



♥ Autism is not a disability, it's a  different ability. ♥

♥

♥

♥

Making Sense of Autism

Parent coffee morning

"If you've met one individual with autism, you've met one individual with autism."

- Stephen Shore

Aims:

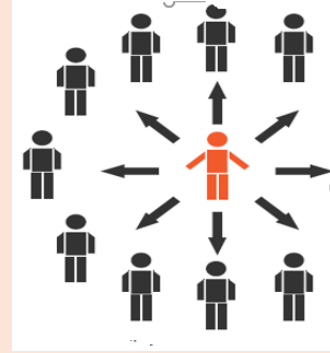
- To give you a brief general overview on Autism.
- An opportunity to meet our Autism Awareness Ambassador Erin and our Inclusion Partner, Jennie Paige.
- To provide a safe space for you to meet other parents of children who have autism; or suspect their child has autism; or who want to know more about autism.

“By understanding the hopes, dreams, strengths and weaknesses of autistic people, society can gain a deeper and rounder view of human nature.”

Lawson, W (1998)
Extract from Life behind glass. London: Jessica Kingsley. p.ii.



What is autism?



- Autism is a **lifelong condition** which affects the way that a child **communicates** and **relates** to people and the world around them.
- It is a **spectrum condition**, which means that, while all children with autism share certain features, their condition will affect them in **different ways**.
- Some people on the spectrum are able to live **independent lives**, but others may face additional challenges, including learning disabilities, which affect them so profoundly that they **may need support** in many areas.
- Approximately 1 in 100 children have autism in the UK.
- Girls with autism present differently to boys with autism which has led to many girls not getting the diagnosis until they are older.



Four areas of difference



"Any understanding of autism should not be approached from a position of 'deficit', but rather from a position of 'difference'. Autistic people are not neuro-typical people with something missing or something extra added on. They are different. If we are serious about equality and inclusion within any area, then we must first of all understand that difference."

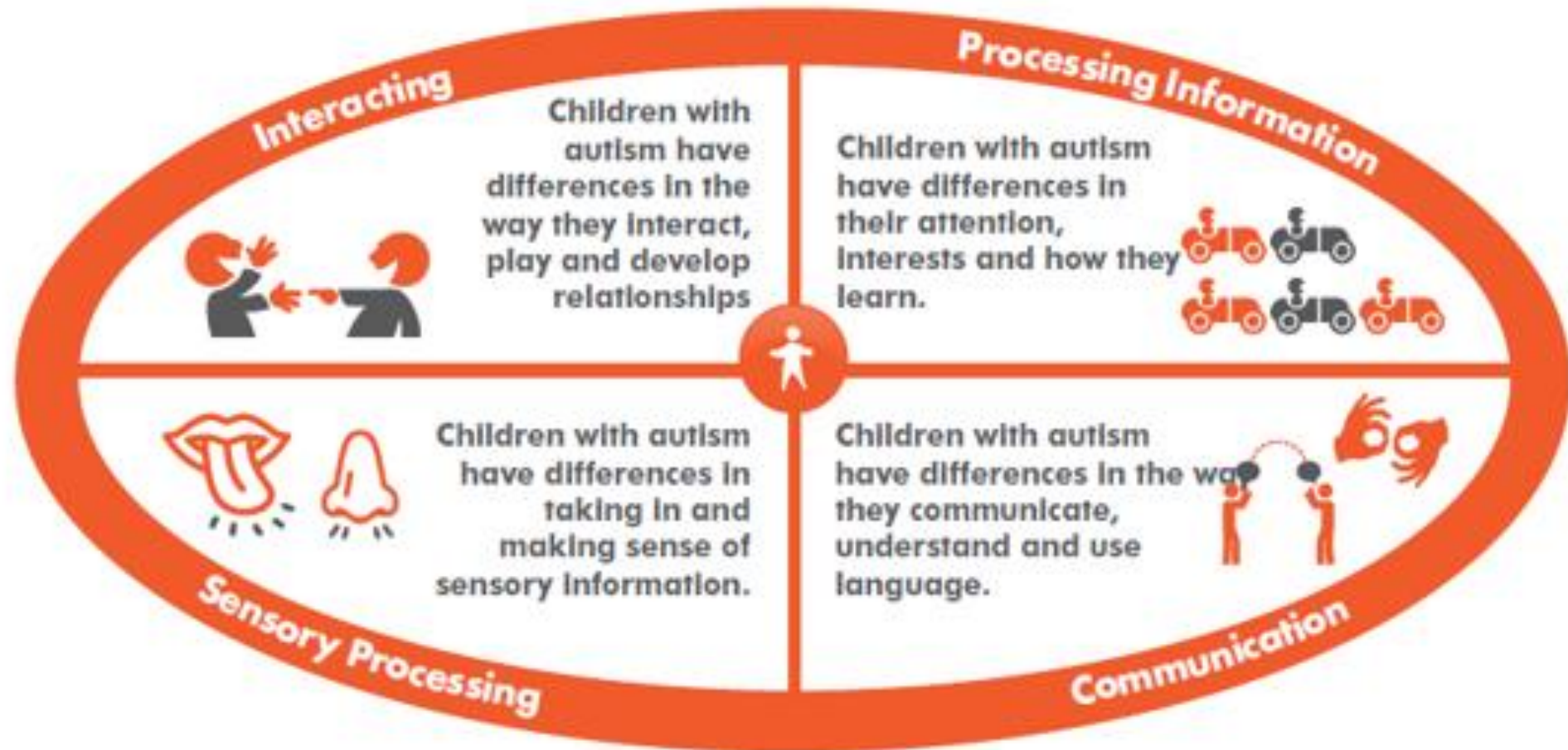
Christine Breakey (2006)

