



Understanding autism

Salisbury Rovers welcomes everyone!

All children are unique. All have needs! However, it is important to understand that children with autism may face particular challenges in social situations and this may result in behaviour which causes distress to them or others.

What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them.

Some autistic people say the world feels overwhelming and this can cause them considerable anxiety. Anxiety changes behaviour.

In particular, understanding and relating to other people, and taking part in everyday life can be harder. Autistic people may feel 'different', they may struggle to communicate, be afraid to communicate or they may say or act in a way which is unexpected.

Autistic people may not 'look' disabled. Some parents of autistic children say that other people simply think their child is naughty or rude. This is not the case. A diagnosis of autism is a complicated process involving multiple clinical professionals. It is not easily given. Key impairments must be demonstrated over time. We have set out some information about them below.

Persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction

Autistic people have difficulties with interpreting both verbal and non-verbal language like gestures or tone of voice. Many have a very literal understanding of language, and think people always mean exactly what they say. They may find it difficult to use or understand facial expressions, tone of voice, jokes and sarcasm.

Social interaction

This results in difficulty 'reading' other people - recognising or understanding others' feelings and intentions - and expressing their own emotions. This can make it very hard for them to navigate the social world. They may appear to be insensitive or appear to behave in a way thought to be socially inappropriate.

Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests

The world can seem a very unpredictable and routines can help manage anxiety. But this means it may be difficult for an autistic person to take a different approach to something once they have been taught the 'right' way to do it. In a football game, they can find people who don't stick to the rules very challenging. Change can be upsetting e.g. new people and environments.

Sensory sensitivity

Autistic people may also experience over or under sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light, colours, temperatures or pain. For example, they may find certain background sounds, which other people ignore or block out, unbearably loud or distracting. This can cause anxiety or even physical pain. Or they may be fascinated by lights or spinning objects. In a football game, even being pushed slightly might be perceived as painful and lead to what seems to be an overreaction.

How can we help?

All behaviour has a purpose. It can be a way of communicating needs and feelings. We aim to work together with parents and children to help support everyone. Here are some top tips drawn from information on the NAS [website](#).

- Be aware that unstructured environments (a football game!) and unfamiliar social situations, with their unwritten rules, can be daunting and unpredictable.
- Be very clear and neutral about what is required. Use the child's name otherwise they may not understand you are speaking to them.
- Speak in a clear consistent way. Be positive, e.g. "Please walk" rather than "Don't run".
- Allow the child time to process what has been said to them. Allow them plenty of time to speak. Use reduced language (simple sentences). Or even draw!
- Children might not recognise they are getting upset or angry. Work with parents and child to identify warning signs.
- Prepare for change in advance – e.g. if changing groups or playing with new children.
- Be aware of sensory issues and how they can affect an autistic person. Being pushed might result in what seems like an overreaction.
- A safe space, or time out can be a way to calm down, especially if environmental factors are causing distress. Discuss what might work.
- Punishment generally won't help the child to understand what you want or help to teach any new skills. Use rewards and motivators can help to encourage a particular behaviour or a new coping strategy. Give praise and rewards immediately and in a way that is meaningful to the particular person.
- Prepare for change and be aware that new people, new environments might cause great anxiety.



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