

# Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)



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The following information has been written by those with a great deal of experience in this area. The information is provided as **guidance** only, allowing you to be more informed in your approach to being a more **inclusive** coach. No two people are the same; as such, please ensure your first step is always to speak to the person – understand their **abilities** and goals, and never assume.

## What is ASD

ASD is a lifelong developmental disability that can affect the way a person communicates and relates to others. It is called a spectrum as it shows itself in such a wide variety of ways, ranging from individuals who are pedantic about certain things to those with Asperger syndrome.

## Points to be Aware of When Coaching People with ASD

The following points summarise many of the characteristics of people with ASD. It is important to understand that not everyone on the autism spectrum will have all of these characteristics; they may present only one or two of the following. By understanding what ASD is, you will feel supported to make your sessions a more positive experience for all your participants.



## Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

### General Characteristics of People with ASD

- Difficulty with social interaction/relationships.
- May appear aloof and indifferent to others.
- Avoid eye contact.
- Difficulty in interacting with others.
- Unaware of others' feelings towards them and the impact of their behaviour on others.
- Apparent insensitivity to peers.
- No concept of their role within a group.
- Little or no perception of danger.
- Resistant to change.

### Common Characteristics of People with ASD

- Poor physical/motor skills.
- Obsessions, usually with toys or objects.
- High levels of anxiety.
- Lack of motivation.
- Depression and low self-esteem.
- Inability to transfer skills from one situation to another.
- Vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation.
- Challenging behaviour.
- Self-injury/self-harm.

### Social Communication

- May repeat/echo words or phrases.
- Inappropriate laughing or giggling.
- No or inappropriate response to sounds.
- Difficulty with expression, and so may need to use gestures.
- One-sided interaction.
- Associate communication/behaviour with people.
- Failure to respond to their name (unless looking at them).
- Failure to comply with general instructions when given to a whole group.
- Difficulty in understanding verbal communication.
- Difficulty in understanding non-verbal communication such as gestures, tone of voice and expressions.

### Imagination

- Limited imagination; some individuals can be over-imaginative and will 'know everything'.
- Limited development of play (concepts of sharing and taking turns).
- Unusual or inappropriate play.
- Inappropriate attachments to objects.
- May spin objects or themselves.

### Including People with ASD in Your Coaching Sessions

- Use their name at the beginning of an instruction or question.
- Tell the participant what to do rather than what not to do.
- Use face-to-face interaction when possible.
- Use visual communication when possible.
- Help your participant to anticipate what will happen next (eg 'When the ball is passed to Bill, who will Bill pass to?').
- Give warnings of any changes that are about to happen (eg 'John, in a few minutes, we will be moving on to a game').
- Control the environment and don't overstimulate (eg face them away from any distractions).
- Teach them the rules and use prompts/reminders to reinforce them.
- Provide a definite beginning and end to activities.
- Reduce anxiety with a confident and positive approach; the participant will feel safer knowing that if they lose control, you won't.
- Provide a safe place and/or person the participant can go to when a situation becomes too much for them to cope with.

Adapted from What is Asperger Syndrome? by The National Autistic Society, 2012.

#### For further information and support, visit:

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

Email: [nas@nas.org.uk](mailto:nas@nas.org.uk)

Tel: 020-7833 2299

To view other useful resources looking at disability in coaching, please click [here](#).

