



Autism Awareness Month 2026

What is Autism?

- Autism is a lifelong neurodivergence and disability.
- Autistic people are different from each other but share differences from non-autistic people in how they think, feel and communicate.
- More than 1 in 100 people are autistic and there are at least 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK.
- Autism is NOT a learning disability or a mental health condition.
- Some autistic people have average or above average intelligence; others may have a learning difficulty.

Communication

Autistic people may have different communication styles, skills and preferences to non-autistic people. They may use and understand words, tone of voice and body language, such as gesture and facial expressions, differently.

Some autistic people have intermittent, unreliable, limited or no speech. They may communicate in other ways, for example: in writing or sign language, through gesture or sounds, or by using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), such as picture cards and/or high-tech devices.



Sensory & Processing

Autistic people can be much more or less sensitive than non-autistic people to the five main senses (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell) and senses for balance, movement, spatial awareness and awareness of internal states (such as hunger and temperature).

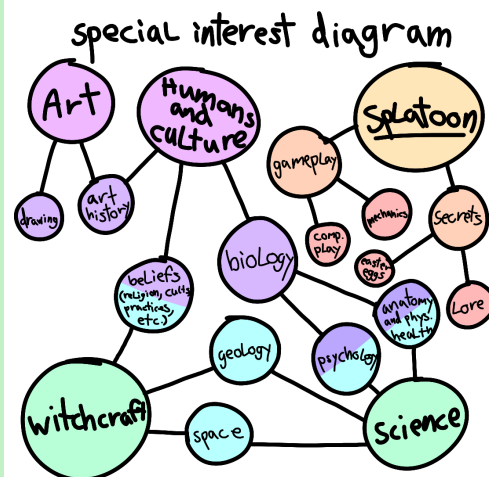
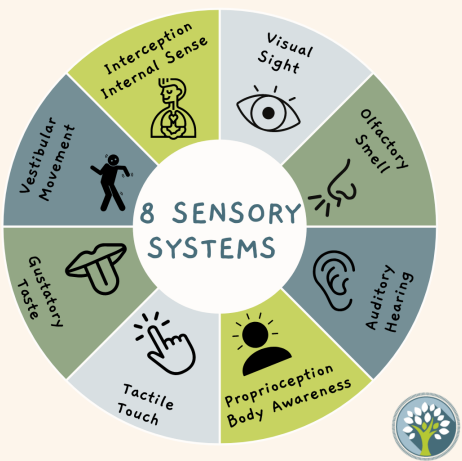
A person may be very sensitive to one kind of sensory input, but not at all sensitive to another. Their reactions can also change depending on the situation and environment.

Behaviours & Interests

Autistic people have focused and dedicated interests. A person may have one specific interest throughout life or jump between many different topics over time. These interests can become areas of expertise or motivation.

Autistic people may make repeated movements and repeated behaviours for example hand flapping, hair twirling, or listening to something on repeat.

In addition, they often have a preference for order, predictability or routine, such as wanting to know what is going to happen in detail, for rules to be the same for everyone, having the same routine or meals each day.



What is the spectrum?

The autistic spectrum *isn't linear* because autism doesn't vary along **one single dimension**.

It's not a straight line from "mild" to "severe."

Instead, it's more like a **profile** made up of many different traits that can vary independently.

Cortica

The autism spectrum is not linear.



It looks more like a variable wheel.



The National Autistic Society say that there is a significant gap in the understanding of autism and the ways in which people can support autistic people and their families at work, at school and in public places. They have launched a new public awareness campaign to help educate people on the simple changes they can make. Here is their video "It's How You Show Up".

It's How You Show Up

Here are some other helpful videos exploring sensory sensitivities and the difficulties coping with unexpected changes.

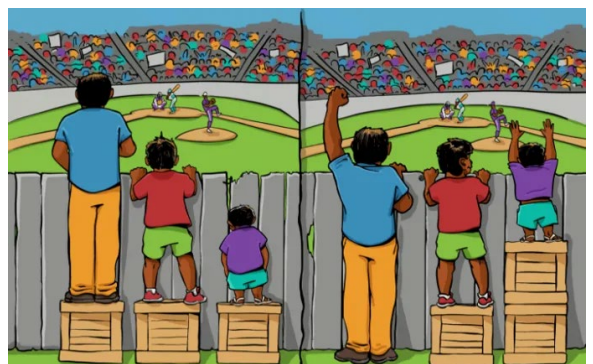
Unexpected changes Sensory sensitivity

Reasonable Adjustments

Under the Equality Act 2010, autistic people are protected because autism is recognised as a disability. This means organisations have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to remove or reduce disadvantage.

Simple changes in a workplace

- Consistent points of contact
- Clear written instructions – no ambiguity
- Predictable routines
- Allocated desks – avoiding hot desking
- Sensory friendly workspaces
- Allow use of noise cancelling headphones and/or music
- Provide early warning of any changes where possible and recovery time/support
- Flexible working options i.e. later starts or earlier finishes to avoid busy transport
- Offer additional time to prepare for meetings i.e. send out agenda and any reading in advance
- Record meetings
- Agree on optimum workload before assigning new tasks



Helpful Links

- National Autistic Society
www.autism.org.uk
- Ambitious About Autism
www.Ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk
- ACAS Workplace Guidance
www.acas.org.uk