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the difference that lasts a lifetime

Autism Support Pack for Foster Parents

Looking after a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can have its challenges, but we're here to help. Our Autism Support Pack for Foster Parents has been designed as a one-stop-shop for all the essential resources, tips and tools you might need when caring for a child with autism.

0800 023 4561
www.thefca.co.uk



Essential information about autism

The difference between boys and girls with ASD

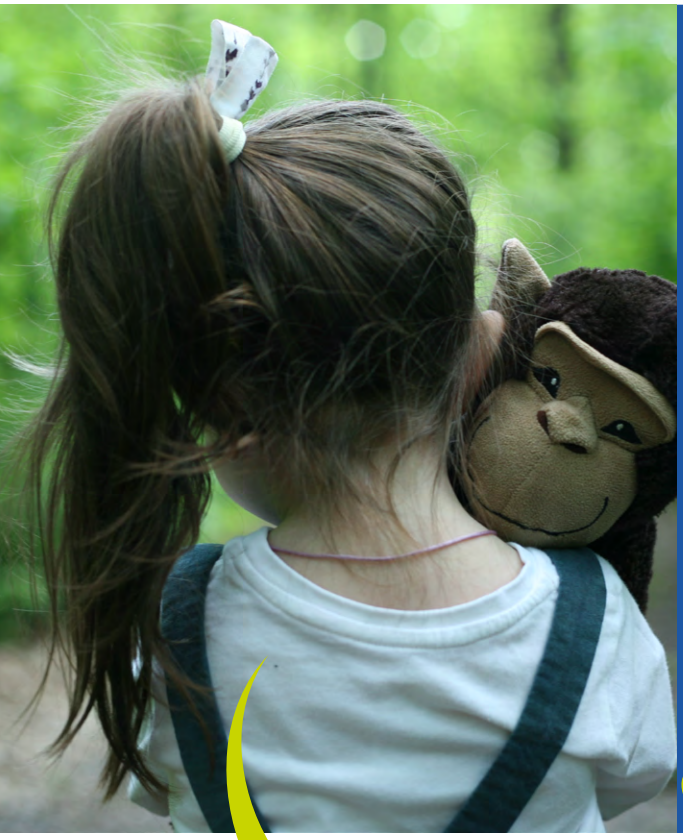
A common misconception made about people with ASD is that it affects more boys than it does girls. However, research suggests that autistic girls may go 'undetected' as they are more capable of imitating their peers and mimicking social norms to 'fit in' – this is called masking, and it can take a toll on mental and physical health. Unfortunately, this means they often evade treatment and support, leading to further problems in adolescence and adulthood.

Studies conducted on children with autism have also shown boys and girls differ in their clinical and neurobiological characteristics. With this in mind, it's evident there are differences in how autism presents in boys and girls. Let's take a closer look.

Boys with autism

- More likely to have repetitive and restricted play behaviours.
- More likely to struggle with social communication in early life.
- More likely to have challenging or disruptive behaviour to obtain items.
- More likely to have perseverative interests in things like statistics and schedules.
- More likely to be hyperactive or prone to distraction.

