

Meet Amber



She is full of curiosity and energy
She can remember everything
She is passionate about her interests
She can light up a room with her smile

But Amber can't always understand
how to act in social situations

Understanding Autism

Autism is a neuro-developmental condition - which means that it is part of the make-up of the brain. People refer to autism in different ways, and you might see it called Autism Spectrum Disorder or Condition (ASD or ASC). Asperger syndrome is a diagnosis that has been given in the past to autistic people who do not have a learning disability, though this term is no longer often used.

About 1 in 100 people are thought to be on the autistic spectrum. Autism is more commonly diagnosed in males, though it is increasingly recognised that there are more females on the autism spectrum than previously thought.

Autism is a spectrum condition, which means that the variation between individuals is huge, though there are key similarities. The core challenge for all is in making sense of the world. The main areas of difficulty are social interaction, communication, flexibility of thought and behaviour, and sensory processing. The degree to which these difficulties impact on day-to-day life can range enormously from person to person, in different settings and across the life span.

People on the autism spectrum often find changes difficult to manage and may become fixated on certain objects or actions. Some will use alternative communication systems, for example signs or pictures. Many autistic individuals are over or under sensitive to touch, taste, smell, sound, light, temperature or pain.

Autism: strengths and challenges

Amber benefits from a reliable daily routine. She is likely to be at her best in safe, familiar surroundings and to find sudden changes challenging.

Amber is best suited to tasks where her attention to detail is a real asset. She can work accurately and will deliver consistently good performance on tasks which match her skill level. For her, quality rather than quantity is the driving force during her day.

Quiet environments with few distractions are where Amber can maximise her strengths. She will almost certainly have difficulties with social interaction and she is unlikely to feel at her best in situations that rely heavily on social or communication skills.

Amber may struggle to explain when a problem arises, so it would be good to check in with her regularly to let her raise any issues.

Here are a few ways we can all support Amber:

General

- Communicate clearly and speak literally
- Keep routines consistent
- Give ample warning and explanation of changes

At home

- Use visual cues to help communication
- Tell her what she should do, not what she shouldn't do
- Help her to make charts and write lists
- Identify stress triggers and try to work around them

At school

- Provide a predictable environment
- Be clear about classroom rules
- To explain harder tasks, use lists, cards or pictures

At work

- A structured routine is likely to work best
- Assign work in small steps and help with prioritising tasks
- Use Amber's ability to focus intensely by involving her in projects where this skill is helpful

At the hospital

- Be aware that Amber may be over (hyper) or under (hypo) sensitive to touch, pain, smells and sounds
- Explain any medical procedures very clearly
- Try to ensure that Amber sees the same staff regularly
- Consider the best time of day for an appointment
- Make waiting times as short as possible