

Waiting Well

With an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASD)



Advice, ideas and sources of support whilst waiting for targeted support.

**What is
Autism
page 3**

**Autism and
Mental Health
Page 4**

**How to Help
page 5**

**Other
Sources of
Support
P 6**

What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder that affects how people communicate and interact with the world, which can be overwhelming. Autism is a spectrum condition and all autistic people are different.



Things in Common

There are some common traits autistic children may share. These include:

COMMUNICATION ISSUES

Autistic children can have a very literal understanding of language, which means that they think people always mean exactly what they say. They may find it difficult to understand other people's facial expressions, tone of voice or jokes and sarcasm. Misunderstandings can be common and lead to increased frustration.

REPETITIVE BEHAVIOUR

It is common for a child with autism to repeat certain actions and have routines that have to be followed. An autistic child can have difficulty with unexpected changes in their daily routine.

ANXIETY

Social situations, and interactions with others can cause anxiety.

SENSORY SENSITIVITIES

An autistic child might be over or under responsive to things which affect the senses – sights, sounds, how things feel and how things taste.

OVERWHELM

Sensory overload and difficulty with unexpected change can lead to autistic adults and children becoming overwhelmed. Often this will be described as a 'meltdown', and they often happen in public.

Autism & Mental Health

Autistic people are more likely to have mental health difficulties, but often autistic behaviours can be mistaken for a mental health problem.

Dealing with one of the aspects of autism, or a combination of a few, can be really difficult. It's common for autistic people to experience anxiety as part of their neurodiversity.



Trying to tell the difference ...

A child who has high sensory needs, or who has difficulty making and maintaining friendships could prefer to be alone. This might be mistaken as experiencing symptoms of low mood.

A child with sensory challenges may limit their food intake, and avoid many types of food. This could be viewed as an eating disorder.

How to Help

There are many effective strategies which help reduce anxiety for a person with autism. These could be helpful things to try whilst you wait for targeted support.

Organise and provide structure:	Provide clear and consistent visual schedules, consistent routines, etc. Making things as predictable as possible will help reduce anxiety and therefore reduce challenging behaviours.
Inform transitions and changes	Recognise that changes can be extremely unsettling, especially when they are unexpected. Refer to a schedule, use countdown timers, give warnings about upcoming changes, etc.
Use visual supports for verbal information	Pictures, text, video and other visuals are great because they provide information that stays. Autism Education & Resources Autism Speaks provides a step-by-step, easy-to-understand introduction to visual supports.
Provide opportunities to calm when overwhelmed:	A calming room or corner, and/or objects or activities that help to calm (e.g. bean bag, weighted rucksack/blanket, use of fidget toys, music, textures, lights) Using a consistent tool such as the Incredible Five Point Scale (https://www.5pointscale.com/) to help identify stages of dysregulation and effective strategies at each stage to support the return to calm can be very helpful.
Support sensory factors:	Providing a range of sensory input, or if the child needs, remove or dampen distracting or disturbing stimuli, such as flickering fluorescent lights, use headphones to help block noise, avoid high traffic times, etc. Derby Royal Hospital offers a parent group which aims to increase understanding around sensory processing and how to support a child's sensory needs – details below.
Communication:	Use clear, to the point language. Focusing on “core words,” shortening phrases, and using simpler words. This will lessen confusion for your child. Example: “Don’t stand on the chair!” - Shorten this phrase to: “Sit please”.

Other Sources of Support and Advice

<https://youtu.be/ejpWWP1HNGQ>

<https://www.5pointscale.com/>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/>

The National Autistic Society:

<http://www.autism.org.uk/>

Autism Education Trust:

<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>

Top 5 must read books for parents - <https://theplaceforchildrenwithautism.com/autism-blog/five-mustread-books-for-parents-with-children-on-the-autism-spectrum>

Parent sensory programme - Paediatric Therapy Admin team on 0300 123 4586 (Opt 2, Opt 5) or email dhcft.psgadmin@nhs.net with their name, childrens details and contact information.