

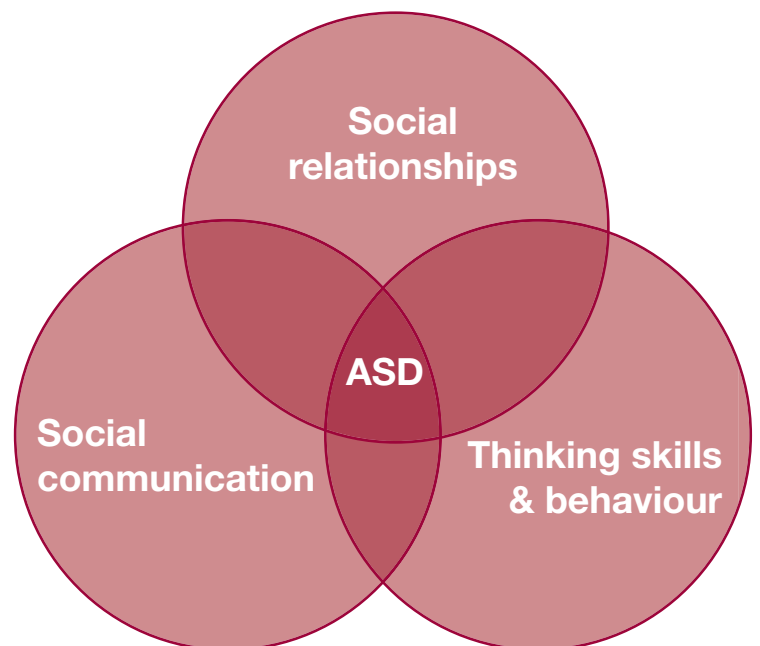
## Helpsheet 1

# Living with Autism Spectrum Disorder

**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a term used to describe a common set of characteristics relating to impairments in three main areas of development.**

Pioneering research by **Lorna Wing** showed that individuals demonstrated a pattern of difficulties occurring in all three areas of development, which she called the ***Triad of Impairments***.

The Triad of Impairments identifies a range of difficulties in the following main areas of development:



### Impairment of social relationships

Individuals with ASD may have difficulty developing social skills and interpreting social behaviour, which in turn will affect their ability to interact with others.

Characteristics in this area of development may include:

- difficulties forming social relationships
- being socially isolated
- finding social cues difficult to read
- behaving in a socially inappropriate or immature way
- lacking the strategies to make friends
- causing offence without being aware
- appearing egocentric or insensitive
- having difficulty understanding the rules of social situations
- finding it difficult to read and interpret facial expressions and body language
- being painfully honest, always telling the truth

## What might help ...

- People with ASD need to be taught how to operate socially. For them it's 'taught not caught', but **be patient**. It may take a long time to introduce, embed and hone social skills and understanding
- Develop scripts for certain situations using e.g. Social Stories / Pep Talks / role rehearsal
- Encourage interaction
- Demonstrate turn taking and sharing
- Promote age-appropriate behaviour and explain why
- Teach how behaviour affects others, create opportunities to discuss feelings in a non-threatening way

## Impairment of social communication

Individuals with ASD may have difficulty understanding and using verbal and non-verbal communication, which will cause problems with social communication.

Characteristics in this area of development may include:

- using formal / pedantic speech
- voice lacking expression, variety of tone
- inability to interpret different tones of voice
- taking things literally
- inability to understand implied meaning
- difficulty understanding idioms – straight from the horse's mouth, don't jump the queue, pull your socks up, raining cats and dogs etc....
- difficulty with non-verbal communication / facial expressions / gestures

## What might help ...

- Explain what you want them to do, not what is not required or what you don't want
- Allow thinking time for processing verbal information
- Reward appropriate responses
- Check for understanding – do not make assumptions
- Teach social use of language e.g. turn-taking in a conversation
- Beware of information overload - avoid bombarding with information / instructions / choices
- Be patient! Social stuff is exhausting for the person with ASD

*"I can't think myself out of a paper bag socially. When I run into a situation that's totally different .... I can't figure out what to do. It's got to be something that I've seen someone else do before so that I can mimic them or I need someone to tell me what to do". Sara Miller*

## Impairment of flexible thinking and behaviour

Individuals with ASD may be rigid in their way of thinking and behaving, preferring rules and routines with which they are familiar. This is sometimes described as 'straight line thinking'. They may have a serious reaction to planned or unplanned changes to routine or usual practice. Neurotypical people manage these and get on with their lives, but for those with ASD this may seriously affect their ability to function.

They may become extremely anxious, exhibiting challenging behaviour, emotional or violent outbursts, which can be difficult for them to manage and for others to understand.

