

Promoting autism inclusive attitudes



**Ideas to use in primary
and secondary
schools; developed
in collaboration with
autistic young people**

autismeducationtrust.org.uk



In collaboration with

Promoting autism inclusive attitudes

Schools and Early Years settings aim to create a sense of community, and focus on providing group activities. Working in groups or with other people can be particularly challenging for learners on the autism spectrum. While it is important for the learner to accept being with others and working with them, it is equally important that neurotypical peers (those without autism) also understand autism and accommodate the needs of the individual. Raising peer awareness of autism is an important aspect of encouraging social inclusion.

This resource is developed as part of the Whole School SEND [Autism Resource Suite](#) and provides a range of activities which can be used within an educational setting for developing positive attitudes towards autism. The resource has classified these according to key stage, to enable you to choose the most appropriate activities for the group you are working with. Most of the downloadable resources, learning scenarios and the following tips were developed along with autistic young people. This is the information that they would like other children to know about. We have also included some links to existing sources which can be useful in developing peer awareness.



Things to consider before you start peer awareness

- Some learners with autism may not know about their condition. Having peer awareness sessions could raise their feelings of difference. Ensure that you have checked with their families about the focus of the assembly or activities. The families may want to withdraw their children from these assemblies or lessons.
- You may also need to consider developing the understanding of learners on the autism spectrum about their own diagnosis.
- Even if your learners are aware of their diagnoses, inform them beforehand that you will be discussing autism with other learners.
- Inform their families so that they can provide extra support in case the learner gets anxious at home during this period.
- If the learner does not want to take part in the lesson or assembly, ensure they have a choice in attending, and plan an alternative option if they do feel uncomfortable.
- Check the terminology you are using. Some children and young people see autism as their identity and would like you to use 'autistic person' (as did the young people who developed the downloadable activities for this resource), however others may prefer to be known as an individual first and may want to use 'has autism' or 'is on the autism spectrum' to describe their condition.
- Do not single out learners within your setting by providing examples which reflect their behaviour, unless individual learners are comfortable with this. Do not call on them to provide support or give their personal experiences if they have not explicitly given permission.

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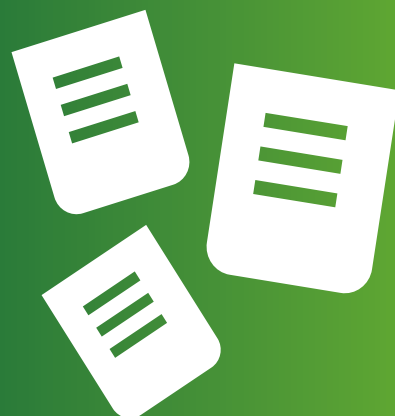
- Do not solely focus on exceptional autistic people such as celebrities or inventors when you are trying to explain autism. This adds to stereotypes about autism and is not always helpful.
- Encourage all learners to speak positively about autism. Make sure that you yourself are using positive language and are focusing on differences and not deficits.
- While peer-awareness aims to increase social acceptance, it is also likely that this can lead to bullying in some cases. Have appropriate measures in place to support learners who are likely to be affected.
- Be aware that running these lessons or assemblies may raise questions for some learners about themselves or people they know. After leading the lesson or assembly, provide a box for anonymous questions. This allows learners to ask questions without the pressure of being identified.
- After leading the lesson or assembly, signpost the learners to the list of trusted resources, so they can learn more on their own if they wish.
- Some learners may want to present the peer-awareness sessions or co-produce the material with you. We have provided a few guidelines towards the end of this resource on how this can be facilitated with learners in key stages 2, 3 and 4.
- Educational professionals should always be honest about their level of knowledge and experience – learners are not expecting you to be an expert on autism. Admit when you are unsure about something, and commit to find out more information from a trusted source.
- Make sure that this assembly or lesson is not a one-off; continue the diversity and inclusion conversation.