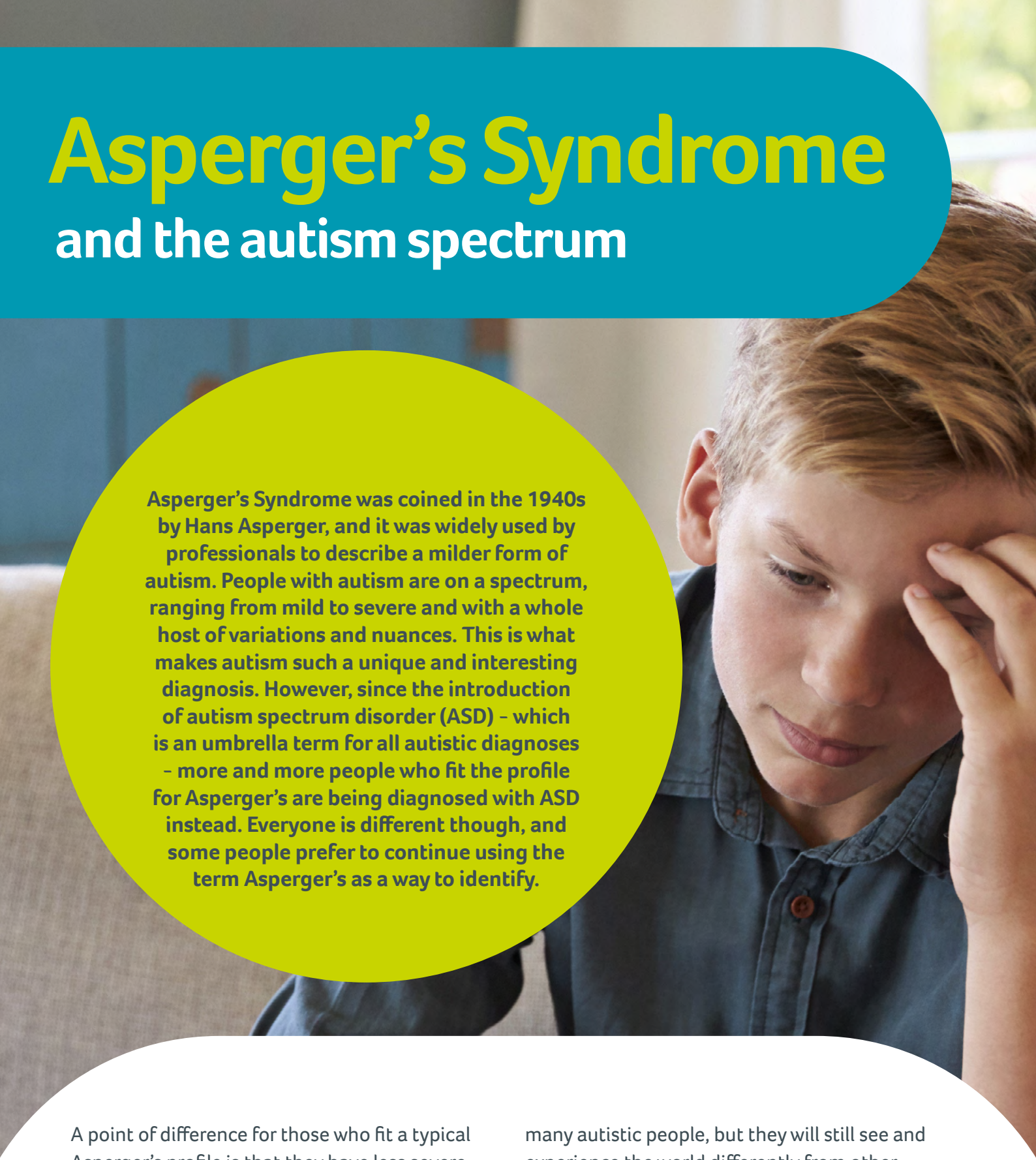




Girls with autism

- More likely to mask in order to fit into social settings. Boys can do this too but it's less common.
- More likely to be able to respond to non-verbal communication cues.
- More likely to have challenging or disruptive behaviour to gain attention.
- More likely to have perseverative interests that appear socially 'typical', like music.
- More likely to be passive and withdrawn.

Asperger's Syndrome
and the autism spectrum



Asperger's Syndrome was coined in the 1940s by Hans Asperger, and it was widely used by professionals to describe a milder form of autism. People with autism are on a spectrum, ranging from mild to severe and with a whole host of variations and nuances. This is what makes autism such a unique and interesting diagnosis. However, since the introduction of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) - which is an umbrella term for all autistic diagnoses - more and more people who fit the profile for Asperger's are being diagnosed with ASD instead. Everyone is different though, and some people prefer to continue using the term Asperger's as a way to identify.

A point of difference for those who fit a typical Asperger's profile is that they have less severe symptoms, have good language and cognitive skills, and they don't have significant delays in language development. This doesn't mean to say they don't have difficulties processing certain aspects of language though, as they may struggle to notice and understand sarcasm or irony.

A young person with Asperger's may not have the learning disabilities often witnessed in many autistic people, but they will still see and experience the world differently from other people. Characteristics will vary from person to person, however the majority of people with Asperger's Syndrome will have:

- Difficulties with or differences in social communication and social interaction.
- Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests that directly affect day-to-day life.

Setting yourself up for success

How to set up a sensory safe space

All of us need our personal space to reconvene our thoughts and chill out, however it's vital that children and young people with autism have a sensory safe space to seek refuge in when they're feeling overwhelmed. In the case of fostered children, it's most likely going to be their bedroom, but it can be anywhere in the house - or garden - that is set up in a way which brings peace and comfort. Sensory safe spaces should calm, soothe and relax your foster child when the outside world is causing distress with overstimulating lights, sounds, smells or textures.

All autistic people have different responses to sensory stimulation, so it's important to first determine what makes your foster child feel happy and what makes them distressed. There's an Activity Sheet for Children and Carers at the end of the guide to help you figure this out!