The Autism Spectrum: A Guide to Good Practice



Four Key Areas of difference:

Every child with autism will have a range of abilities within each of these areas. Many children with autism have high levels of anxiety as a result of these differences.



Interacting:

Children with autism have differences in the way they interact and develop relationships with others, and with learning through play.



Understanding social behaviours and emotions usually develops from birth, but pupils on the autism spectrum do not easily learn or understand the skills involved in building and maintain relationships

"You can be the cleverest kid in the world but you won't get anywhere in life if you can't have a conversation. For people like me a social and emotional education is so much more valuable than an academic one."

Luke Dicker in Greenman, Jan (2010)
'Life at the Edge and Beyond: Living with ADHD and Asperger Syndrome' London: Jessica Kingsley



Wing and Gould identified different styles of social interaction that you may see:

ALOOF and **INDIFFERENT**: unaware of others

PASSIVELY ACCEPTING social approaches

ACTIVE but **ODD** approaches

STILTED and **OVERFORMAL**

Interacting:

What can you do to support your child?

Communication

- Use objects, pictures and language to help children express themselves and understand others.

Interests

- Use their interests to interact and play with them.



Skills

- Teach and practice turn-taking and sharing in different activities and groups.

Awareness

- Everyone supporting the child knows and understands their needs.

Communication

- Children with autism may have difficulty with:
 - Understanding why they need to communicate
 - Understanding how to get the message across
 - Understanding what messages others are trying to communicate
 - Being able to use what they do know in different ways, with different people/ places.

What can you do to support your child?

- Explicitly teaching your child:
 - How to have a conversation.
 - What different facial expressions can mean.
 - How to communicate with different people depending on who they are.

“Difficulty with language, body language and facial expressions is a big one. These are the things that we have massive difficulties with. For the adolescent and teenage person with Asperger Syndrome, deciphering other kids’ meanings is harder than deciphering ancient hieroglyphics.”

Luke Jackson (2002)
Freaks, Geeks and Asperger syndrome.



Sensory Processing:

We are all sensory beings and our sensory systems support our learning.