Characteristics in this area of development may include:

- having difficulties adapting behaviour to suit specific situations
- repetitive behaviour patterns
- having problems transferring skills from one setting to another
- insistence on certain rules and may be very rigid about their own routines e.g. arranging food in the fridge or cupboards, locking up at night, dressing, eating
- difficulty making choices
- limited ability to think in an abstract way
- for some individuals with ASD, but not all, difficulty to think imaginatively, to pretend or to be creative
- difficulty with problem solving
- difficulty being spontaneous
- having an unusual and absorbing 'special interest'

## What might help ...

Having a special interest is very important to the person with ASD. It is used as a calming strategy for those anxious times of the day. The person with ASD thinks or talks about their special interest to feel safe, as an escape, as a coping strategy in stressful or anxious situations.

- **Work with the individual, family, staff and peers to ensure consistency**
- **Encourage the use of checklists, to do lists, visual information, planners, apps on phone, electronic reminders to help structure the day and reduce anxiety for the individual with ASD**
- **Whenever possible, plan with and prepare the individual with ASD with advanced warning of forthcoming changes**
- **Signal clear start and finish to activities**
- **Develop self-monitoring behaviours to manage stress e.g. breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, Five Point Scale**
- **Put stress buster strategies in place for unexpected changes**
- **Specific instructions / strategies may be needed for unstructured times or times of transition e.g. breaks, lunchtimes, going home**
- **Families have a detailed knowledge of the needs and difficulties of their family member who has autism. Tap into that knowledge**
- **Troubleshoot the environment / the curriculum / the timetable and try to spot where problems or difficulties could occur**

# General Information

## Co-morbidity

Some individuals with ASD:

- may also have severe learning difficulties, whilst others may be functioning at quite a high level. ASD is no respecter of intellect
- may have additional needs such as Developmental Co-Ordination Disorder (DCD), Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- may also have difficulties with their sleeping and eating patterns, which may stay with them all their lives
- may be likely to have epilepsy

ASD can affect people of any level of intellectual ability and individuals can present with difficulties of varying degrees, some people being more affected than others. Hence, the use of the word 'spectrum'.

## Different subgroups within the spectrum:

Some individuals with ASD:

- Asperger Syndrome
- High Functioning Autism
- Classic Autism
- Kanner's Autism

Individuals in all these subgroups will experience difficulties related to the Triad of Impairments.

## Diagnosis of ASD

A diagnosis of ASD is made by medical professionals.

Some individuals may receive a diagnosis early in their lives, others much later in life and some may never have that 'official' diagnosis.

However, the individual with ASD and / or family members and friends, will recognise the particular traits / set of difficulties. Individuals who have these traits, will live with their difficulties, will find coping mechanisms and may function well in life, having families and fulfilling employment. Others may find many things in everyday life extremely difficult.

***"I find great value and meaning in my life and have no wish to be cured of being myself. If you would help me don't try to change me to fit in your world. Grant me the dignity of meeting me on my own terms – recognise that we are equally alien to each other ... Work with me to build more bridges between us".***

*Dr Temple Grandin*



Ireland's EU Structural Funds Programmes 2007 - 2013  
Co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union



## Helpsheet 2

# Sensory Differences

**We have learned a lot from people on the autism spectrum describing their own particular sensory issues and how they can impact upon their lives and experiences (Williams, 1992 & 1996, Lawson, 2000 and Grandin, 1995). Many would say that sensory differences affect most of their everyday routines.**

