages and may find it hard to understand or relate to how social rules change due to context, or what is considered socially 'appropriate' (ie what is appropriate to say and do in some situations is inappropriate in other situations). It is hard

for young people on the autism spectrum to easily and quickly read and understand the emotional intentions of staff and peers, but it should also be remembered that this can be a 'two-way' difficulty. The actions of children and young people on the autism spectrum are often misinterpreted as intentionally insensitive or defiant. Children and young people on the autism spectrum may need help to develop the skills which will support them to understand, manage and/or make friendships and relationships.

Differences in the way sensory information is processed

Many children and young people with autism may have levels of sensory perception that are atypical/outside the typical range. This can mean that they may be hypo or hyper sensitive to particular sensory stimuli such as sights, sounds and smells. They may also be overwhelmed as they have problems in separating out sensory information and attending to the most relevant. This can cause high levels of anxiety and staff can do a great deal to reduce this by finding out what each child and young person finds hard and creating a classroom and school environment which addresses these difficulties.

Differences in how information is processed and adjusting to unpredictable changes in routine

Children and young people with autism find change much more difficult than others as they are not easily able to predict what will happen instead or what to do in the changed situation. Some children and young people with autism develop special interests in a topic or activity which may occupy a great deal of their thought and time. Such interests can be used to very good effect as part of the learning process and can be broadened into related areas and act as a route into employment. Children and young people on the autism spectrum have an uneven profile of abilities, which can also coincide with other factors such as age, personality, or the existence of other developmental differences or impairments. It is therefore of paramount importance to assess each child and young person to gain an overall profile of their strengths and needs.

Understanding and using communication and language both verbal and non-verbal

Children and young people with autism at all levels of intellectual ability have difficulties in understanding the communication and language of adults and peers and in communicating effectively themselves. About 40% of children with autism are delayed in learning to speak and some people develop little or no speech. It is likely that most children and young people with autism will need support and strategies to help teach them how to communicate with staff and peers in order to have their needs met. This can involve the use of alternative means of communication (e.g. objects of reference, visual symbols, photos, gestures, spoken word, or a combination of means). It should be remembered that an approach to communication for young people should be consistent across the school day.

Support strategies

You may need to:

- provide an area in the classroom where the pupil can have their own personal space, with the minimum of distractions
- ensure that the classroom has an element of continuity - not too many changes at one time
- prepare the pupil well in advance for any changes in school routine, if possible, as this can be very distressing for them

- be consistent in the management of behaviour
- use a daily visual timetable for younger children
- use visual task lists for older students
- keep instructions clear and simple, checking that they are understood by repeating the instructions individually, as an autistic pupil will not understand that general instructions are for them unless their name is used
- use ICT to support learning in a variety of ways
- explain jokes, idioms and figures of speech - what they are, what they mean and how they work, as far as can be understood, and that people often say things that may not seem logical or literal
- teach the pupil how to interpret social signals
- use social stories to support a learner in specific social situations
- teach self-help skills
- use visual and concrete materials to support understanding of conceptual vocabulary
- use games and activities to teach social conventions and interaction, such as turn-taking
- ensure that the pupil understands that school and classroom rules apply to them.

Support agencies

- Autism Education Trust: www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk
- Autism Independent UK: www.autismuk.com
- Autism Society (USA): www.autism.org
- National Autistic Society: www.nas.org.uk
- Parents for Early Intervention of Autism in Children: www.peach.org.uk
- Scottish Society for Autism: www.autism-in-scotland.org.uk

If you have any particular items you would like information on or any interesting information or resources which you would like to share with your colleagues via this fortnightly bulletin please e-mail them to me:

ari@st-peters.bournemouth.sch.uk

Many thanks

Anne