Resources for Primary schools

This section has a range of resources which can be used as classroom lessons or as a whole school assembly. We have included some suggestions of how these can be differentiated at the two key stages; you will obviously need to judge the level based on your own pupils.



Classroom activities

Woodfer's World

Woodfer's World resources



This is a set of four stories which are aimed at developing empathy in young children. The stories do not mention autism, although the main character shows some autistic characteristics.

KS1 - These stories can be used for general discussion on being kind to others and acceptance of difference.

KS2 - The discussion can be extended to identify the characteristics of autism, and strategies which can be used to include a pupil with autism in classroom and playground activities.

Pablo's World

Pablo's World resources



This is a Cbeebies programme where 5 year-old Pablo has autism (although not mentioned). These short films can be used to discuss various circumstances that pupils on the autism spectrum can find difficult.

KS1 - These stories can be used to discuss how different people experience a situation. The follow-up activities such as [make your own timetable](#) or [daily planner](#), [sensory seeking activity](#), and my [fact sheet](#) can be used to explain how we are all different in some ways and yet the same in others.

Make your own timetable and *sensory seeking activity* can also be used to explain the importance of routine for some pupils with autism and the difference in sensory perceptions that they may have.

KS2 - The videos from the Pablo series can be used as a basis for problem solving situations that pupils with autism can find difficult. Pupils can be encouraged to write their own stories with solutions. These examples can also be used to explain why there are sometimes different behaviour expectations for pupils with autism.

Autism information poster

Autism information poster



This has been developed by autistic young people to explain autism and some of the things they find difficult, as well as things they enjoy doing.

KS1 - This poster can be used as a basis to discuss different things that everyone finds difficult or enjoys. This activity can encourage acceptance of diversity.

All the pupils could be encouraged to complete this [One-page profile](#) to show that everyone has strengths and areas where they may need help.

The three situations which highlight difficulties can be used to discuss what the peers can do to help. [Ways to support someone with autism activity sheet](#) can be used to provide some general examples, before pupils work on problem solving the three situations presented in this poster.

Classroom activities

Some people with autism

Activity sheet



KS1 - This activity sheet asks pupils to match the statements with the pictures. This can be used as a follow-up activity after pupils have been informed of basic features of autism.

KS2 - This activity sheet can be used to explain the variation amongst people with autism and introduce the concept of spectrum of difference. Scenarios or videos of people with autism across the spectrum can be used to provide examples of the diversity of autistic people.

Autism related words

Activity sheet



KS2 - This activity sheet can be used as a revision activity after these terms are introduced as part of a lesson, to further develop understanding of autism.

BlueBee TV

PDF



A 2-page PDF covering autism facts for children. Sections include how to be a friend to someone with autism.

KS2 - This information can be used to discuss other strategies which peers can use to make someone with autism feel included.

Communication preference cards

Communication cards



KS2 - Some schools tend to use the traffic light system to indicate the communication preferences of a pupil with autism. This document can be used to discuss with pupils if they have green, yellow, or red times and how they would like to be supported in such situations.

Learning scenarios

Autistic young people have come up with the following learning scenarios based on their experiences at school. These scenarios should be used to promote discussion, and support pupils in working out how to be inclusive. The suggested answers are not exhaustive but are the start of a conversation. No pupil should be made to feel that they are giving the wrong answer but should be supported to explore their ideas.

The scenarios could be used as a follow up activity after the 'What is autism' presentations (which can be found on page 9) and after the completion of the 'Autism related words' activity (on page 6).

Scenario 1

A boy at school hardly talks and doesn't make eye contact. He stays on his own during playtime.

How you can help:

- Encourage him to join in with games, even if he doesn't talk.
- Make him feel comfortable.
- Don't laugh at him but be nice to him.

Follow-up questions:

- How could you help someone join in without talking?
- What games can you play that don't need verbal communication?
- Why do you think he doesn't like to make eye contact?