5 external senses: **taste, touch, smell, sight, hearing.**

Internal senses: **interoception**(feeling hungry, tired, thirst, angry)

Proprioception (knowing where your body is in space), **vestibular** (our sense of movement, balance)

Autistic children will have varying differences in their sensory processing.

Sensory processing difficulties are when your brain finds it difficult to organise and interpret the information which it is receiving into a meaningful response.

For example, finding it difficult to pick out what is the most important sound and what isn't. So the buzzing sound from a radiator might be given priority above the sound of the teacher talking.

Sensory overload clip

Behaviour you may see:

Sensory differences can cause pupils on the autism spectrum to experience stress and anxiety



“It was easy for me to move into a state of sensory overload and when this happened, it was always difficult to stay among people.”

Wenn Lawson (1998)
Life Behind Glass. London: Jessica Kingsley. p.3.

There are a large number of different sensory behaviours you may notice your child doing either because they are hyper-sensitive (high) or hypo-sensitive (low) to different things.

Some examples:

- Hands over ears (hyper-sensitive to noise)
- Humming when it is quiet (hypo-sensitive to noise)
- Stimming (To try and block out sensory input)
- Fidgety (to attempt to stay alert)
- Don't like certain clothes/ materials.
- 'Fussy eaters' not liking certain textures.
- Like to smell everything.
- Avoid eye-contact
- 'Clumsy'

Processing Information

- Children with autism can **find change difficult** (particularly at **transition** points), but not impossible.
- Providing **structure**, giving **warning** and keeping to **routines** can help reduce levels of anxiety.
- Your child may need time to process the instruction/ question you have asked.

“Everything is so busy at school and everyone else, all the kids and all the teachers, seems to have a purpose and I have never quite fathomed out what that purpose is... It is like beginning a game without knowing any of the rules or passwords.”

Luke Jackson (young adult with autism)
(2002) *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger Syndrome: A User Guide to Adolescence*. London: Jessica Kingsley. p.114.



Processing Information

- How you can help:

Communication

- Use simple language and say what you mean clearly.

Sensory environment

- Make simple changes to reduce anxiety.



Visual cues

- Use objects, pictures and visual timetables to support understanding and learning.

