



A LIFELONG NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DIFFERENCE

# Autism

Autism is a lifelong way of experiencing the world that shapes how a person communicates, relates to others, and processes sensory information. It is a natural form of neurodivergence, not an illness.

**i** Autism is a **spectrum** — every autistic person has their own profile of strengths and support needs. Identity-first language (an 'autistic person') is the preferred norm in much of the UK autistic community.

## **👁️** How it can present

- Communicating and socialising in different ways — tone, eye contact, gesture and 'reading between the lines'
- Taking language literally and valuing clear, direct communication
- Deep, focused interests and passions
- A preference for routine, predictability and knowing what comes next
- Sensory differences — over- or under-sensitivity to sound, light, touch, taste or smell
- Self-regulating through movement or repetition ('stimming'); 'masking' differences can be exhausting

## **👍** What helps — supportive approaches

- ✓ Predictable routines, visual timetables and advance notice of change
- ✓ Clear, literal language and extra processing time
- ✓ Sensory-friendly spaces and access to quiet, low-arousal areas
- ✓ Building on interests and strengths, not only challenges
- ✓ Reasonable adjustments at school and work (a legal right)
- ✓ Respecting each person's preferred way of communicating

## **📍** UK CONTEXT

# 1 in 100+

At least 1 in 100 people are autistic — around 700,000+ children and adults in the UK. The true figure is likely higher than the number formally identified.

*National Autistic Society*

## **★** Strengths often seen

- ★ Strong attention to detail and accuracy
- ★ Deep focus and real expertise in areas of interest
- ★ Honesty, loyalty and a strong sense of fairness
- ★ Logical thinking and pattern recognition
- ★ Fresh, original approaches to problems

## **📍** Finding assessment & support in the UK

- 1 Talk to your GP, who can refer to an NHS autism assessment service
- 2 Children are usually assessed via NHS community paediatrics or CAMHS
- 3 Ask your school's SENCo about SEN Support (an 'assess-plan-do-review' cycle)
- 4 Request an EHC needs assessment / EHCP where needs are greater
- 5 The National Autistic Society helpline and local services can advise while you wait

**Please note** — this sheet provides general information only. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for individual assessment or professional advice. Every person is unique; if you have concerns about yourself or a child, please speak with a suitably qualified professional.

**Sources & further information:** NHS · NICE (CG142, QS51) · National Autistic Society · British Psychological Society