

Coping With Challenging Parents

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS (Parents with an Autism Spectrum Disorder)

Understanding parent's behaviour may not be that simple but it doesn't always have to be challenging. Better communication and a better relationship between parents and staff should be effective.

There could be many reasons for why parents behave and react in a challenging way and they may be unaware of their own behaviours as they themselves could be on the Autistic Spectrum.

The information provided focuses on parents 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 people (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.

People 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 the person. Adults 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 person with ASD can easily be overloaded with sensory information in busy places, such as the Reception 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 person 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 parent to help them make sense of the situation. Please note that not everyone with ASD may find direct confrontation difficult, so do remember to give them a choice.

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

This can take a lot out of a person; it can be very tiring and draining and can take them two or three days to get back to normal. A person who struggles with anxiety can be affected differently to people who normally work well with understanding and rules.

Some people may experience a meltdown; this can have a big impact on their lives. The person may experience rumbling before a meltdown or a trigger (fight or flight). After a meltdown the person needs space and time to recover as it can take days or weeks to get better. The person 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.

People that do have a diagnosis, no matter how intelligent they are, can still feel misunderstood and vulnerable. People can find it hard to fit in to society and be accepted - no matter how hard they try they seem to fail. Adults still get situations wrong and make mistakes. Every parent is different and they may well have never received any help or support for the ASD. Only some people with a diagnosis are on medication to help support their ASD.

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

*Debbie Marshall
Chair of CANadda*



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SOME HELPFUL TIPS

- DO** keep your language simple and direct, use short sentences and be clear.
- DO** keep good communication between home and school; breakdown in communication may lead to a parent being more anxious and stressed.
- DO** explain to the parent and keep them informed so they know what's going on within school with their child; the parent may not have very good flexible thinking and may find it hard to understand what is going on.
- DO** make sure parents know what is expected to happen within school; a summary from your SEN policy would be helpful as parents with ASD are highly likely to be visual and may like to see it on paper. They can go through the information in their own time; this will give the parent something to refer back to as they may need to check what's going to happen throughout the year.
- DO** make sure information to parents is clear to minimise misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Parents may not be able to read between the lines, be clear e.g. yes or no, left or right, black or white.
- DO** allow the parents 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 parent; having information written down may be helpful as the parent can take their own time to process the information.
- DO** be clear of anything that is happening with their son or daughter by keeping them up-dated on what's going to happen in the future.
- DO** give them time to outline their concerns as parents may need to make sense of what is happening and going to happen.
- DO** keep choices simple due to problems with understanding, especially if their anxiety levels are high.
- DO** remember to let parents know if things change or don't happen as lack of warning may increase their anxiety levels.
- DON'T** ignore parents and make them feel unwelcome, they may be having a very difficult day.
- DON'T** expect them to understand body language, gestures, tone of voice or facial expressions. Be concrete in what you say.
- 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 parent 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 an adult brain isn't functioning normally.
- DON'T** ignore a parent when things have gone wrong between home and school as they may be very stressed, use calm communication. Allow at least three days for them to calm down and for them to get themselves back to normal. Be aware that there could be other triggers that have or is happening around their lives. Make sure you make an appointment with the parent to help them make sense of their world. Some people with ASD may find direct confrontation difficult, so always try to give them a choice as this may help bring their stress / anxiety levels down.
- DON'T** get ignored; be patient, be understanding with the parent as they may not be able to help their inappropriate behaviour.

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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.

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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
Email: 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
Web Site: www.nas.org.uk

Dyslexia Action

2-4 Mint Lane, Lincoln, LN1 1UD
Telephone: 01522 539267
Website: www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk
Email: 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
Website: 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
Website: www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

ADDISS

Premier House, 112 Station Road, Edgware, Middlesex, HA8 7BJ
Telephone: 020 8952 2800
Email: info@addiss.co.uk
Web Site: 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/

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