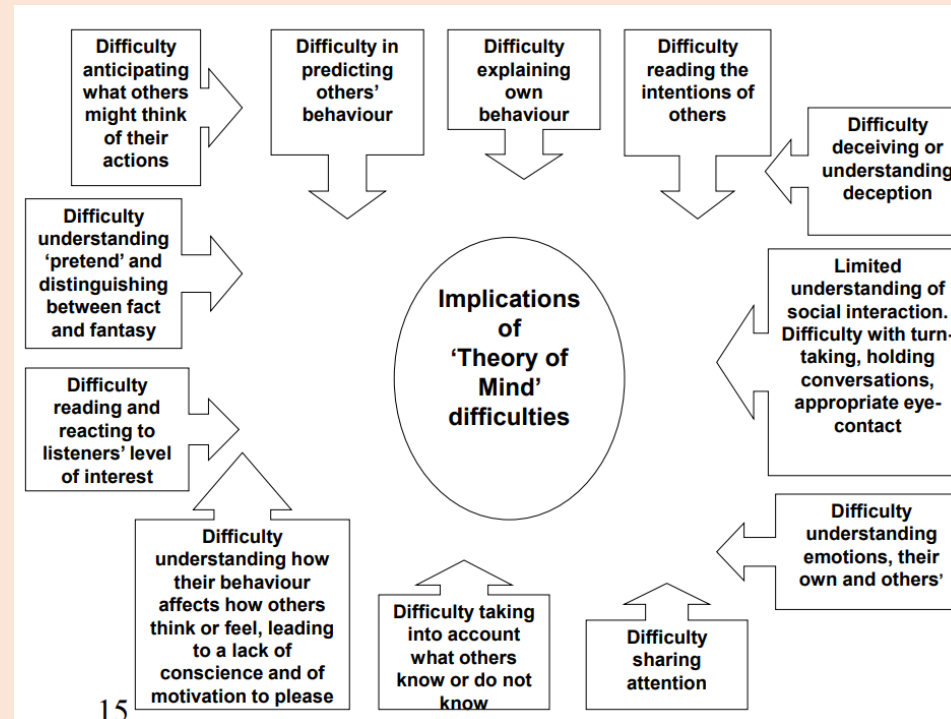
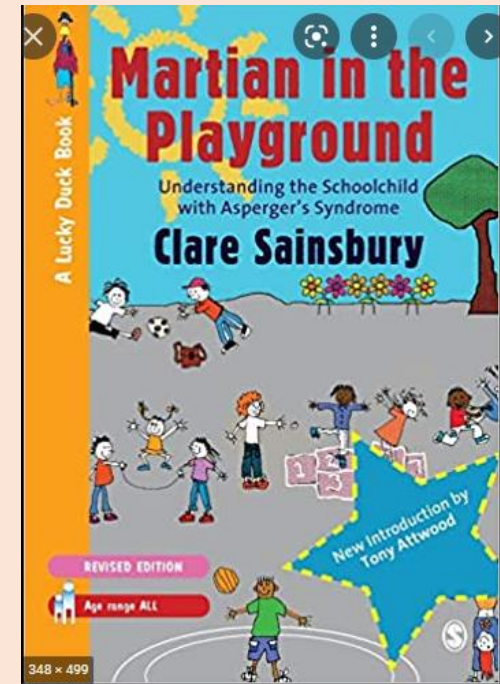
Transitions

- Help children predict what is happening next and let them know about changes to normal routines.

Psychological Theories of Autism

- **Theory of Mind:** This can lead to miscommunication as often people with autism find it difficult to understand other people's perspective or will expect other people to know what they are thinking.

'My mother recalls that often, when she dropped me off at primary school, I would turn to her in a panic and demand, for example, "Where's the frying pan?" This would invariably be the first she'd heard of it, and it would take lengthy interrogation to establish that everyone in the class had been told to bring a frying pan and it had never occurred to me that she needed to be told this in order to provide it.'



