

It can be difficult to know when to tell a person with autism that they are on the spectrum. This information sheet gives some tips on how to approach this topic.

Families, teaching and support staff are often reluctant to talk to a person with autism about their condition and what it means, as they find it a difficult topic to approach and explain.

Sometimes, a child might ask "Why haven't I got six friends like Jake?" or "Why doesn't my brain work properly?" In these cases, it can be easier to address these questions, rather than ignore them. It can be very challenging for a person with autism to make sense of the neurotypical world, so explaining their differences to them may help them to put together coping strategies.

Tips

Don't try to tell a person with autism everything at once. Give small amounts of information and allow them to come back and ask questions at a later stage. There are lots of useful tools around to help when explaining to someone that they have autism and what that means:

- Stories where the central character or narrator has autism, like *'The Blue Bottle Mystery'* by Mary Hooperman and *'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night'* by Mark Haddon.
- For people sharing information on diagnosis with someone older, Tony Attwood's first book on Asperger Syndrome can be helpful. Individuals can read the diagnostic criteria for autism for themselves and see how they fit into this.
- You could share with the person with autism some of the many famous people who have the condition and have been successful in their careers. We have provided a list of useful books on this topic at the end of this information sheet.

If the person with autism has an associated learning disability, do not let this stop you from being honest about autism. Although in some cases the severity of their learning disability may mean they will not be able to understand their condition, they may still be aware that they are 'different'. This means that supporting them in increasing their self-esteem is important. They, like any other person, need to know they are valued and worth just as much as any other person.

It is important to remember that autism does not go away: living in a neurotypical world can be a real challenge every day. People with autism will need support from people who understand them, even if sometimes this support is only in the background. They may need more support at some stages in their lives than at others.

We have listed some websites at the end of this information sheet which are designed to offer people with autism opportunities to share their experiences. These may be helpful for some people to learn about others with the condition.

Bibliography and further reading

- *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger Syndrome* by Luke Jackson
- *Martian in the Playground* by Clare Sainsbury
- *The Blue Bottle Mystery* by Mary Hooperman
- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* by Mark Haddon
- *Can I tell you about my Asperger Syndrome?* by Jude Welton
- *What is Asperger Syndrome and how will it affect me?* by the National Autistic Society
- *I am Special* by Peter Vermeulen
- *Asperger's What does it mean to me?* by Catherine Faherty
- *Asperger's Syndrome* by Tony Attwood
- *The Complete Guide to Asperger Syndrome* by Tony Attwood
- *Different Like Me – My Book of Autism Heroes* by Jennifer Elder
- *Asperger's Syndrome and High Achievement – Some Very Remarkable People* by Ioan James

Useful websites

- Autism Connect – A social network for people with autism and those who support them. www.autism-connect.org.uk
- Wrong Planet – a web community for people with autism and those that support them. www.wrongplanet.net