

# INFORMATION AND RESOURCES



**ADDvanced Solutions**  
Supporting you to find the answers

## Children and Young People's Guide: You, Me and ASD

### Living with Autism

Autism affects everyone in a different way – it is a lifelong condition but some people grow to lead independent lives, where others will need support for their whole lives.

There is a lot more understanding about autism, and there are many books and websites out there that you can access. They can help you to find out about why you find some things harder than most people. A lot of the books and websites are by people who have autism and are telling their story to make it easier for others.

Because it's difficult to know or express how you're feeling on the inside you can feel frustrated, and often misunderstood. It really helps if someone can slow down and take the world at your own speed, and take the time to find out who you really are.

People with autism can often be very anxious and afraid, and so it's good to find the things that make you feel more happy and safe. For some it's certain smells, like aromatherapy (others find strong smells really stressful); some like watching familiar films, others like to listen to music. Think about what makes you feel calm, and how you can use this to help when you feel stressed or anxious.

Ellie is at college, her story is on the NAS website. She says:

**"Eye contact is difficult and although I like going to the cinema on my own, if a stranger sits next to me I panic and want to leave. But I have learned that if I stay, I will eventually get so absorbed by the movie that I'll simply forget they're there!"**

### Transition

Changing activity can be very stressful. Changing classes each year, and sometimes changing school, is a big deal! Find out all you can about the next class. The more familiar you are with the teachers, the classroom(s) and the way things are done, the less stressful it will be for you.

Usually there will be a transition day, or a 'taster day' for you to try it out. It would be very helpful to go along to see what it's like without the pressure of it being the first day! You could try and get some photographs of the new classroom (but remember that schools sometimes redecorate and rearrange rooms before the new school year). If you are feeling very anxious about a change that's coming up find out all you can about it.

Ask your teacher or helper at school to tell you the name of the person you can go to for help in your new setting – it might be different people on different days.

It may also be helpful for you to let your new teacher know about you, and the things that are helpful to you as well as things that cause you difficulty. For example, you may find it difficult to work in a group; you may prefer to have the same seat for all lessons if possible, etc.

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When you arrive in your new class or school, remember that you will not be the only anxious person! If you spot someone else looking worried, maybe you could make them feel better by giving a friendly smile.

### Self-Management

Everyone matures by learning self-management skills, it's developing how we conduct ourselves in the different settings throughout our lives.

For young people with autism this can be a challenge, as the rules and expectations of other people, and society in general are not always obvious!

What to say, or not to say: when you are upset or angry, emotions can be very powerful and it is difficult to control what you say and do. Thinking through more acceptable responses (words and actions that won't harm or frighten others) in advance can be helpful.

For example, saying 'I'm really worried', and 'I'm feeling very angry' is a safer and kinder alternative to 'No, I won't do it!' or hitting out at someone.

You may feel that those close to you should know you well enough to know what you are thinking and feeling, but there are many times when they won't. It will be helpful for you and for them if you can calmly let them know if something is troubling you, or if there is something you particularly want to do.

It's important that you listen to the people around you, too, so that you can know what matters to them.

**Organisation:** this can be challenging, or you may be a very organised person! Being organised isn't always automatic, it takes time and effort but it makes life less stressful overall. There are lots of ways to help you to stay on top of what you need to remember, such as calendars and reminders on your phone. Colour coding files and school stuff can be helpful, and having the same place to keep your school things so you can easily find them will save you time and stress.

You will be able to think of other ways to help reduce your stress levels, or talk to your mum or dad and come up with strategies together. If you have a timetable of everything that's coming up in the next week displayed on your bedroom wall, for example, you will feel more in control of what is happening in your life, and less stressed by unexpected events.

Think about what it is that you enjoy doing, (maybe drawing, music, or something else) and make sure you allow time to do this as well as the things that you need to do.

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Relationships can be one of the biggest challenges if you are on the Autistic spectrum. Somehow other people seem to have an instinct to know what to say and when to say, and it seems that there are some unwritten rules for relationships that no-one has told you!

You may be the kind of person who would like lots of friends, or maybe you would be happy with one or two closer people. Friendship takes time and it can be a bumpy ride – it is good to remember to show kindness and respect to everyone as much as you are able. This way people will feel safe and happy to be around you.

Be ready to take advice and support from those around you, like family, support staff, teachers and friends. If you have the opportunity to go to a communication club in or out of school you may find it very helpful, and a place to make friends with other young people. It can sometimes feel that everyone is always putting you right; try to remember that the people close to you – family and others – are on your side and want to help you.

**Bullying:** if bullying becomes an issue for you, quietly talk to someone you know you can trust in school or at home. It is not always a good idea to confront the bully yourself, nor should you just keep quiet and say nothing. Tell someone. A real friend will be kind to you and won't embarrass you or make you feel unwelcome or unimportant. If you regularly feel uncomfortable around someone it may be best to see them less often.

Here are some tips to help you build and maintain good relationships:

- Try to maintain **eye contact**, without staring, to show you're interested in what someone is saying. If you find this painful, make sure you are looking at their face as much as you can.
- **Listen to what they're saying**, and allow them to finish what they want to say.
- Try to **remember the important things** about your friends - what they like, when their birthday is - this helps them to know you care about them.
- **Be kind** to yourself and to other people; you're going to get things wrong and so will they!
- Be ready to **share your friends with their other friends** - a healthy relationship has room for other people.
- Your friends may need space to be by themselves at times, and so will you! This is ok, and a good friendship is one that allows each other room to be themselves.

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### Tips for my teachers in school - How you can help me:

- **Give me structure and routine:** Let me know in advance if you are going to change things or if things are going to be different.
- **Don't rush me or I will get confused:** Rushing me will only stress me out I will forget the things I need to do, to take or what I need to do next.
- **Use pictures or props wherever you can:** I learn best by seeing, it helps to make sense of the words.
- **Please make your instructions clear and simple.** I often don't understand sarcasm or metaphor – I take what you say very literally! So please don't say what you don't mean, and keep to your word.
- I may have a strong need to make my work 'perfect' and this can make me very anxious and afraid to begin.
- **I find it hard to cope with a lot of fuss and attention;** if you're pleased with something I have done it encourages me most if you quietly let me know. In the same way it would be great if we could set up a signal for me to let you know when I need help; I will struggle to let you know in front of other people.
- **Sometimes I am overwhelmed and need a break:** Set up a signal that I can give if I need to leave the classroom; maybe a coloured card that I can display for you to see.
- **Please be aware of my sensory difficulties:** They can be a major cause of distress and distraction, please help me to manage them.
- **Have clear and consistent rules on display:** It helps me to understand what you expect from me, and how I should behave, and also helps me to know what is acceptable for other pupils.
- **Help me with social situations:** I can't always say when I'm struggling in a pair or a group situation. Please rescue me if you can see that I am not coping.
- **I may find it hard to start a conversation;** it helps if you can give me a 'starter.'
- Please listen to me, respect me, value me and help me to feel appreciated.

*These tips were developed by and with a group of young people living with neurodevelopmental conditions accessing the ADDvanced Solutions Young Peoples' Group.*

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