



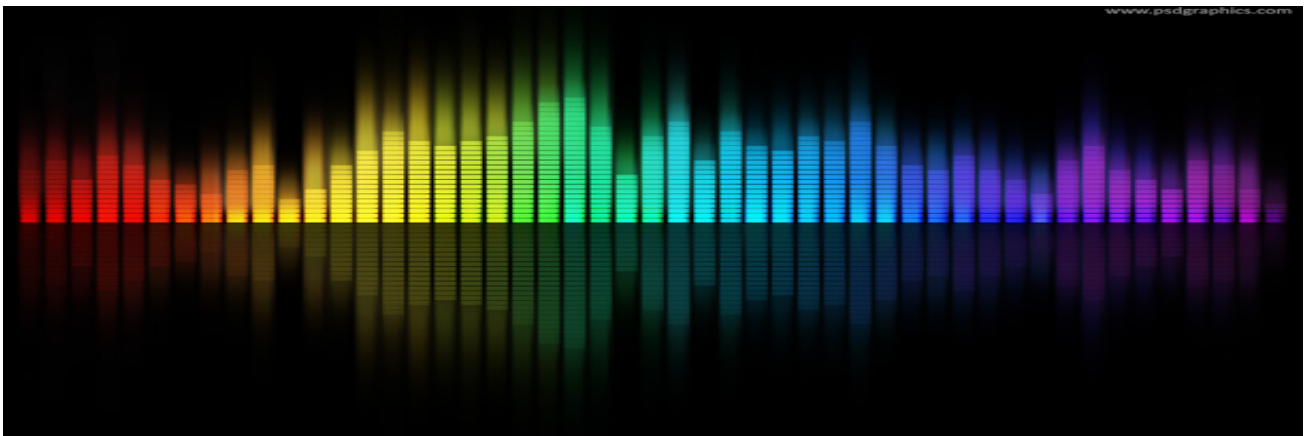
Autism Spectrum Disorder

A guide for teachers

What is autism spectrum disorder?

An autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates, relates to others and experiences the world. Each person with ASD is affected differently but shares impairments in the following areas described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V, American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

1. Social communication & Social interaction,
2. Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour



Educational Impacts

Social Interaction difficulties mean a student on the spectrum may find it difficult to understand unwritten social rules, other people's emotions and feelings and express their own emotions. Their interactions with peers may appear over-formal, egocentric or 'strange' and as a result they may find it hard to form friendships, preferring to spend time alone. Put simply, students with ASD find it difficult to **'fit in'** with their peers in the school environment.

Social Communication difficulties cover both verbal and non-verbal language. Students on the spectrum may have a very literal understanding of language and can be slow to process language. They may have difficulties in using and understanding tone and pitch as well as jokes and sarcasm. Some students may not speak or have limited speech while others will have good language skills but may struggle with turn taking in conversation. In terms of verbal language, students may have difficulties in understanding facial expressions, body language and eye contact. Put simply, students with ASD find it difficult to **understand** what is being communicated and what is expected particularly when the information is communicated verbally.

Restricted interests & repetitive behaviour difficulties can make it hard for a student on the spectrum to understand and predict another person's behaviour and imagine situations outside of their own routine. This may make it difficult for a student to plan ahead and organise themselves to cope with new and unfamiliar situations. Sensory sensitivities are also part of having ASD and can make the hustle and bustle of school life a frightening experience. Students with Autism may be over or under sensitive to certain sensory stimulation such as sights, sounds and smells. Put simply, students with autism find **coping** with aspects of the school environment challenging.