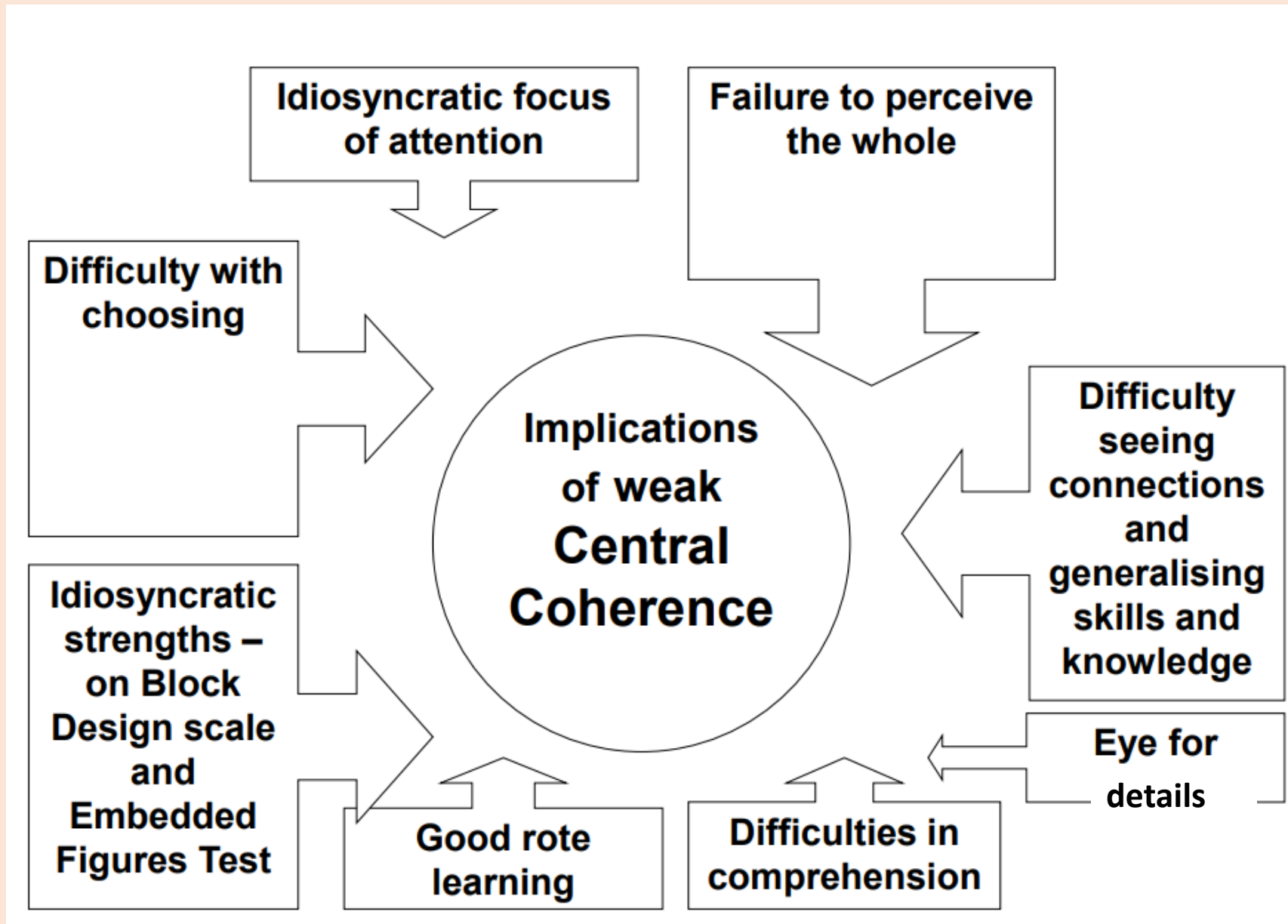
Psychological Theories of Autism

- **Central Coherence:** This can lead to difficulties with conceptualising the bigger picture, making sense of their surroundings and generalising due to getting lost in the detail.



