

# Coping With Challenging Children

## INFORMATION FOR PARENTS (Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder)

Understanding children's behaviour may not be that simple but it doesn't always have to be challenging. There could be many reasons why children behave and react in a challenging way and they may be unaware of their own behaviours. We hope the information provided will be helpful to parents who find their child's behaviour challenging.

The information provided focuses on children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) but it can also be helpful to other conditions including ADHD and learning difficulties.

ASD is one of the major neuro-developmental conditions. If a parent has a child with ASD there is a higher chance that one or both parents has ASD too as the condition can be genetically inherited. Asperger's Syndrome is a hidden disability and is not always obvious initially.

ASD is more common in boys / men but this does not mean that you should discount the possibility in girls / women too. It is less likely to be diagnosed in girls as girls do better socially and cope better with life compared to boys. Girls also don't normally have the same level of behavioural problems compared to boys.

Autism is a development disorder. Children don't grow out of it once they enter into adulthood. There is no "cure" and it is a lifelong condition. ASD is not a mental illness but children (whether diagnosed or not) will probably go through life experiencing difficulties as they encounter communication problems, ASD affects how they relate to other people, and also how they see and make sense of the world around them.

Children with autism can be extremely sensitive to specific sensory stimuli. This varies depending on the individual. It is important to think about the senses when talking to a child. Children with ASD may also have more than one form of Neurodiversity; they can overlap each other which may lead to other difficulties for them.

A child with ASD can easily be overloaded with sensory information in busy places, such as a shopping area, where there are lots of people in close proximity. The way in which this sensory overload is dealt with depends on the individual. It can trigger a fight or flight reaction.

When a situation goes wrong for a child with ASD, it may be confusing for them as they're trying to make sense of what has happened and where it has gone wrong as they lack understanding of it. It is always helpful to retreat to a quieter area too to talk through the situation with the child to help them make sense of the situation. Please note that not every child with ASD may find direct confrontation difficult, so do remember to give them a choice.

Anxiety is a real difficulty for lots of children with ASD. It affects a child psychologically and physically. Anxiety may affect the mind and the body for a child with ASD. It can affect a child's day to day life. When they are stressed they take less information in as they may not be functioning very well. Their brain just stops working to its full potential.

This can take a lot out of a child. It can be very tiring and draining and can take them a couple of days to get back to normal. A child who struggles with anxiety can be affected differently to children who normally work well with understanding and rules.

Some children may experience a meltdown; this can have a big impact on their lives. The child may experience rumbling before a meltdown or a trigger (fight or flight). After a meltdown the child may need space and time to recover as it can take hours or days to get better. The child that is recovering may find it hard to get out of bed in the morning as they have no energy, they may be withdrawn, want to hide away, lack confidence or be confused.

Children that do have a diagnosis, no matter how intelligent they are, can still feel misunderstood and vulnerable. Children can find it hard to fit in to society and be accepted - no matter how hard they try they seem to fail. Children still get situations wrong and make mistakes. Every child is different and most children would have received help and support for the ASD, but there are still children that will go undetected into adulthood without a diagnosis. Only some children with a diagnosis are on medication to help support their ASD.

As a parent you are important too so it is important for you to take a break and learn to recognise when you need to, as children with ASD can be very challenging especially if their stress levels and anxiety levels are high.

*This document is a guide only, everyone is different, difficulties vary from children to children, these guidelines are there to inform your judgment not replace it.*

*Debbie Marshall  
Chair of CANadda*



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## SOME HELPFUL TIPS

- DO** use the child's name first to get their attention and then use short sentences e.g. Sam please sit down or Sam please come down stairs.
- DO** when speaking to a child get down to their level and keep your language simple and direct and be clear to minimise misunderstanding or misinterpretation.
- DO** allow the child extra time to process information and respond when they are spoken to. If you interrupt them then they may have to start again or become overwhelmed.
- DO** check for understanding when speaking to the child. Children may not be able to read between the lines, be clear e.g. yes or no, left or right, black or white.
- DO** use simple, closed and direct questions. Use visual cues to increase understanding e.g. photos, symbols, writing, drawings, objects etc.
- DO** keep choices to two until you are sure the child can make the right choice, due to problems with understanding.
- DO** explain to the child and keep them informed at all times so the child knows what is expected to happen; the child may not have very good flexible thinking and may find it hard to understand what is going on.
- DO** remember to let the child know if things change or don't happen as lack of warning may increase their anxiety levels.
- DO** keep good communication between you and the child and let them know what is happening by keeping them up-dated on what's going to happen in the future.
- DO** have information written down i.e. A timetable may be helpful as the child can take their own time to process the information. Use visual aids too as children with ASD are very visual.
- DO** keep good routines
- DO** have an area so the child has got somewhere to go and relax as they need time out away from stressful situation or time to destress after coming home from school / work.
- DO** reduce the child's stimuli in their environment to help bring down their stress and anxiety levels.
- DON'T** ignore the child and make them feel unwelcome, they may be having a very difficult day. They may need time out after school to relax.
- DON'T** expect them to understand body language, gestures, tone of voice or facial expressions. Be clear in what you say.
- DON'T** assume that inappropriate behaviour is deliberate; it may be the only way that a child can cope with a stressful situation.
- DON'T** use abstract ideas and phrases due to the likelihood of literal interpretation.
- DON'T** take lack of eye contact as a sign of rudeness; it can be hard to process a lot of information as the face has a lot of detailed information or the child may find eye contact unpleasant.
- DON'T** think they are deliberately being rude or disrespectful if they talk inappropriately or on seemingly irrelevant topics. This may be likely to increase in times of stress and if a child's brain isn't functioning normally.
- DON'T** ignore a child when things have gone wrong between you and them as they may be very stressed, use calm communication and allow them time to chill out.
- DON'T** get ignored; be patient, understand the child as they may not be able to help their inappropriate behaviour.
- DON'T** shout, stay calm. It is important that you take a break yourself and recognise when you need to do so.

