

Resources

National Autistic Society

The leading charity dedicated to supporting individuals on the autistic spectrum, including Asperger Syndrome, and their parents and carers

The National Autistic
393 City Road
London
EC1V 1NG

Wessex Autistic Society

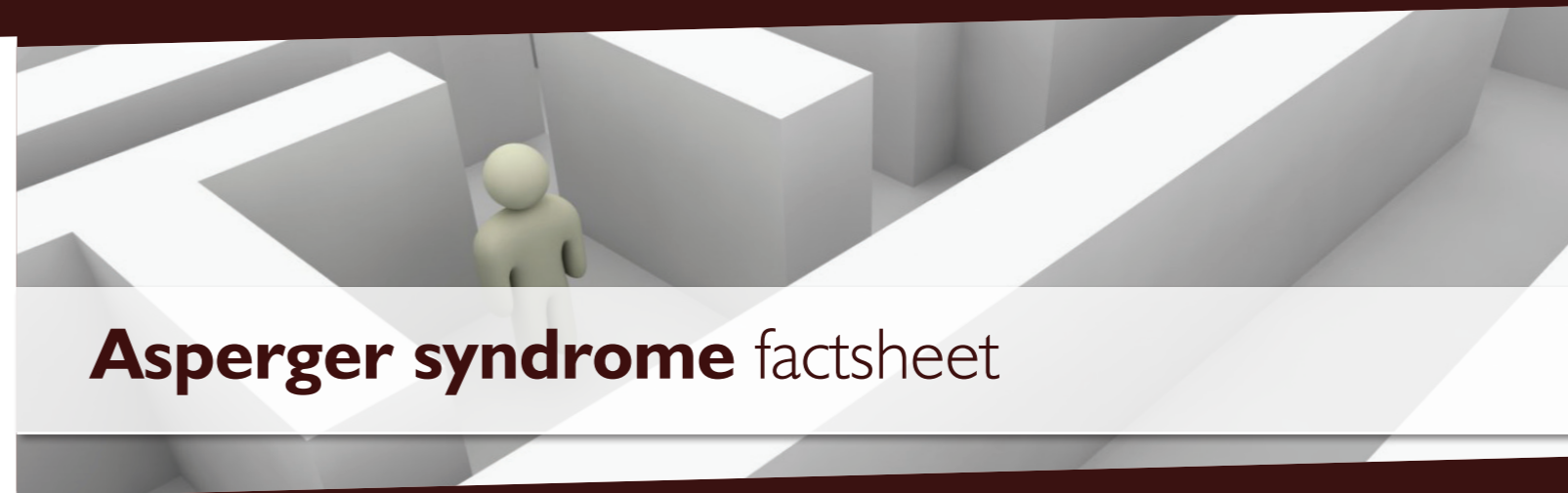
Provide services to individuals on the autistic spectrum and their families in Dorset and nearby areas, including the running of a boarding school near Christchurch.

The Wessex Autistic Society
22 Bargates
Christchurch
Dorset
BH23 1QL

“Fulfilling and rewarding lives”, the strategy for adults with autism in England (2010)

A document written as part of the conditions of the Autism Act 2009, offering recommendations for both local and national bodies on supporting adults on the autistic spectrum.

www.dh.gov.uk/prod.consum
www.dh.gov.uk/prod.consum/dh/groups/dh/digital/assets/@dh/@ps/document/digitalasset/dh_113405.pdf



Asperger syndrome factsheet

Definitions of Asperger Syndrome

Autism	A lifelong developmental disability which affects the ability to interact and communicate with others. For instance eye contact may be avoided, speech patterns may be unusual (eg speaking in a monotone), and it may be impossible to ‘imagine oneself in someone else’s shoes’. Typically, motor skills are also affected.
Autistic spectrum	A catch-all term for various developmental conditions, including Asperger Syndrome, that are generally agreed to be some form of autism, more severe than others.
Asperger Syndrome	A condition of the less severe end of the autistic spectrum, characterised by the social difficulties common to all autistic spectrum disorders usually combined with at least average intelligence and often relative fluency in speech (while still facing significant difficulties with communication).
Triad of impairments	Difficulty with social communication, difficulty with social interaction and difficulty with social imagination: these impairments are consistent within all individuals on the autistic spectrum.

Terminology

Asperger Syndrome. Asperger’s; often abbreviated AS. Individuals with the condition may refer to themselves as ‘Aspie’ and to non-autistic people as ‘neurotypical’ or ‘NT’ for short.