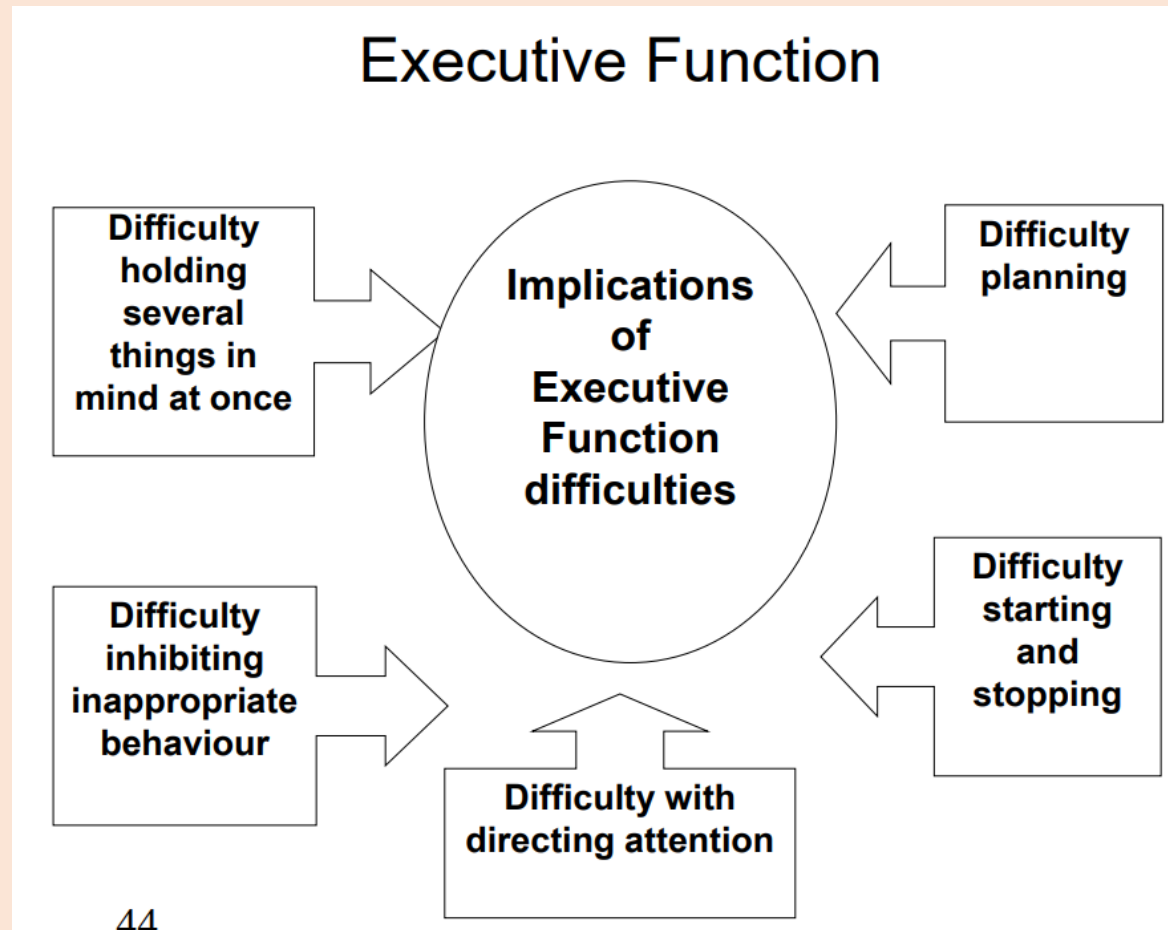
A young person with autism may focus on the individual detail and not grasp the overarching category.

Psychological Theories of Autism



Psychological Theories of Autism

- **Executive Function:** This is the ability to follow something through to achieve a goal. It involves planning, problem solving, decision making, holding several things in mind at one time, carrying out multiple tasks, inhibiting inappropriate behaviour, directing attention.



Memory

- We have three types of long-term memory:
- Procedural- How to do things
- Semantic- Facts
- Episodic- memory of events.
- People with autism tend to generate fewer episodic memories and take longer to do so. It is the episodic memory that people with autism tend to have difficulties with.

What do I do if I suspect my child has autism?

Remember, we have an open door policy, you can always speak to your class teacher and/ or SENCO.

- You can go to your gp who will complete a referral to the paediatrician for you.
- OR
- Speak to Mrs Youngblood (SENCO) as she can also complete a referral to the paediatrician for you.
- The paediatrician will look at the information on the referral and will arrange to speak with you.
- They will give you and the school questionnaires to complete.
- If they think that your child could have autism, they will then refer to a specific clinic (could be referred to as STAARS on the letter). *E-mail received yesterday to inform me that I can now make a referral specifically for Autism and ADHD which goes to a separate mailbox*

A Parent's Experience of the process:

The experience of the assessment actually began a year before the assessment, when it was initially suggested by a paediatrician. We had booked an appointment to review my child's eating issues (which at the time were very tricky) and delay in speech. At the end of the appointment the paediatrician suggested we be referred for an ASD assessment. I wasn't expecting this and it felt like a punch to the stomach. I returned home and cried a lot.

It took some time to grasp what this meant. I knew very little about the autism spectrum and felt a lot of sympathy for those dealing with it, but the possibility that my child was in the spectrum tapped into all sorts of fears and anxiety.