Decor

Colours are known to affect our mood, and this is especially the case for those with autism. Choose soft, muted colours like light purples, pale blues, navy blues, greys or soft browns. Try to avoid bold, jarring colours like red and yellow, as this can be overstimulating and cause stress.

Opt for simple designs over complicated ones. Intense wallpaper patterns like polka dots or stripes can make a room feel smaller or bigger than it is, which can make those with autism feel particularly uncomfortable in their surroundings.

Lighting

Mute the main lighting with a dimmer switch or use a lamp as the primary light source instead.

Add lava lamps, disco balls or fairy lights to provide calming sensory light stimulation.

If natural light is causing distress, consider a blackout blind, or look at where the mirror is placed to see if it's causing an uncomfortable reflection from the window.

Glow in the dark stickers are fun, sensory additions to an autistic child's safe space, especially if they have trouble settling down for sleep.

Furniture and organisation

Many autistic children are sensitive to disorder, so keep their safe space clutter-free with storage boxes low to the ground. This means they can access their toys and also learn to put them back, which is good for establishing routines.

Arrange the furniture to hide electric outlets and wiring.

The type of flooring can also cause sensory overload. If the child's bedroom has laminate flooring, this could be considered quite noisy so opt for a plush rug to cover it up. On the other hand, an autistic child might find carpet uncomfortable on their bare feet, so make sure to put slippers or socks outside the door of their sensory safe bedroom.

Comfort

Bean bags are a great and safer alternative to regular chairs if your autistic foster child struggles with their gross-motor skills.

Weighted blankets are proven to provide stress-relief and elicit a sense of calm.

Think about the textures your foster child enjoys and replicate this in their bedding to help them settle at night. Some fabrics provide more sensory stimulation than others, like silk, velvet or fleece, so it's important to know what could potentially soothe or irritate your foster child with autism.

Sounds and smells

Place a mist humidifier in the room to fill it with a calming lavender smell at nighttime. These gadgets are great as they let out a gentle stream of scented mist that doesn't overwhelm the nostrils.

Autistic children and young people often find getting to sleep quite a stressful experience, so you may want to consider playing nature sounds or white noise to deprive them of sensory distractions.

Background noises like hearing the TV from another room in the house can be especially distressing for autistic children, but we know that soundproofing is expensive. A cheaper alternative is to fix cushions to the wall to help block out sound from the rest of the house.



How to prepare

the family for your autistic foster child

When you foster an autistic child, it's important to make sure your wider family circle is aware of what to expect when visiting. Not everybody is brushed up on their knowledge of ASD, and it's not uncommon for other children, or even adults, to say something unintentionally harmful. Preparation is the key to a successful and harmonious experience for everyone.

- Some children with autism take longer to process verbal information, so ask that family members adopt the '10 second rule' when asking a question. Although some people may feel obliged to help the child out by stepping in with the answer, it's important we empower our foster children and build their confidence.
- Try to encourage everyone to use concrete language that can't be misinterpreted. Phrases like 'break a leg' or 'it's raining cats and dogs' can be quite confusing for a child with autism, as they tend to take things literally.
- Make sure they know upfront if your foster child hits or bites as a means of emotional expression. Teach your family to focus on the action they want from the child. Instead of 'stop hitting', get them to say 'hands down'. Children with autism may not know what to do instead of hitting, so giving them an instruction of what to do with their hands should elicit a positive response.
- Make sure they don't take things personally! If your foster child acts extremely shy or completely withdraws from a particular family member, it's important they don't feel dejected. They will most likely have done nothing wrong, and they could have done everything right - it might just take a while before your foster child feels comfortable around that person.



Autism resources and information

National Autistic Society

The **National Autistic Society** is the UK's leading charity for people on the autism spectrum and their families.

- **Advice and Guidance** - find a wide range of information about autism
- **Autism Services Directory** - an easy way to find local and national services
- **Online Community** - meet like-minded people and share experiences
- **Transition Support Helpline** - get advice on making the transition from school to further or higher education

Ambitious about Autism

Ambitious about Autism is a charity that provides a wealth of information, runs specialist educational services and campaigns for change.

- **Parent toolkit** – a practical toolkit designed to support carers during the early years
- **Talk about Autism Forum** – the UK's largest online autism community
- **Training courses for parents and carers** – increase your understanding of autism and your foster child's needs

Child Autism UK

Child Autism UK offers support, advice and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) programmes for families.

Autism helpline – 01344 882248

Training courses – enquire about a wide range of training courses that cover social skills, behaviour management and supporting autistic children in school

Living Autism

Living Autism provides an easy way for individuals and families to find services, advice and support.