The expression ‘high functioning autism’ is also used, though it is less well-defined and not strictly equivalent.

Written by David Howell, a staff member at Weymouth and Portland Borough Council with Asperger Syndrome. Largely based on David’s own experiences and resources from the National Autistic Society website.

A history of autism and Asperger Syndrome as separate diagnoses

As a term to describe a mental disorder, ‘autism’ was first used around 1917 in relation to schizophrenia, to describe how sufferers displayed obviously self-centred behaviour. However, awareness of what we now know as autism dates back to the 1940s: Leo Kanner, in 1943, used the term ‘early infantile autism’ to describe the behaviour of young children he had been studying, while a year later Hans Asperger wrote about an older and more intelligent group of children (Asperger referred to them as “little professors”) that displayed somewhat similar behaviour and were also described as ‘autistic’.

However, because the two were writing on separate continents and in different languages (Kanner in English, Asperger in German), and international cooperation in research was not as established as it is today, the connection between the two was only made clear in 1981 when Lorna Wing, a bilingual researcher – the so-called “triad of impairments” related to social communication, interaction and imagination. The term “Asperger Syndrome” was coined by Wing to describe what she saw as a separate but related condition to ‘classic’ autism, and eventually the idea of an “autism spectrum” was established and widely accepted.

Dependent

Employment effects of Asperger Syndrome

Although most people with Asperger Syndrome are of least average intelligence – and a significant minority are exceptionally able in some fields, most often mathematics and the sciences, research on 2001 suggested only 2% of adults with an AS diagnosis work full-time. By comparison, of the estimated seven million working-age people in the UK considered ‘disabled’ for any condition, almost 50% were employed at that time, and the figure of those who are not disabled exceeded 80%.

While this figure may be an excessively low estimate, because less severely affected adults are often undiagnosed – and the figures may have improved since, due in part to increased awareness – the figures are still striking. This is especially true when one realises that many people with AS provide the skills and attributes often much sought after by employers – high levels of numeracy, attention to detail, reliability, and a willingness and ability to consistently perform repetitive tasks to a high standard.

Those with AS who are employed are often found in specialist fields where technical knowledge and attention to detail are of high importance, such as IT and architecture: they are typically much less suited to fields requiring significant interaction with customers. Because such industries are the leading employers in Weymouth and Portland, the employment rate for local people with AS may even be lower than the national average.

Incidence of Asperger Syndrome



Detail on the share of the population with an autistic spectrum condition has long been patchy, not least because diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome in particular has been incomplete at best. At present, the consensus is that approximately 1% of children have an autistic spectrum disorder, a majority of whom have Asperger Syndrome, and at least 75% of whom are boys. However, it is often

speculated that many girls are never diagnosed, as the diagnostic criteria are largely based on the behavioural characteristics of boys; research investigating the gender gap in diagnosis is still highly inconclusive.

To date, there has still not been any large-scale attempt to estimate the number of adults with an autistic spectrum disorder. However, because the condition is lifelong – and the claimed link between the MMR vaccine and autism, once seen as a cause of increasing numbers of cases, having been conclusively rejected in multiple studies – it seems probable that a similar proportion of adults are also on the autistic spectrum, perhaps with many of them undiagnosed. This sentence is quite hard to read: Extrapolating incidence rates from childhood to the adult population suggests there are over 500,000 people in the UK on the autistic spectrum, at least 300,000 of whom have Asperger Syndrome.

It is important to note that:

- Everyone on the autistic spectrum faces different challenge, and catch-all the generic plans will be less effective than targeted, specific approaches.
- Asperger Syndrome is often stereotyped as the condition of insular scientific geniuses (in part due to the movie “Rain Man”.) Many such individuals do not fit the stereotype and resent the assumption that they do.
- While everyone on the autistic spectrum has social difficulties, these can manifest themselves very differently. Many are quite extroverted when talking about a speciality interest, but very quiet otherwise.
- Most people with Asperger Syndrome have difficulties with motor skills, and many are either over – or under – sensitive to light, sound and other senses. This can make accessing services difficult – for instance, crowded buses and trains may provoke panic.
- Autistic spectrum conditions are not visible; children on the spectrum may be wrongly dismissed as ‘naughty’.
- Autism is not curable, but carefully-planned interventions can reduce the difficulties related to the condition.