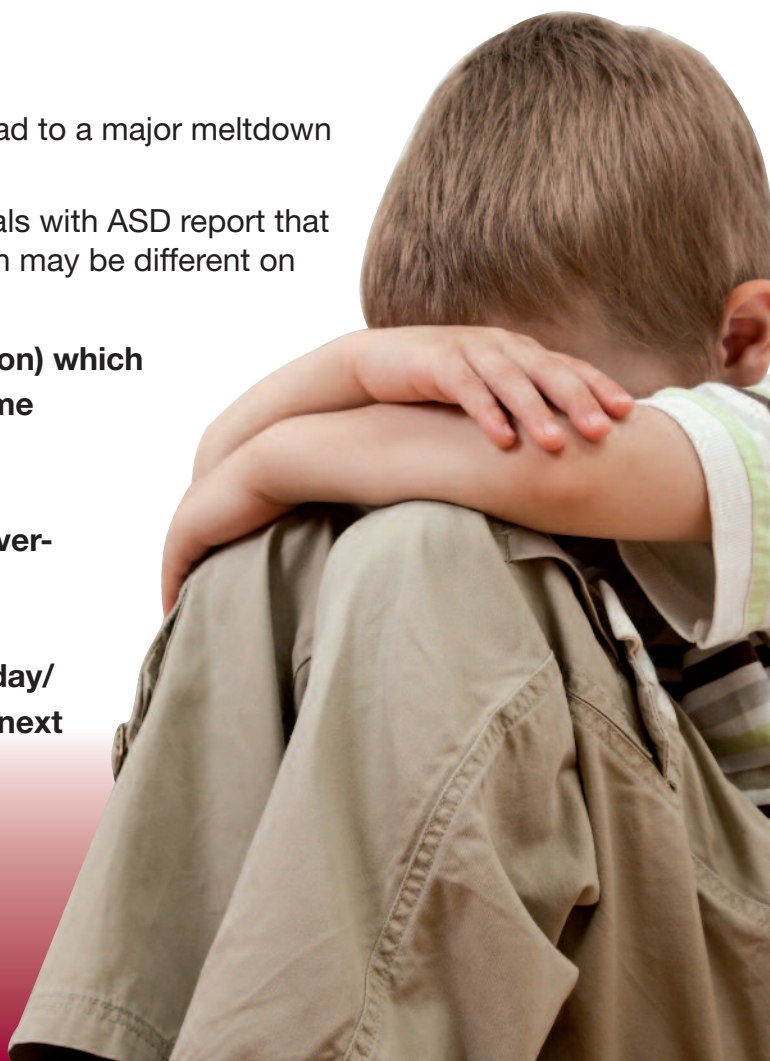
Neurotypical people, unaffected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD), would take the following in their stride or at least have some strategies for coping:

- **Bright supermarket lights**
- **Queuing at a checkout**
- **Loud music over the public address system**
- **People needing to get past**
- **Children crying**
- **An error at the cash till**

For some people with ASD this would lead to a major meltdown because it involves sensory overload.

In terms of sensory processing, individuals with ASD report that sometimes the consistency of perception may be different on different occasions, ranging from

- **Hyposensitivity (a dulling of sensation) which may give rise to a craving for extreme sensations**
- **Hypersensitivity (an over arousal of sensation) which may give rise to over-reaction to common or familiar experiences**
- **Or something that is tolerable one day/ minute might be overwhelming the next**



# Sensory Issues

<p><b>SENSORY AREA:</b> <b>Visual/sight</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May not meet eye gaze</li><li>• Uses sight at sides of eyes</li><li>• Fear of some environments</li><li>• Over reacts to some forms of lighting</li><li>• Needs a clear visual order, cannot cope with clutter or chaos</li><li>• Strong visual likes and dislikes</li></ul>	<p><b>CHECK :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do bright lights cause discomfort ?</li><li>• Are they fearful of dark rooms ?</li><li>• Do they miss detail in the foreground ?</li></ul> <p><b>AND TRY:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Different coloured Perspex overlays</li><li>• Deciding whether it's more important to look or listen, not both together</li><li>• Don't insist on eye contact</li></ul>
<p><b>SENSORY AREA:</b> <b>Auditory/hearing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appears not to be paying attention</li><li>• Some noises cause over reaction or inappropriate response</li><li>• Cannot screen out background noises</li><li>• Uses hands over ears to cut out noise stimulation</li><li>• Finds the human voice hard to tune into</li></ul>	<p><b>CHECK :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• That they have heard what was said</li><li>• They are not having to use 2 or more senses in combination</li><li>• They are not making their own noise to mask other distractions</li></ul> <p><b>AND TRY:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Forewarning of any sudden noises e.g. alarms</li><li>• Using more visual means of communication</li><li>• Using socially acceptable ear protectors e.g. headphones</li></ul>
<p><b>SENSORY AREA:</b> <b>Tactile/touch</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Over or under reacts to certain types of touch</li><li>• Finds some clothing too uncomfortable to wear</li><li>• Including fastenings, labels, seams on clothes</li><li>• Does not want to get 'dirt' on hands or clothing</li><li>• Over or under reacts to temperature or pain</li></ul>	<p><b>CHECK :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are their preferred types of clothing ?</li><li>• What types of touch do they find acceptable ?</li><li>• Do they have different responses to hot/cold/pain?</li></ul> <p><b>AND TRY:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A more acceptable dress code (e.g. no labels)</li><li>• Building an understanding that we wear clothes to suit the expected weather</li><li>• De-sensitising activities e.g. involvement in cooking to make tolerance of 'dirty' tasks</li></ul>
<p><b>SENSORY AREA:</b> <b>Gustatory/taste</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong preferences for certain tastes</li><li>• Dislike of some foods because of texture and colour</li><li>• Types of food cannot touch each other on a plate</li><li>• Hard to try out new tastes/foods</li></ul>	<p><b>CHECK :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do all new things (not just foods) have to be tasted first ?</li><li>• Do they taste inappropriate liquids ?</li><li>• Do they refuse to eat 'different' food ?</li></ul> <p><b>AND TRY:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identifying what their taste preferences are</li><li>• Working with others to present food that is palatable to them</li><li>• Working with others to extend food preferences</li></ul>

## **SENSORY AREA:**

### **Olfactory/smell**

- Strong preferences for certain smells
- Identifies others by their perfume/after shave/deodorant/washing powder
- Finds some smells overpowering

## **CHECK:**

- Do all new things or people have to be smelt first ?
- Do they use smell to determine what is safe to eat or drink ?
- Do they refuse to be in over perfumed environments ?