Scenario 2

A young girl doesn't like eating in the lunch hall. She often gets very upset and has meltdowns during lunch due to the noise levels and smells of food.

How you can help:

- Do not laugh or talk about her during or after lunch.
- Understand that some people have different tolerances when it comes to noises and smells.
- Do not stare or laugh when/if she has a meltdown.
- Be kind and get her support from staff if she needs it.

Follow up questions:

- Do you know what a sensory sensitivity is?
- Do you know what a meltdown is?
- Why do you think the young girl is having meltdowns?



Learning scenarios

Scenario 3

A child finds it difficult to sit and focus for more than 20 minutes on the whiteboard in class. He starts to make noises and cover his ears with his hands.

How you can help:

- Do not laugh or stare when someone makes noises or covers their ears.
- Understand that some people struggle to focus.

Follow-up questions:

- Do you know what stimming is?
- Do you know why some people can focus longer than others?
- Do you find it hard to sit still?



Scenario 4

During circle time, a child never joins in when it is their time to speak or get involved. They are too shy to say anything in the group and choose to stay quiet.

How you can help:

- Encourage your peer to get involved.
- If you know they have a special interest, you could ask them to talk about this.
- Understand that some people may prefer to communicate by writing.
- Everyone in the class could contribute to circle time without talking, for example by signing or using picture cards.

Follow up questions:

- Do you know what a special interest is?
- How many ways of communicating can you think of?



School assembly activities

Pablo's World

Pablo's World resources



The short videos from this television series can be used to present some topics such as being friends, and why some situations can be difficult for pupils on the autism spectrum.

What is autism presentation

Primary Presentation



This presentation can be used as a whole school assembly to specifically introduce autism. This could be a good follow-up assembly topic after Pablo's World sessions.

Teachers' notes

Primary Teachers' Notes



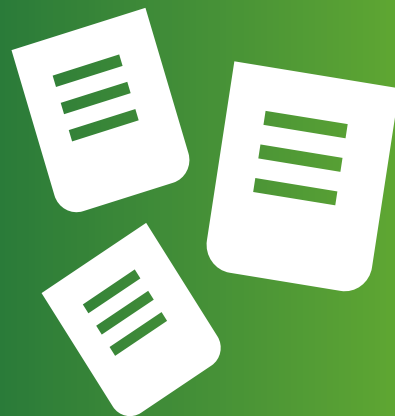
These guidelines provide some additional information which can help you in presenting this session.





Resources for Secondary schools

Most of the resources in this section are appropriate for both Key Stage 3 and 4 students. The difference will be mainly in how you present these and the level of discussion you will have.



Classroom activities

Youth Patron videos

Watch video



Here is a series of videos where autistic young people explain about stimming, communication, meltdowns and shutdowns.

Before watching the videos, ask students what they know about each topic and if they can give a definition of each term.

Possible questions:

- How would you describe autism in your own words?
- How would you explain what stimming is?
- How many methods of communication can you think of?
- What is the difference between a meltdown and a shutdown?
- What can cause people to get to the point of a meltdown or shutdown?

After watching the videos, discuss what they or others can do to facilitate communication with someone with autism, and how best to support an individual if they are having a meltdown.

We need an education

Watch video



This video is of an Ambitious about Autism youth patron sharing her experience of education through a poem she has written. Use this video to prompt discussion about the barriers that people might face accessing education.

Possible questions:

- Which part of Bella's poem stood out the most for you?
- How do you think we could make education better for autistic students?

Autism myths

PDF



This is a handout that covers myths around autism and stereotypes. Use this handout to discuss how these myths and stereotypes have arisen and why they persist.

Potential discussion points:

- What stereotypes have you heard about autism?
- Can you think of any autistic characters from books, films or TV?
- Do you think these are realistic presentations of autism?

Communication preference cards

Communication cards



Some conferences for autistic people use this traffic light system to facilitate communication and interaction.