Autism Glossary – get to know the important terminology associated with ASD

Support Group Finder – enter your postcode and find support groups in and around your local area

Autism Support Network

The **Autism Support Network** brings people and families together to share knowledge and offer support with their free Support Community.

- **Support Community** – find groups on a wide range of topics or ask your own question to start a discussion

Council for Disabled Children

Find your local Special Education Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS).

- **SENDIASS** – choose your region and find out about your local SENDIAS Services, including address, opening hours, email and website.

Action for Children

Action for Children is a charity that aims to protect and support children and young people with practical and emotional care.

- **Parent Talk** – an advice hub covering all things parenting, including additional needs and disabilities
- **1:1 Chat with a Parenting Coach** – have a free and confidential chat with a parenting coach about any topic that's affecting you

AutismNI

AutismNI is Northern Ireland's main autism charity offering support, training and resources for parents, carers and individuals touched by autism.

Helpline - 028 9040 1729

Virtual Support Groups – choose from over 20 support groups to chat with other carers and share experiences

Autism Factsheets – a wide range of useful factsheets covering everything from managing behaviours to coping on holiday

Fancy a read?



Books about autism for foster parents

Autism: How to Raise a Happy Autistic Child
By Jessie Hewitson
Get it >

Asperger Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals
By Tony Attwood
Get it >

Parenting a Child with Asperger Syndrome: 200 Tips and Strategies
By Brenda Boyd
Get it >

Helping Children to Build Self-Esteem: A Photocopiable Activities Book
By Deborah Plummer
Get it >

Can't Eat, Won't Eat: Dietary Difficulties and Autistic Spectrum Disorders
By Brenda Legge
Get it >

1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders
By Veronica Zysk and Ellen Notbohm
Get it >

Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew
By Ellen Notbohm
Get it >

The Autistic Spectrum: A Guide for Parents and Professionals
by Lorna Wing
Get it >

Books about autism for children and young people

Different Like Me: My Book of autism Heroes
By Jennifer Elder
Get it >

All My Stripes: A Story for Children with Autism
By Shaina Rudolph and Danielle Royer
Get it >

My Brother Charlie
By Holly Robinson Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete
Get it >

All Cats Have Asperger Syndrome
By Kathy Hoopmann
Get it >

Freaks, Geeks and Asperger Syndrome: A User Guide to Adolescence
By Luke Jackson
Get it >



How FCA support Foster Parents

When you're a foster parent with FCA, you have an entire network of support at your fingertips, around the clock. We believe that everybody in the child's life plays an active role in their care, so you're never left alone. We call this Team Parenting®. It's a partnership that puts the child at the very centre, surrounded by a team of professionals who are all dedicated to help them have the happiest, healthiest future. Our unrivalled support package includes:

- A packed calendar of events and activities: we hold regular events throughout the year to help foster parents, children and young people bond and have fun together.
- Therapy Groups: whether a foster parent is new or experienced, they can come to our carer therapy groups to learn new skills. Together, carers share experiences, help each other solve difficulties and find new ways to think about problems.
- First-class training programme: all our carers have access to a comprehensive training programme including mandatory classroom training on child development and attachment, promoting positive behaviour, and communication and teamwork. There is also a library of complimentary e-learning modules that carers can do in their own time.
- 24/7 Support: our out of hours support is there for you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Activity sheet for children and carers

Fill out this information sheet with your autistic foster child to gain a better understanding of how you can help them in certain areas of their life. It's also a fun, engaging activity that can help them develop more self-awareness of their needs and interests! Once you're done, you can stick it on the fridge so everyone in the household knows what makes your foster child happy or upset.

About me!



My name is:

My favourite things are:

I like to do these activities:

I have a special interest in:

My routines!



I like to do these things at certain times:

You can help me follow these routines by:

My communication!

I communicate by:

Words I know and respond to:

If I want something I will:

If I'm scared, I will:

You can help me better understand by:

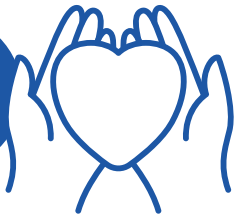
My senses!



These things upset me or make me stressed:

These things calm me down:

My self-care!



I like to eat/drink:

I don't like to eat/drink:

I need help with:
(Circle the relevant ones or add your own)

Getting dressed	Going to the toilet
Brushing my teeth	Wearing my glasses
Going to sleep	Eating
Hitting	Biting
Scratching	_____

Anything else?

_____

_____

_____

Start your journey with FCA

Whether you're new to fostering or thinking of transferring, we'd love to answer any questions you might have.

Get in touch

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