An Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
Autism is a ‘hidden disability’, meaning it is not easy to recognise when someone has the condition. When you see the following pattern (on a wristband, card or mobile device) it means someone has autism and wants you to know so that you can support them:

Individuals with autism have difficulty in accessing sport and leisure activities and other services. Support from staff can make a huge difference, understanding autism has the power to change lives. The information to follow is provided to help you to understand autism and ways in which you can support children and adults with the condition.
It is estimated that 1 in every 100 people in the UK have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

ASD is a lifelong condition and affects people from all backgrounds.

ASD affects more males than females.

Many people with an ASD have not been diagnosed, and therefore may not realise they have the condition.

This is especially true for adults.
Autism Spectrum Disorders are also known by other names, including:

- Autism
- Asperger’s Syndrome
- Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC)
- Childhood Autism
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder
We refer to an Autism ‘Spectrum’ because of the way in which the condition affects individuals can vary.

On one end of the spectrum people with autism may have an additional learning disability and be more severely impaired.

On the other end, individuals may have an average or above average intellect and may function at a higher level.
For information on the SIGNS of autism visit:
www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/recognise-ASD-adult
www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/recognise-ASD-child
Individuals with an ASD have impairments in the following areas:

- Social Communication
- Social Imagination and Flexibility of Thought
- Social Interaction

And may also demonstrate:

- Restricted or repetitive patterns of behaviour
- Restricted, repetitive interests or activities
- Unusual sensory responses
Individuals with an ASD have impairments in social communication. The way in which the person is affected varies. These impairments can include difficulties in using and understanding:

- speech
- gestures
- eye contact
- tone of voice
- language
Impairments in social communication

How this impacts on day to day life:

- In order to understand when someone is being sarcastic, we analyse many non verbal cues. This means that people with ASD may struggle to recognise and appreciate sarcasm.

- Avoiding eye contact maybe interpreted as the individual being rude, it is not.

- Speaking in a monotone voice maybe lead to emotions being misinterpreted by others.

- We often rely on tone of voice, gesture and eye contact as well as words to convey our point. People with ASD may not be able to use or understand these easily.

- Someone with ASD may not be able to use gesture or interpret others gestures.

- People with ASD may interpret language literally and so may misunderstand understand idioms (“pull your socks up”) and metaphors (“my head was spinning”).
Individuals with an ASD have impairments in social interaction. The way in which the person is affected varies.

These impairments can include difficulties in:

- Building and sustaining relationships
- Giving and receiving compliments
- Showing concern for others
- Sharing
- Enjoying conversation
- Understanding humour
Impairments in social interaction

How this impacts on day to day life:

- Children may find it difficult to instigate or join in play with other children.
- Children with ASD may find turn taking and sharing difficult. This can cause problems with friendships with other children.
- People with ASD find it difficult to develop and maintain friendships and relationships. This does not mean that they do not want friends.

- People with ASD may not enjoy conversation in the same way, and therefore prefer to discuss factual issues rather than enjoying the interaction with another. They may not understand signs of the other person wanting to end the conversation etc.
- Children and adults with ASD may find it difficult to show empathy, this can make them appear ‘cold’ to others.
- People with ASD have difficulty in understanding the rules of social relationships. This may cause many issues including them offering truthful opinion rather than a tactful one.
People with an ASD have impairments in social imagination. Again, the extent varies from one individual to another.

The impact of this can affect many areas of daily life and may include difficulties in:

- predicting reactions and events
- relating to others
- planning
- problem solving
- creative activities
- coping with changes
Impairments in social imagination and flexibility of thought

How this impacts on day to day life:

- **When problem solving**, we rely on our social imagination to predict possible outcomes. This is difficult for someone with an ASD.

- **Playing team games** often relies on social imagination to predict how other people will interact in the game. This can be difficult for people with an ASD.

- **People with ASD** find it difficult to predict how others may be feeling or how they will react due to problems with social imagination.

- Some people with ASD have difficulties with creative imagination. Others have good creative imagination, and only the social imagination is affected.

- **Planning** can be difficult without good social imagination, people with ASD often rely on calendars or planners to help them with this.

- **Coping with changes** can be difficult without good social imagination. People with ASD usually prefer routines to unpredictability.
Many people with an autism can have sensory issues. The individual with ASD’s perception of the senses can be heightened or decreased. All the senses can be affected.

- **tactile** (touch)
- **vestibular** (movement)
- **proprioceptive** (body position)
- **visual** (looking)
- **auditory** (hearing)
- **olfactory** (smell)
- **gustatory** (taste)
Sensory issues

How this impacts on day to day life:

- Decreased feelings of pain
- Sensitivity to lighting in shops
- Difficulties around noisy traffic
- Inability to tolerate certain smells
- Dislike of certain colours
- Sensitivity to touch
- Distress/anxiety in busy environments
How you can help:

- Being aware of Autism Spectrum Disorders and the difficulties experienced by individuals with ASD is key.
- If struggling ask - ask the individual, carers or seek advice from others.
- Be understanding, people with ASD have a lot to offer society but may need support.
- Consider how you can adapt the environment to decrease sensory issues (decrease noise, dim lighting, find a quiet space etc.)
- Adapt your communication style.
Communication - adapting your communication can help an individual with ASD:

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Don’t use idioms or metaphors
- Allow time for the individual to process information
- Keep instructions short
- Avoid relying on gesture, facial expression or tone of voice
Autism Spectrum Disorder

To complete the questionnaire and to get your personalised ASD awareness certificate visit:

ASDinfoWales.co.uk/asdaware

You can also apply to become an ASD aware organisation. For more information please visit:

ASDinfoWales.co.uk/asd-aware-organisations
Further information and links to other resources can be found at:

www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk

or email enquiries to ASDinfo@WLGA.gov.uk

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