

Information for Parents/Guardians of Children and Young People with Autism Spectrum Disorder

The aim of this pamphlet is to inform parents and guardians of supports and services available for children and young people with autism spectrum disorder and their families.



What is an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)?

Autism is a developmental disability that affects how a child or young person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. The first signs of autism usually appear as developmental delays before the age of 3.

Children or young people with autism can have limited interests and repetitive patterns of behaviour which means that small changes in familiar surroundings or routines may cause them great upset. Many children or young people with autism may be overly or under sensitive to certain sounds, touch, taste, smells, light or colours.

Children with autism may have difficulty in developing language and in using abstract concepts. Others will have good language skills themselves, but may still find it hard to understand conversations and how to take part in them.

While they have some characteristics in common, children with autism are also unique individuals. They are different from each other and their autism affects them in different ways. This is why autism is called a spectrum disorder as some people with autism will be able to live independent lives but others may have learning disabilities and may need a lifetime of specialist support. While children with autism may have a number of difficulties, they also can have areas of particular strengths and talents. It is important for parents to be aware of these strengths and to encourage their children in these areas.

The early days

Children with autism benefit from early identification and intervention. Parents are often the first to notice early signs of a difference in their child's language, behaviour or social development, for example a lack of interest in playing with other children or a loss in their language ability.

There can be better outcomes for children and young people who are assessed early, who get access to appropriate supports and whose family receive advice and support. If you are concerned about your child you should seek advice from your GP or local HSE health centre. If necessary, your child can then be referred to a paediatrician who can assess the child's developmental delay.

Assessment of Need

Parents of any child born after 1st June 2002 may apply to the HSE for an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act, if they think that their child may have a disability. Following the assessment, parents will receive an Assessment Report stating their child's needs, if any, and the services required to meet those needs. Where a need for supports is identified, a service statement is prepared which specifies the health services to be provided to the child, with reference to available resources.

Getting support

If you discover that your child has autism you should immediately seek the support that is available to you. This support can come from public health nurses and GPs and other health professionals such as psychologists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists. Support can also come from family, friends, other parents/guardians who have children with ASD and from autism support groups. You may also find it useful to visit the website of the Middletown Centre for Autism (www.middletownautism.com) which provides information and training for parents.

The Middletown Centre for Autism is a jointly funded initiative between the Department of Education in Northern Ireland and the Department of Education and Skills.

People nowadays often use the Internet as a source of information. Please bear in mind that sometimes information on the internet can be exaggerated, misleading or wrong. In matters concerning your child's health and education, you should seek information and advice from the appropriate professional sources.

Your child may have autism but it is important for you to know that many children with autism lead happy and fulfilling lives. They receive support in school and many children have positive outcomes and go on to lead independent and productive lives after school.

Early intervention

It is very important for young children with ASD to receive support as early as possible in life to assist their development. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) has developed a strategy to provide early intervention for children with ASD

from the age of 2½ years. Children over 3 years of age may be enrolled in an autism specific early intervention class; if such a school placement is not available Home Tuition may be provided as an interim measure until a school placement is identified. Home tuition is also provided for children with ASD aged between 2½ and three years of age as they cannot enrol in school. Details of the Home Tuition scheme are available on the Department's website at www.education.ie.

The State funds a free pre-school place for all eligible children (ECCE Scheme), including children with ASD, in the year prior to starting school. More information is available on www.dcy.gov.ie. Children with ASD who have additional needs may also be eligible to attend other HSE funded crèche or pre-school settings.

Going to school

Children and young people with ASD present with a wide range of learning needs. Many children with ASD attend their local mainstream primary and post-primary schools. Some are able to be fully included in the mainstream setting. Others are able to attend mainstream schools but need individualised planning, additional teaching and/or care assistance. A smaller number, with more complex needs may require a special school or special class placement where more intensive and supportive interventions are available. A full list of special schools and special classes in mainstream schools is available on the NCSE website.

Educational services available to your child

Children with ASD, along with all other children, need to have access to a curriculum which is designed to foster their individual identity and to meet their needs.