*Debbie Marshall*

*Chair of CANadda*



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**What is Neurodiversity?** Neurodiversity is a word for wider than usual variation in how our brains process information and how we think, as we can be wired differently. This includes concentration, language, sound, images, light, texture, colour, touch, smell, taste, perception, interaction, communication, imagination, attention, hyperactivity, writing, speech, thought, memory, reading, writing, sequencing and movement. Some major neuro-diverse types are listed below.

**What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?** An Autism Spectrum Disorder varies from person to person. Fundamentally it means that there is a reduced level of ability in the following areas: Social Communication, Social Interaction and Social Imagination. ASD is a lifelong developmental disorder and people with ASD may demonstrate repetitive behaviour patterns, narrow obsessional Interests and resistance to change. They can have unusual sensitivity to their environments.

It can affect how they talk with people – they can be very literal, not understanding jokes, lack understanding when to start or end a conversation and not knowing what to talk about. They find it hard to make and maintain friendships, lack awareness of social rules, can find others confusing and unpredictable, they may have inappropriate behaviours and manners. Asperger's Syndrome is a type of Autism.

**What are Dyslexia and Dyscalculia?** These are learning disabilities and can affect all levels of intelligence. They happen when the development of automatic skills does not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities. It is characterised by difficulties in the following areas: Auditory Processing, Literacy, Numeracy, Working and Short-Term Memory.

Dyslexia can affect how they process and extract words, making sense from written material and cause weaknesses in reading and spelling words. It can also affect how they remember things for a short time and mean that they have difficulty holding on to several pieces of information without referring to notes. Dyscalculia can cause difficulties and understanding of simple numbers and basic numeracy skills. The DfES defines dyscalculia as 'a condition that affects the ability to acquire arithmetical skills'.

**What is Dyspraxia?** Dyspraxia may be seen as clumsiness. It's generally recognised to be an immaturity or impairment of the planning, organisation of movement and co-ordination. It affects the following areas: Gross, Fine Motor Skills, Perception, Thought, Speech and Language.

It affects how people move their bodies, how they see and think about the world and how they speak and use words.

**What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD)?** Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a genetic and neurobiological disorder found in adults as well as children and is defined and based upon observations about how people behave in the following areas: Attention Span, Hyperactivity and Impulsiveness.

They can have difficulty keeping attention, getting easily distracted, become bored, daydreams, often loses things and struggles to follow instructions. They may have too much energy, keeping busy, fidgeting, sublimation, very impatient, act without regard for consequences and difficulty waiting their turn. They don't always stop and think before they do things, acts on a whim, and acts on urges too readily, poor organisation and planning ability.

*Debbie Marshall*

*Chair of CANadda*



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# Coping With Challenging Children

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, ADVICE AND HELP CONTACT:

### **CANadda**

Washingborough Methodist Church, Lincoln Road, Washingborough, LN4 1AT  
Switchboard: 0845 004 6832  
Helpline: 01522 716899  
Website: [www.canadda.org.uk](http://www.canadda.org.uk)  
Email: [debbie.canadda@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:debbie.canadda@yahoo.co.uk)

## FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:

### **The National Autistic Society**

393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG  
Switchboard: 020 7833 2299  
Helpline: 0808 800 4104  
Education Rights Service: 0808 800 4102  
Email: [nas@nas.org.uk](mailto:nas@nas.org.uk)  
Web Site: [www.nas.org.uk](http://www.nas.org.uk)

### **Dyslexia Action**

2-4 Mint Lane, Lincoln, LN1 1UD  
Telephone: 01522 539267  
Website: [www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk)  
Email: [info@dyslexiaaction.org.uk](mailto:info@dyslexiaaction.org.uk)

### **The Dyscalculia Centre**

First and Best in Education, Earlstrees Court, Earlstrees Road, Coby, Northants, NN17 4HH  
Email: [info@dyscalculia.me.uk](mailto:info@dyscalculia.me.uk)  
Website: [www.dyscalculia.me.uk/teacher.html](http://www.dyscalculia.me.uk/teacher.html)

### **Dyspraxia Foundation**

8 west Alley, Hitchin, Herts, SG5 1EG  
Helpline: 01462 454986 (Mon-Fri 10am – 1pm)  
Admin: 01462 455016  
Email: [dyspraxia@dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](mailto:dyspraxia@dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)  
Website: [www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)

### **ADDISS**

Premier House, 112 Station Road, Edgware, Middlesex, HA8 7BJ  
Telephone: 020 8952 2800  
Email: [info@addiss.co.uk](mailto:info@addiss.co.uk)  
Web Site: [www.addiss.co.uk](http://www.addiss.co.uk)

### **Dystalk**

Talks on topics about ADHD, Dyscalculia, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Early Years from Professors, Head and SEN Teachers.  
Web Site: [www.dystalk.com/](http://www.dystalk.com/)

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