It took about a year for the assessment date. By then, I had learned a little more about the spectrum and indeed we could see a lot of flags that indicated our child had ASD, but there was still some hope this was a misunderstanding. I guess, a kind of denial.

My child's teacher at the time, the wonderful Miss Cox, had raised with us the need for an assessment for ASD and so we were in conversation with her beforehand too. She knew that we were on the waiting list and it was very helpful to have the support of the teacher, preparing us for what it would mean to raise a child with autism. The school, even before a diagnosis, was already providing extra support for my child's specific needs and I was learning from the school and working with the school.

On the day of the diagnosis both my husband and I came to hospital with our child. We were called into a room with a couple of doctors (or specialists of some sort) and a representative from snap.

A Parent's Experience of the process:

The assessment happened in two parts simultaneously. Someone interacted with my child, asking questions and giving instructions and making observations. At the same time, a doctor asked my husband and I questions.

I found it hard to answer questions in front of my child and also found it hard to see my child struggling to respond to instructions without me being able to jump in and help. I would always be a sort of “translator”, making sure my child understood what other people were saying or asking.

At the end of the appointment they sent us to the waiting room and after a while they called us back in. At that point they had made a diagnosis and shared it with us. Our child was, indeed, in the autism spectrum. Again, it felt like a punch in the stomach. Despite all our preparations, we weren't expecting such a quick decision or to hear it in such a dry and direct way. They told us that our child would receive support at school and that we could access extra support through Organizations such as Snap.

It was very hard to receive the diagnosis. It felt, at the time, very deterministic. All possible fears came through our heads, and I did cry and wrestle with it a fair bit. Although we knew this was a possibility, it was also a shock. And although it was a shock, it was also a relief. A type of validation. As a parent I had felt that a lot of our struggles was perhaps my fault, that I had done something wrong or missed something. The diagnosis helped me understand that many of the struggles was not my fault, but rather that we as a couple had worked hard to help a special little baby and toddler who had different needs and responded differently to things.

A Parent's Experience of the process:

However, some years on from this I have a few things I have learnt which I'd like to share.

Autism is a superpower. It really is. It's a special way of thinking and perceiving the world. And in a world of increasing and pursued sameness, my child's uniqueness is an amazing value. I see how other kids are drawn to and delighted by the lightness, innocence and joy my child has in abundance. It is like a balsam.

But it comes with a lot of work, firstly for the child, but also for parents and teachers. I often think of a duck. Fine on the surface but desperately paddling under the water. Even things that are normally relaxing for other kids can be a bit a work for a child in the spectrum, like playing with others.

But we see so much beauty and strength and incredible talent and intelligence in our wee delightful and perfect child. We also see incredible character growth, inner strength and perseverance. My child works very hard but my child is always growing, always developing, always victorious. Some things don't happen in my timing or the normal timing but it's beautiful to see how resilient and capable children can be. Eventually, things click. Many years on, my child is still working hard but my child is also thriving!

A Parent's Experience of the process:

My child now eats most foods and even enjoys eating things that most children their age don't eat. We are gobsmacked! My kid also reads like mad, speaks very eloquently and has a lovely relationship with peers at school and has a few close good friends.

Keeping hope, perspective, having patience and openness to learn and to love unconditionally are key for parents of kids in the spectrum. Giving ourselves a break and being ok with getting things wrong sometimes is also important (I struggle with this).

As parents, our position has been to be as accepting, loving and nurturing as we can possibly be, but also to give our child every opportunity to grow and develop. Sometimes we chose to protect and sometimes to push them forward. We believe our child can be anything and do anything. Our autistic child is incredible.

This school has been the best support we could have possibly asked for. They have been the main partners and companions in this

Journey. We are so grateful we landed here. Miss Cox was the perfect angel to help us through the toughest beginning in this journey, we have laughed and cried together (at least I have cried!). Miss Youngblood has been a constant, empathetic and knowledgeable support for our child but also for us as parents. Like Miss Cox, every teacher my child has had has been an angel, a true gift from God, blessing our kiddo and helping my child to grow into a beautiful human being. We have also had some key LSAs who have made all the difference, they can't imagine how much impact they have had.

