

# What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disability that affects the way that people communicate and interact with others. All autistic people are unique.

However, autistic people may display some of the characteristics in the two main areas below:

## Social communication and interaction

### Finds two-way conversations difficult

- May find it difficult to start, maintain, or end a conversation
- May find it hard to stay on topic

### Needs help to interact with others

- May prefer to be alone
- May want to join in but not know how
- May find it difficult to form and maintain social relationships

### Seems uninterested

- May avoid eye contact
- May not respond to name
- May appear to be in their own world

### Needs help with communication

- May have delayed or limited speech
- May tend to interpret language literally
- May have a large vocabulary but struggle with social use of language

### Difficulty reading social cues or situations

- May find it hard to read body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice
- May need help to understand when a behaviour is appropriate

## Behaviour, interests and activities

### Under- or over-responsive senses

- May have unusual reactions to what they see, hear, smell, touch or taste etc
- May need regular movement breaks

### Prefers structure and routine

- May need structure or routine to help process information
- May need to be prepared and supported to try new things
- May need support and time when transitioning to a new activity, e.g. switching off a video game to go into doctor's office
- May need support with planning tasks and time management

### Narrow interests

- May have an intense interest in one topic
- May have an interest that is unusual
- May have an unusual level of interest in a topic

### Repetitive behaviours & body movements

- May repeat the same action over and over e.g. lining up objects or watching the same movie repeatedly
- May display echolalia (repeating words or phrases)
- May display hand-flapping, spinning, rocking etc. This is also called stimming