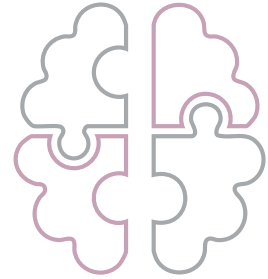




# AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition that involves a unique way of perceiving and experiencing the world. It is categorised by differences in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts (i.e. difficulties in social interactions, difficulties understanding and using nonverbal communication [e.g. eye contact, facial expressions]; difficulties in developing, maintaining and understanding relationships) and restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities (e.g. repetitive movements or speech; insistence on sameness, preference for certain routines and difficulties with changes to routines; narrow interests [but often know a lot of detail and information about their interest areas]; under or over-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory inputs).



ASD is described as a 'spectrum' because it can present in many different ways with different levels of presentation.

## IT IS DIAGNOSED IN 3 LEVELS

### LEVEL 1

'requires support'

### LEVEL 2

'requires substantial support'

### LEVEL 3

'requires very substantial support'

Some people with ASD can communicate verbally, others use augmentative and alternative communication systems, some have co-existing disabilities such as intellectual disability, others do not; some people require support in all daily activities, many do not, or only require a few supports or changes to tasks or the environment to be independent.

## TERMINOLOGY

'person with autism' is a commonly used term, however some people prefer to use 'identity first' language such as Autistic person, or Neurodivergent, as opposed to 'person first' language to describe themselves. If in doubt – please ask the person what they prefer.

## STRENGTHS

Each individual will come with their own unique strengths, however, some common strength areas include being very knowledgeable particularly in their areas of interest, noticing and seeing the details in things that others might miss (e.g. visual details, sounds etc.), having unique ways of perceiving things and coming up with unique ideas, having a good memory in various areas (e.g. memory for events), and being able to make rational (less emotional) decisions in situations.

## SUPPORTING THE PERSON AT NETBALL

### 1

#### Get to know the person

- Utilise the 'All About Me' form to better understand the individual
- Get to know their strengths and interest areas to help build rapport
- Every person with Autism is different – don't assume
- Find out how the person learns best – often using visual prompts, gestures, and demonstrations assists with understanding rather than lots of verbal instruction and interaction

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## 2

### Communication Supports

- Allow the person time to process information and respond (e.g. if you are giving instructions or asking them a question)
- Some people will use supports to assist with communication (e.g. pictures, communication device) so get to know their communication system as much as possible
- For many people with autism using eye-contact and understanding other non-verbals is difficult so whilst they may not look at you while you're speaking, don't assume they aren't listening. They may also not interpret things such as your facial expressions or tone of voice accurately
- Some people with autism may need more direction and support to understand social aspects of being in a team and some of the 'unwritten rules' such as turn-taking, encouraging their peers, using greeting etc., so try to model these positive behaviours during your interactions and provide gentle prompts when needed

## 3

### Consistency and managing changes

- Implement consistent routines in your session structure (e.g. how you start the session, order of activities, rest breaks etc.)
- If there is a significant change try to give the group time to prepare for this (e.g. having a different coach next week as you'll be away)
- Have the schedule of session activities in pictures if possible (e.g. a visual chart)

## 4

### Sensory and Social 'Overload'

- Be mindful of sensory aspects of the environment and activities (e.g. noise, movement, smells, visual input, tactile input, unpredictability of bigger groups). The person may struggle to participate in an activity due to a sensory input (sounds, sights, smells, tactile input, movement) that is too overwhelming to their system or may require a break and some time in a quieter space in between overwhelming activities (e.g. they may struggle with wearing sunscreen and need a break after putting it on before they can join in)
- Be mindful of the social aspects of activities, social environments can be draining, even if enjoyable for the person: they may prefer smaller group activities or prefer to watch first and join in when comfortable, they may need breaks from group participation so consider a mix of interactive/team-based activities and individual practice
- Ask them what they need and what helps them when they feel overwhelmed
- At the start of each session remind everyone that they can let you know if they need a break (either verbally, or suggest a signal they can use) and remind them of where they can go if they need a calmer space for some downtime
- Get to know the person's 'triggers' (things that might lead to them feeling overwhelmed or engaging in a behaviour) and try to minimise these or prepare the person and help them come up with a plan (e.g. 'James, there are going to be some sirens soon for the start of netball games', 'do you want to go and get a drink while that is happening?'). Please refer to the 'positive behaviour support' resource for more information about this

## THINGS TO REMEMBER

**Each person is an individual and will have different strengths, interests and support needs even when they have the same disability or condition.**

### Remember to:

- Utilise the 'All About Me' form and have a conversation with the person
- Create a culture where the person will feel comfortable asking for assistance if they need it
- Don't worry if you make a mistake, it's all a part of learning
- Small changes will make a big difference

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## INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

### National Autism Strategy 2025-2031



[National Autism Strategy 2025-2031 document](#) →

### Sensory Processing



[Raising Children website](#) →

### Autism Queensland



[Autism Queensland website](#) →

### Information in this resource card has been adapted from:

- <https://www.littleathletics.com.au/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/autism/hcp/diagnosis/index.html>
- <https://embrace-autism.com/autism-strengths-and-challenges/>