

Our services

Advice and guidance

autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance

Autism Services Directory

A searchable directory of national and local services, support groups and resources. autism.org.uk/autism-services-directory

Online Community

Autistic adults and families can connect, share experiences and find support. autism.org.uk/community

Branches

Our volunteer-led branches across the UK offer support, information and social activities for autistic children, adults and their families. autism.org.uk/branches

Parent to Parent

Emotional support from trained volunteers who have lived experience of supporting an autistic child. autism.org.uk/parent-to-parent

Get support

Find trusted information, practical tools and support: autism.org.uk

Training: autism.org.uk/training

Newsletters: autism.org.uk/what-we-do/newsletter-form



Autism support

Autism information and services
for autistic people and families



Advice and guidance

What is autism?

Autism influences how people experience and interact with the world. It is a lifelong neurodivergence and disability. Autistic people are different from each other. But, for a diagnosis, they must share differences from non-autistic people in how they think, feel and communicate.

Being autistic means you may feel things and react to them differently to non-autistic people. You may find socialising confusing or tiring, and you may become overwhelmed in loud or busy places. You may have intense interests, prefer order and routine, and use repeated movements or actions to calm yourself or express joy. You might mask your discomfort to fit in, which can lead to mental illness.

How many autistic people are there?

More than one in 100 people are autistic. In the UK, this means at least 700,000 autistic adults and children. This includes some people without a formal diagnosis, as many face barriers to assessment, particularly people from marginalised groups.



The greatest discomfort for autistic people can be the social one. For me, I was confused by the way people behaved.



Chris Packham CBE,
National Autistic Society Ambassador

The spectrum

Autism is understood as a spectrum, but it's not a straight line from 'less' to 'more' autistic. Each autistic person has a unique combination of characteristics, strengths and challenges. A person's characteristics can vary over time, in different situations, or if they are masking. It's important not to make assumptions about an individual's abilities or support needs.

Autism is not a learning disability or a mental health condition. But around a third of autistic people also have a learning disability, and autistic people are more likely to experience mental health problems.



To find out more visit:
autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance

Understanding autism and diagnosis

Understanding autism

Our understanding of autism continues to develop. Most autistic people see being autistic as central to who they are. They may need support, but often the challenges they face come from barriers in society, not from being autistic.

Medical texts often describe autism differently to how autistic people describe it, and sometimes use language that many autistic people and others find inaccurate and offensive. Everyone's brain is different. So a neurodiversity approach views autism as a natural variation in people.

Core characteristics needed for diagnosis

To receive an autism diagnosis, a specialist team must agree that a person shows lifelong differences compared to non-autistic people in:

Communication

Autistic people may use and understand words, tone of voice and body language differently. Some use little or no speech and may communicate through writing, sign language, gesture, sounds, or Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

Behaviours and interests

Autistic people may have focused and dedicated interests, repeated movements and behaviour (known as stimming) and a preference for order, predictability or routine.

Sensory processing

Autistic people can be much more or less sensitive to sound, light, touch, taste or smell, and to body movements and internal sensations. Their experience and reactions may be different to other people's, and this can vary depending on the environment and situation.

Before diagnosis

We provide clear, practical information and resources, including:

- Signs that a child or adult may be autistic
- Deciding whether to seek an autism assessment
- How to request an autism assessment
- How to bring up that you think someone may be autistic.



To find out more visit:
autism.org.uk/diagnosis-advice