## **AND TRY:**

- Noting smell preferences and use as a relaxant – like essential oils or toiletry items.
- Making others aware of the importance of smell
- Cutting down on air fresheners/car fresheners or other strongly perfumed environmental smell.

## **SENSORY AREA:**

### **Vestibular/balance**

- Loves spinning, rocking, bouncing
- Craves strong physical activities
- Seeks out experiences that challenge centre of gravity
- Appears to lack a sense of personal safety

## **CHECK:**

- What are their choices of sitting and standing ?
- Can they keep still as a 'statue' ?
- How active do they need to be during a period of time ?

## **AND TRY:**

- Safe centre of gravity activities e.g. climbing walls, trampolining, rebounding, bouncy castles
- Using weighted objects to encourage sitting still
- Finding a chair/seated position that is comfortable for them

## **SENSORY AREA:**

### **Proprioception & proxemics/ body position in space**

- May stand too close or too far away from people in conversation
- Finds making choices in environments hard – e.g. what chair to sit on; where to stand in a space
- May over or under use force – pulls and pushes too hard or not hard enough

## **CHECK:**

- How strong is their grip/grasp ?
- How they move around people and places – do they walk 'through' people ?
- Is it stressful to find a table to sit at ?

## **AND TRY:**

- To practice an acceptable distance from others you know very well/quite well and those who are strangers
- Practising different strengths of pushes/pulls and grips
- Identifying how to choose a good place to sit/stand

# GENERAL USEFUL STRATEGIES

- List the ways in which the individuals with ASD whom you know use their senses to gain information.
- List how they spend their free time and whether this fulfils a sensory function for them.
- How could you use their sensory preferences to present new tasks and experiences?

## References

Grandin, T (1995) Thinking in pictures and other reports from my life with autism. New York : Vintage books

Lawson, W (2000) A life through glass. London: Jessica Kingsley

Williams, D (1992) Nobody, nowhere. New York: Time books

Williams, D (1996) Somebody, somewhere. London: Jessica Kingsley

# Deis-Cyfle!

Deis-Cyfle! means Opportunity!

Opportunity for you to gain the skills you need  
to empower people with ASD.



Ireland's EU Structural Funds  
Programmes 2007 - 2013  
Co-funded by the Irish Government  
and the European Union





## Helpsheet 3

# Impacts of ASD

This Helpsheet accompanies the Module 3 training session titled 'The Impacts of Autism Spectrum Disorder'.

The Helpsheet aims to give you some ideas on how to lessen the impacts of each area of the Triad of Impairments by taking each in turn and gives further suggestions following on from the Module 1 Helpsheet.

## What might help - suggestions

### SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Promote the idea that people can help to meet their needs
- Use informal social times to encourage their interaction without pressure
- Create opportunities to discuss feelings using activities and tasks
- Is social skills training needed ?
- How can peers get involved to support ?

### SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

- Be very clear about what you expect
- Always give more time for processing verbal information
- Tell them what you want them to do, instead of what not to do
- Make opportunities to communicate
- Limit choices- too many choices can cause confusion
- Ensure they can - ask questions that will give them more information / say 'No' to unwanted approaches/ greet others appropriately / ask for help

### FLEXIBILITY

- Realise the importance of consistency and continuity in their lives
- Use visual information to give extra clues
- Plan for change and make sure they know of changes in advance
- Encourage self-organisation strategies – work planning / social life
- Develop self-monitoring to manage their own levels of stress
- Specific instructions may be needed for times of transition, e.g. breaks, changes of tasks etc

## Here are some other conditions that can occur alongside ASD:

Fragile X

Tourette's

Tuberous sclerosis

Rett's

Down

Landau Kleffner

Angelman

ADHD

Gastrointestinal problems

Epilepsy

Neuroinflammation and immune disorder

Sleep problems

## As well as:

Anxiety and other mental health conditions

Sensory Integration Disorder (SID)

Dyspraxia

Central Auditory Processing (CAP)

Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome ("Irlen Syndrome")

Learning disability/ability

Dyslexia/hyperlexia

Non-verbal Learning Disability



Ireland's EU Structural Funds Programmes 2007 - 2013  
Co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union