A Parent's Experience of the process:

Snap is also an amazing charity that is super helpful to the kids and to the parents, they are loving and respectful and full of helpful resources. They are worth checking out, joining in and supporting too.

Thank you to all those involved in our child's journey. And, to the parents at the start of this process, I send you love and courage and I promise you it is not as difficult as it may seem now and this journey also brings some beautiful surprises and unexpected joys.

With a bit of experience behind us, we know that we will continue to face challenges, but we also now know we will overcome them.



We have primarily focused on the difficulties that children with autism face, however, having a diagnosis of autism is not a negative. There are many strengths that people with autism have and we want our autistic children to know that.

Chris Packham

'The ability to see things that others can't see is a great asset to a naturalist. I am more visual, so my pattern recognition is good. It's not that I conjure the image in my mind, because when I see something, it's a matrix and everything is interconnected and forms a pattern. I can remember the pattern. If a branch falls off a tree, I can tell because I remember that pattern.'





2. Stephen Wiltshire



- 'Paper' was his first word
- Can look at a subject once and then draw accurate, detailed picture – 19-foot-long drawing of 300+ square miles of New York City based on 20 minute helicopter ride
- 'London Alphabet', sequence of 26 London landmarks, drawn at 10 years old



In 2006, Stephen Wiltshire awarded the MBE for services to art, and opened permanent gallery at the Royal Opera Arcade in London.



Greta Thunberg

"I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic ... and act as if the house was on fire. "

Greta Thunberg
Environmental Activist



Paddy And Christine McGuinness: Our Family And Autism

Ep. 1/1



Christine and Paddy McGuinness

Autism Awareness Ambassador



One Page Profile

This is intended to reflect the child's individual interests

Things I find difficult:
I find Maths difficult all of it.

Things I am good at (at school and home):
I'm good at swimming.
I'm good at English.
Reading.

People that are important to me:
My family.
Friends.
Teachers.

Things that help me:
Teachers.
My multiplication square.



What do people like and admire about me:
I'm kind.
Helpful.
I do good work.

My hopes and dreams:
Maybe get a book published while I'm still a child.
To become famous like act and sing.
To become kinder.

Erin was helped by Mrs Davis.
09/02/22.



Sign-Posting:

- Essex Local Offer- <http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/>
- Good Beginnings 10-week course run by Essex (see local offer)
- SNAP – www.snapcharity.org – 01277 211300
- National Autistic Society- <https://www.autism.org.uk/>
- Autism Education Trust - <https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>
- The curly hair project- <https://thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk/>

Jargon Buster:

Vocabulary	Explanation
ASD/ ASC	Autism Spectrum Disorder/ Autism Spectrum Condition
Sensory Processing	When your brain interprets and organises the sensory information coming through and how to respond to it.
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
Inclusion Partner	Works for the local authority to support schools
Inclusion Register (SEND register)	A list of pupils who are receiving additional support within school.
One Plan	A document which details long term outcomes, SMART targets and the support a child is receiving
EHCP	Education, Health Care Plan- A legally binding document which outlines a child's needs and the long-term outcomes that have been set. It is for children and young people who need more support than is available through special educational needs support. It lasts until the person is 25.
One Page Profile	A document where the child has shared their views.
Educational Psychologist	A specialist in child development and supporting children with their education.
Paediatrician	A doctor that specialises in children's health and can give diagnosis.

Feedback

- Enjoy your tea and cake/ biscuits.
- Please do provide us with feedback on the post-it notes provided and stick on either the 'What Went Well poster' and 'Even Better If'.
- If you have requests for any further workshops related to supporting children with additional needs please also add it onto EBI poster.

