

# Children on the spectrum

A short guide for parents and carers  
of autistic children



# Having an autistic child can be challenging. Getting help shouldn't be.

There are around 150,000 autistic children in the UK, many undiagnosed. A diagnosis can help parents understand their autistic child better and why they are experiencing difficulties. It can also make it easier to access the services, benefits and support they need at home and school.

## Children on the autism spectrum:

- find it hard to understand non-verbal communication, like facial expressions and tone of voice
- have difficulty understanding people's behaviour and recognising other's feelings or expressing their own
- take language very literally and find metaphors and idioms confusing
- engage in repetitive behaviour and routines and can develop intense and highly focused interests
- find change and unexpected situations stressful and very scary
- are very sensitive to light, touch, sound or smell.

## Getting a diagnosis for your child

If you feel your child may be autistic, ask your GP for a diagnosis referral. Not all GPs have an in-depth knowledge of autism, so give clear examples of any difficulties your child has had with the above characteristics. Show them a copy of our guidance for GPs (on our website) to explain their duty to refer you for a diagnosis to a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist or multi-disciplinary team.



[www.autism.org.uk/childdiagnosis](http://www.autism.org.uk/childdiagnosis)

## Your child's rights to support in school

If you think your child needs support at school, your local authority has a duty to carry out a needs assessment. This could help with support at school or pre-school, from teachers, support staff and other services such as speech and language therapy.



[www.autism.org.uk/education](http://www.autism.org.uk/education)



***“When your child is first diagnosed, it can feel like you’ve entered a whole new world and you can worry about your child’s future. So, it’s really important to get as much support as you can as early as you can.”***

*Dr Carrie Grant and David Grant,  
parents to autistic children*

## Parent to Parent helpline

The emotional effect of a diagnosis can be overwhelming and it can feel like a lot to deal with, even if it's something you were expecting. Other family members may also struggle. Our Parent to Parent helpline is a good place to start to talk to other people who have been through a similar experience.

**[www.autism.org.uk/P2P](http://www.autism.org.uk/P2P) Tel: 0808 800 4106**

## EarlyBird programme

We offer a three-month training programme for parents and carers of pre-school autistic children, involving group training sessions, individual home visits and ongoing work with their child at home.

There is also an EarlyBird Plus programme for children who receive a later diagnosis (four-eight years) as well as our EarlyBird Healthy Minds and Teen Life programmes.

**[www.autism.org.uk/earlybird](http://www.autism.org.uk/earlybird)**

## Educational support and rights

Your child may be entitled to get extra help in school. You and the school can ask for a formal assessment. In England, your authority may issue an education, health and care plan. In Wales and Northern Ireland, it will be a statement and in Scotland, a co-ordinated support plan. The assessment will establish what needs your child has, what kinds of extra support they should have and what type of school they should go to. We have a free Education Rights Service available to help.

**[www.autism.org.uk/education](http://www.autism.org.uk/education)**

## Applying for benefits

Autism is recognised as a disability in the UK. This means that many autistic children and their families will qualify for a number of current benefits like Disability Living Allowance. Benefits in the UK are changing so please check our website.

**[www.autism.org.uk/benefits](http://www.autism.org.uk/benefits)**

## Local branches and meeting other families

We have 116 volunteer-led branches up and down the country. That means 75% of the UK population lives within 20 miles from a group of understanding and experienced individuals who can provide support and advice for autistic children and their families. Many branches offer special activities for autistic children. Visit our website to find your local branch and get in touch.

**[www.autism.org.uk/branches](http://www.autism.org.uk/branches)**

## Meet Levi

Levi is a non-verbal 12-year-old who often finds social situations very challenging and is prone to meltdowns. Levi's parents, Paul and Michael, used our helpline for advice and to find out about local services to help.



## Meet James

James was two when he was diagnosed. His early diagnosis meant his family could attend our EarlyBird programme. This early intervention and the right support has helped James, who was non-verbal and displaying challenging behaviour, flourish at school.



## Meet Harry

Harry, who is 13, experienced a few bad years at school due to a lack of support and understanding from his teachers and school. So mum, Jody, contacted our Education Rights Service for advice.  
[www.autism.org.uk/educationrights](http://www.autism.org.uk/educationrights)



## Meet Selina

Selina is a 12-year-old cat lover who was diagnosed when she was seven. She attends a National Autistic Society school and is hoping to become an RSPCA officer when she grows up.  
[www.autism.org.uk/schools](http://www.autism.org.uk/schools)



## Meet Soffi

Soffi is a 15-year-old autistic girl and active member of her local National Autistic Society branch. Meeting other young autistic people and hearing about their experiences has really boosted Soffi's confidence.



**For more information on all of our services:**

 visit our website at [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

# Stay in touch with like-minded parents

Many parents have told us having autistic children can sometimes feel like you are on your own. Our online community is a great way to contact some of the 150,000 families with autistic children in the UK. You can hear their stories, share yours and keep up-to-date on all the latest news, developments and legislation.



 <http://community.autism.org.uk>

 [www.twitter.com/Autism](http://www.twitter.com/Autism)

 [www.facebook.com/NationalAutisticSociety](http://www.facebook.com/NationalAutisticSociety)

## Join Chris Packham and our 23,000 members

The National Autistic Society was set up in 1962 by a group of parents, including Lorna Wing who coined the term 'the autistic spectrum'. Since then, our membership has grown to 23,000 and, as well as belonging to the UK's leading charity for autistic people, members receive:

- our quarterly *Your Autism Magazine*
- free member events across the UK and discounts to the Autism Shows in London, Birmingham and Manchester
- an invitation to our Annual General Meeting where you can help shape the future direction of the charity.

Become a member today at [www.autism.org.uk/membership](http://www.autism.org.uk/membership)

## Autism-friendly performances and All Aboard at Thomas Land

In cooperation with many theatres and cinemas around the country, we put on autism-friendly shows and viewings. Shows have included *The Lion King*, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and *Aladdin*.

Every September, we also run a fun day at Thomas Land for autistic children and their families.

[www.autism.org.uk/shows](http://www.autism.org.uk/shows) and [www.autism.org.uk/allaboard](http://www.autism.org.uk/allaboard)

A close-up portrait of Chris Packham, a man with light brown hair and a warm smile. He is wearing a dark green, textured jacket over a dark ribbed turtleneck. The background is a soft-focus green foliage.

***“The best way to create  
a society that works  
for autistic people,  
is to join one.”***

*Chris Packham, animal enthusiast,  
autistic man and National Autistic Society  
ambassador and honorary member*

# National Autistic Society

## Transforming lives and changing attitudes since 1962

- Our helpline, website and 116 local volunteer-led branches provide information, support and practical advice to hundreds of autistic people and their families every day.
- We train over 11,000 teachers, health workers and other professionals every year to help ensure schools, health services and workplaces meet the needs of autistic people.
- Our *Too Much Information* campaign has reached 65 million people, helping to increase understanding of the difficulties autistic people face every day.
- In 2009, we led a campaign to persuade the Government to introduce the first ever Autism Act in England that guarantees the rights of autistic adults.
- Over 5,000 businesses take part in Autism Hour every year.
- To date, 52 organisations have been awarded our Autism Friendly Award, including Buckingham Palace, Edinburgh Airport and the BBC Media Centre in Salford.

With your help, we can do even more. Find out how you can become a member and other ways to support our charity at [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)



National  
Autistic  
Society

The National Autistic Society is a charity registered in England and Wales (269425) and in Scotland (SC039427)  
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