The education system supports children and young people with ASD in the following ways:

- The classroom teacher supports students with special educational needs and may adapt lessons or tasks to suit the individual, as necessary.
- Resource and learning support teachers are available to provide additional teaching, if it is required.
- Special schools and special classes have smaller class sizes.
- Access to support from special needs assistants (SNAs) is provided for students who have significant care needs

arising from ASD. SNAs are employed to look after the care needs of children while the teacher is responsible for teaching the child. The circumstances in which SNAs are allocated for pupils with special educational needs are detailed in Circular 0030/2014, available on the DES website at: www.education.ie.

- Extended school year scheme (July provision).
- Additional supports, such as assistive technology (see DES Circular 0010/2013) and special school transport arrangements may also be provided where children are eligible. Information about these schemes is available on the DES website at: www.education.ie.
- Candidates with permanent or long-term conditions, including visual and hearing difficulties, or specific learning difficulties, which they believe will significantly impair their performance in the examinations may apply to the State Examinations Commission for a reasonable accommodation(s) to be made to facilitate them taking the examinations (RACE).

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

If your child's difficulties arise during their school going years, you may need to discuss your concerns with his/her teacher or school principal. The school may refer your child, with your consent, to the NEPS psychologist. There is no charge for this service. NEPS psychologists work with parents, teachers and children to provide support for learning, behaviour, social and emotional development, and transition planning. NEPS psychologists will refer students to clinical services, where this is necessary, for diagnosis, assessment and treatment.

Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs)

SENOs provide a direct service to the parents of children/young people with special educational needs and to schools. SENOs approve additional teaching and SNA supports to schools, where necessary, to support students with special educational needs. SENOs are a valuable resource to parents in the following ways:

- Providing support and advice.
- Identifying possible school placements for your child.
- Liaising with the school, the HSE and other services.
- Assisting in planning the transition of children to school, between schools and onwards from school.

Department of Education and Skills: Policy

The Department's policy is focused on ensuring that all children, including those with autism spectrum disorders, can have access to an education appropriate to meeting their needs and abilities. The policy is to provide for children with special educational needs, including autism, to be included in mainstream schools unless such a placement would not be in their best interests or the interests of the children with whom they are to be educated. Some children with more complex special educational needs may be supported in a special class in a mainstream school. These children have the option, where appropriate, of full or part-time inclusion and interaction with other children. Other children may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school.

Health supports

The HSE provides a range of services for children with autism. As necessary, these services may include: psychiatric and psychological services, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and respite care. Further information is available at your local health centre.

Further information

Further information for parents/guardians can be found in the NCSE publications:

- *Children with Special Educational Needs: Information Booklet for Parents*
- *Choosing a school: A Guide for Parents and Guardians of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs*
- *Post-School Education and Training Information on Options for Adults and School Leavers with Disabilities*

All available at www.ncse.ie.

Useful contacts

Your local **SENO** may be contacted through the school or from the NCSE website at www.ncse.ie.

Department of Education and Skills: www.education.ie.

Local health centre: www.hse.ie.

Information about other supports to which you may be entitled are available on the website of **Citizens Information** at: www.citizensinformation.ie or from the relevant Government Departments.

Other support organisations include:

Autism Spectrum Information Advice and Meeting Point (ASIAM): www.asiam.ie.

Asperger Syndrome Association of Ireland: www.aspireireland.ie.

Irish Autism Action: www.autismireland.ie.

Irish Society for Autism: autism.ie.

National Parents Council Primary: www.npc.ie.

National Parents Council Post-Primary: www.npcpp.ie.

Shine Centre for Autism: www.shineireland.com.

Special Needs Parents Association: www.specialneedsparents.ie.

Psychological Society of Ireland: www.psihq.ie.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive and these organisations are listed only for information purposes. The National Council for Special Education may have had no involvement with these organisations and cannot vouch for them or their staff. Parents should always satisfy themselves regarding the appropriateness of providing any information concerning their child to any third-party.



National Council for Special Education

1-2 Mill Street, Trim, Co. Meath.

Tel: 046 948 6400

Web: www.ncse.ie

Email: info@ncse.ie