Potential discussion points:

- What are the benefits of using such a system?
- How does this comply with disability legislations in the UK?

Learning scenarios

Autistic young people have come up with the following learning scenarios based on their experiences at school. These scenarios should be used to promote discussion and support students in working out how to be inclusive. No students should be made to feel they are giving the wrong answer but should be supported to explore their ideas.

The scenarios could be used as a follow-up activity after the Youth Patron activity.

Scenario 1

A student finds it difficult to sit and focus for more than 30 minutes on the whiteboard in class. He starts to make noises and cover his ears with his hands.

Discuss what you think would be helpful responses if you were this student's peer.

Follow-up questions:

- Do you know what stimming is?
- Do you know why some people can focus longer than others?
- Do you find it hard to sit still?



Scenario 2

You notice someone getting anxious at the end of class. They look panicked and are making a lot of movements. In the corridor they stop and put their hands over their ears. They are late for their next class.

Discuss what you think would be helpful responses if you were this student's peer.

Follow-up questions:

- Why do you think the student is getting anxious?
- Can you identify what might be difficult about moving between classes?
- How could the environment be improved?



Learning scenarios

Scenario 3

You go to the toilet during breaktime and find a student who seems very distressed. They are flapping their hands, making noises and rocking back and forth on the floor.

Discuss what you think would be helpful responses if you were this student's peer.

Follow-up questions:

- Do you know what stimming is?
- Do you know what a meltdown is?
- What do you think is happening here?



Scenario 4

An autistic student finds group work very stressful because she often gets paired with students who do not understand her behaviour. She is anxious because she must move seats and talk to different people.

Discuss what you think would be helpful responses if you were this student's peer.

Follow-up questions:

- Why might someone find group work difficult?
- How can you accommodate other people's needs?
- Do you know what 'reasonable adjustments' are?



Scenario 5

A student is really passionate about an interest of theirs. It is their favourite thing to talk about to other people. You notice some students are mocking this interest and making fun of the person.

Discuss what you think would be helpful responses if you were this student's peer.

Follow-up questions:

- How would you explain a special interest?
- What can be done to raise others' awareness of autism?
- What policies and procedures should a school have, to address such situations?



School assemblies

What is autism?

Secondary Presentation



This is a generic presentation which can be used for a school assembly. The slides have presenter notes, but there is also this additional document with more detailed notes:

[Secondary Teacher's notes](#)

Youth Patron video

Watch video



In this video young people talk about what autism means to them. This can be used as part of an assembly to discuss the individual nature of autism and what the school and peers can do to support students on the autism spectrum.

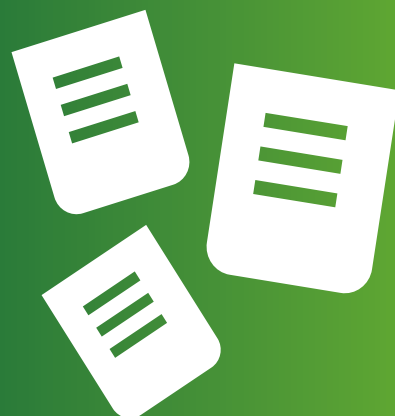




Presenting about their own autism

KS2, KS3 and KS4

Suggestions for developing autistic
young people's self-identity.



Presenting about their own autism

KS2, KS3 and KS4

Section 3 of this document can be used to work with a young person on the autism spectrum to develop their understanding of autism and how they may want to talk about it to others. The following downloadable document gives a lot of helpful advice on this: [How to explain autism to others](#)

Going through some of these activities can help the student to shape the narrative around their autism, and discover how they want to share about their autism with their classmates or the year group. This could form the basis of a presentation to their class, or simply be an internal tool for understanding and supporting learners.

The following four downloadable worksheets are provided to use with the individual learner:

- [How to support me](#)
- [What autism means for me](#)
- [Support plan](#) – a form that provides a template focused around the four areas of difference.
- [Goal and skill planner](#) – a form to help with planning for goals.

