

Is your little one autistic?



'Neurodivergent' or 'neurominority' refers to people with neurological functioning that differs from the societal majority. This includes autism and ADHD.

As individuals we're all unique, with different strengths and challenges, and differences in the way our brains work. Everyone's identity should be understood and welcomed as part of a neurodiverse society. Here are a few ways you can be neurodiversity-inclusive:

- Try to use identity-first language, e.g., 'autistic people' rather than 'people with autism'
- Try to use the word 'differences' rather than 'impairment' or 'disorder'
- Instead of trying to 'fix' these differences, you can support neurodivergent people by making changes to the environment and the way you interact

What is autism?

Autism affects how someone makes sense of the world around them. This is a type of neurodivergence, a hard-wired difference in the way your child thinks and responds to the sensory environment.

The autistic brain works differently, so you may notice your child communicates, behaves, and processes things in a way that their peers do not. They may have repetitive behaviours, over or under sensitivity, fixed interests, and their own way of communicating and playing. **A supportive, adapted environment can have a really positive impact on autistic children.**

How does autism affect children's talking?

Some autistic children are late to talk, while others talk but find understanding what other people say or mean difficult to interpret. They may also need extra time to process and understand information.

Some autistic children use different means of communicating, such as pictures, gestures, and technology. They can really benefit when words and sentences are kept short and simple, and are supported with visuals, e.g., you could hold up a plate while you say, "dinner time!"

Should I be worried?

Try not to worry about negative stories around autism and focus on what works for your little one. The better your understanding of their strengths and areas of need, the better you can support them and lower the risk of negative outcomes in the longer term. Support is available via professionals, resources, and other parents you can connect with.



How can I help day to day?

The world might feel a little strange for autistic children, who are trying to understand language and process lots of different sensory information, like lights, sounds, and textures. This can result in meltdowns and a need for some 'time out' alone. The best way to help an autistic child would be to watch and understand what is difficult for them, so you can reduce or remove any triggers.

Try to create a safe space at home too. **Focus on your little one's many strengths and skills: join them in play, follow their lead, and copy their actions to show you're interested.**

References and further information

National Autistic Society

The Speech & OT Co.

What works for autistic children (2022) and Avoiding anxiety in autistic children (2020) by Dr Luke Beardon

Rethinking autism – Diagnosis, Identity and Equality (2016) by Katherine Runswick-Cole, Rebecca Mallett and Sami Timimi

Rethinking Autism Assessment, Diagnosis, and Intervention Within a Neurodevelopmental Pathway Framework

Neurodevelopmental disorders and neurodiversity: definition of terms from Scotland's National Autism Implementation Team



Does your little one have ADHD?

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. This is a neurodevelopmental condition which causes differences in brain activity, affecting three areas of behaviour:

Attention control

- Children may have trouble focussing their attention, concentrating, and staying on task
- They may struggle to listen to directions, miss important details, and find it difficult to finish tasks they've started
- They may often daydream or dawdle, seem absent-minded or forgetful, and lose track of time and belongings

Activity levels

- Children may feel fidgety, restless, and have trouble sitting still or staying quiet
- They may rush activities and make mistakes
- They may climb, jump, and run around even when it's not appropriate to do so

Impulsivity

- Children may act without thinking
- They may interrupt, push and grab, and find waiting difficult
- They may show risky behaviour and do things without asking for permission

Should I be worried?

It's normal for young children to seem busy, active, and distracted at times. All children can struggle with these behaviours for lots of reasons, such as not having enough sleep. If these problems affect your little one's nursery or school life, and you see no improvement as they get older, speak to your GP or their nursery/school's Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo).

How can I help day to day?

- **Follow daily routines.** For example, try to make breakfast and pack your child's bag at the same time each morning. You could try setting reminders and alerts on your phone to make this easier.
- **Keep items in their place.** Pick up any clutter around the home and find a consistent place for everything you need on a daily basis.
- **Break big tasks down** into smaller, more manageable pieces. Some children benefit from knowing exactly how long they need to concentrate for. You can help your little one to build their concentration on a task by using timers. For example, you could set a timer for 15 minutes while you look at books together. Try to aim for 20 minutes maximum on any task.
- **Plan regular breaks.** Encourage your little one to get up, move around, and do something different after spending time concentrating.

- **Give instructions one by one.** Wait until your little one has completed one step before moving on to the next. Then ask them to repeat back what they have understood to help them stay on task.
- **Avoid using 'before' and 'after' in your instructions,** such as "before you eat breakfast, wash your hands". Instead, try saying instructions one by one, in the order they are happening.
- **Prioritise sleep and a healthy diet.** To help improve your little one's concentration, avoid using screens in their bedroom and try alternatives to caffeinated or sugary drinks.
- **Try using gentle stimulation** to help your little one concentrate. For example, try playing calming instrumental music on a low volume, or hanging fairy lights in their room. Some children may also find it easier to concentrate while listening to headphones.

References and further information

Additude

The ADHD Foundation

The National Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service (ADDISS)