

The project « **Sharing European Knowledge on Autism: Training Programs for Parents** », with number 2015-1-TR01-KA204-022656, under Erasmus+ Programme, was funded with support from the **European Commission**.

Summary guide for parents in Northern Ireland who have children with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)



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What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong disability which disrupts the development of social and communication skills.

The term Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is used because the condition varies from person to person.

It affects individuals from all walks of life, ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds

What causes Autism?

The exact cause or causes of autism is/are still not known but research shows that genetic factors are important.

It is also evident from research that autism may be associated with a variety of conditions affecting brain development which occur before, during, or very soon after birth.

Remember ASD is not

- A learning disability
- A mental health problem
- Due to poor parenting

Basic strategies to use to support a child with ASD

- Provide a set daily routine
- Make clear (including the use of a firm 'NO') which behaviours are unacceptable
- Use positive rather than negative instructions ('walk on the pavement' rather than 'don't walk on the road')
- Avoid sentences like, 'Would you like to tidy your room?' when you want to instruct 'Tidy your room'
- Address the child by name when you want a response
- Provide a warning of any change in routine or switch of activity
- Recognise that some change(s) in mood or behaviour may reflect anxiety or stress (which may be triggered by a minor change in routine or by confusion which they are unable to explain)
- Specifically teach social skills and rules, such as turn- taking, social distance, and strategies for initiating and maintaining conversation

- Teach how feelings are expressed or communicated, when it is inappropriate to express feelings, and how feelings can be recognised
- Teach the difference between bullying and teasing
- Practice newly acquired skills in different settings
- Teach what *finished* means and ensure that the child knows what to do when a task is complete
- Allow the child to avoid certain activities, which are not essential, and they do not like - see this to encourage choice
- Allow some access to obsessive behaviour as a reward for effort for tasks set
- Use simple visual charts to record progress and regular use of praise or more tangible rewards to mark good performance

Summary of the Formal Assessment Process in Northern Ireland

As a parent/carer you may have concerns about your child or young person's development or whether he/she may have autism. Once your GP, health visitor or other professional, with whom you are in contact, is sure that your child/young person is experiencing difficulties, he/she will refer him/her for an assessment. To start the referral process the professional who will make the referral will complete an Autism Service Team (AST) Referral Form which will include information obtained from you.

Step One:

Once a referral is made by an appropriate professional to the specialist AST in your local Health and Social Care Trust, you will be contacted by a member of the AST within four weeks with details about your appointment, if the referral has been accepted for assessment. At this time the AST will also seek information from any services your child/young person is currently receiving. If the referral has not been accepted the referral form will be returned to the referring professional with an explanation/advice about next steps.

Step Two:

One or more meetings will take place to carry out some tests with your child/young person. This is called the assessment process and this can happen at home, at school, or at the Autism Clinic. This will commence within 13 weeks from the referral made to the AST.

Who does the assessment?

The team involved in making the ASD diagnosis will come from a range of professional backgrounds, comprising at least two members from the following list:

- paediatrician;
- child psychiatrist;
- speech and language therapist;
- occupational therapist;
- clinical psychologist;
- specialist health visitor;
- mental health practitioner;
- social worker;
- specialist nurse;
- educational psychologist;
- specialist teacher/advisor;
- other trained professionals with relevant knowledge and expertise.

All professionals who carry out assessments for an ASD diagnosis will have expertise acquired through ASD specific training and related conditions, professional development, supervision and work experience.

Steps Three and Four:

Once the ASD assessment has taken place, you will either be informed on that occasion or at a later meeting, on an agreed date, of the outcomes of the assessment (tests) and be advised if your child/young person has ASD or not, and what will happen next.

Step Five:

Staff will talk to you about the treatments / interventions to be put in place for your child/young person. These treatments/interventions are known as the tailored Intervention Care Plan (ICP) and will be based on your child/young person's assessed needs. They will commence within 13 weeks of getting your child/young person's diagnosis. Ongoing family support will also be made available.

Step Six:

When the initial agreed treatment/interventions have been completed, you will be contacted by the AST, to come for a review appointment to check on your child/young person's progress. You will be advised of a named worker to support you and you may seek advice at anytime. Long-term planning and review will be put in place, especially for transition points.

USEFUL WEBSITES

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/>

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

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health>

<https://www.middletownautism.com/links>

<http://www.autismni.org/>

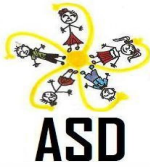
This publication is part of the Erasmus Plus Project "**Sharing European Knowledge on Autism: Training Programs for Parents**".

It was made possible by the participation and support of partners:



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