When you think that the learner you are working with is ready to share their narrative with others in the school, you can use this [Co-production Guide](#) to help them in presenting their narrative of autism.



Useful resources and references

Most of the following resources have been recommended by autistic young people as material which can provide better understanding of autism. You can use these as part of your classroom discussions and lessons, or signpost your learners to these for further information.

Books

Fiction:

A Kind of Spark – Ellie McNicoll

State of Grace – Rachael Lucas

Underdogs series – Chris Bonnell

Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time – Mark Haddon

Can you see me? – Libby Scott

Stim: an autistic anthology – edited by Lizzie Huxley-Jones

M is for Autism – Limsfield Grange Students

Pablo's Feelings, Goodnight Pablo, Pablo and the noisy party, Pablo picks his shoes – Cbeebies

Non-fiction:

Existing Autistic – Megan Rhiannon

Stim – Lizzie 'Huxley' Jones

Odd Girl Out – Laura James

How to be autistic – Charlotte Amelia Poe

The Reason I Jump – Naoki Higashida

Fall down seven times, get up eight – Naoki Higashida

Neurotribes – Steve Silberman

The Awesome Autistic Go-To Guide: A Practical Handbook for Autistic Teens and Tweens – Yenn Purkis

The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide – Sienna Castellon

Camouflage: The Hidden Lives of Autistic Women – Dr Sarah Bargiela

Reading lists:

<https://lizziehuxleyjones.com/essential-autistic-reading-list/>

Lizzie Huxley Jones essential autistic reading list. Has a variety of books for different age ranges.

<https://autisticandunapologetic.com/category/autism-entertainment/>

There are some good reviews of books, films and TV series that are all autism related.

TV

The A Word

Pablo's World

Chris Packham: Asperger's and Me

Are You Autistic? – Channel 4

Everything Is Going to Be Okay

Atypical

These are some of the existing resources developed by various professionals and organisations.

Books:

Autism in Primary Classroom
Joy Beaney and Penny Kershaw,
London: National Autistic Society

Creating autism champions
Joy Beaney, London: Jessica Kingsley

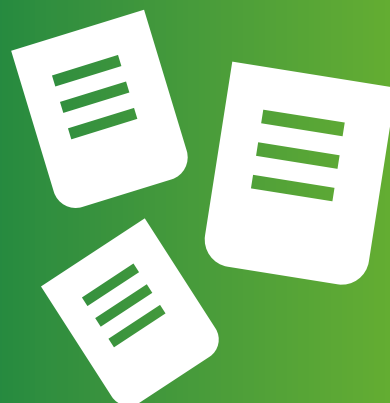
Can I tell you about autism?
Jude Welton, London: Jessica Kingsley

Other existing peer awareness material

Organisation	Resource	Description
TES	Autism peer support pack https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/autism-awareness-peer-support-pack-3013442	Whole class activities to introduce autism
TES	Autism awareness assembly https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/autism-awareness-assembly-11865938	A whole school assembly highlighting famous people
Center for Autism and Related Disabilities	Peer awareness http://card.ufl.edu/resources/trainings/spotlights/spotlight-on-peer-awareness-training/	This is an American site which provides links to videos and books
Organization for Autism Research	Kit for Kids https://researchautism.org/resources/kit-for-kids/	This is an American site with a range of resources for raising peer awareness
Geek Club Books	Autism information station https://geekclubbooks.com/bluebee-teevee-autism-information-station/	Short films to introduce autism
Twinkl	It's okay to be different https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-s-3204-its-ok-to-be-different-autism-awareness-assembly	Whole school assembly resource

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Autism Education Trust

www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk

Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER)

www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/acer

Nasen

www.nasen.org.uk

Whole School SEND

www.sendgateway.org.uk

Ambitious about Autism

www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk

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