

The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity for people affected by autism. We were founded in 1962, by a group of parents who were passionate about ensuring a better future for their children. Today we have over 18,000 members, 80 branches and provide a wide range of advice, information, support and specialist services to 100,000 people each year. A local charity with a national presence, we campaign and lobby for lasting positive change for people affected by autism.

For further information, please contact the NAS team in your area:

South East Regional Team

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Head Office

Tel: 020 7833 2299

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Website: www.autism.org.uk

Autism Helpline

(information, advice and support for people with an ASD, their families and professionals):

0845 070 4004 (10am-4pm, Mon-Fri)

Other useful websites:

Together for Disabled Children
www.togetherfdc.org

Every Child Matters
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

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Aiming High for Disabled Children



Guidance for local authorities on short-break provision for children and young people with an autism spectrum disorder



Your autism charity

Through the Government's Aiming High for Disabled Children initiative, local authorities are required to make sure that families of children and young people with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are able to access a wide range of local short-break provision that fulfils their specific needs. This includes access to community activities, overnight breaks, and daytime breaks in the home and elsewhere.

This guidance aims to support local authorities in planning and providing suitable short-break services.

What is a short break and what are the benefits?

A short break is a period of time when a disabled child has the opportunity to take part in enjoyable activities without a parent needing to be with him/her.

Short breaks:

- > can be fun and educational
- > can reduce social exclusion
- > allow children to develop new skills and relationships
- > offer children some independence from their families
- > give parents and siblings a break from their caring responsibilities and some time to themselves. This is vitally important in sustaining relationships within the family.

"His sisters have benefited from the service as he is very demanding and very active and I did not have the time to do anything with my other children."

Short breaks for children with an autism spectrum disorder need to meet their specific support needs so that the break has a positive effect on them and their whole family.

What is an autism spectrum disorder?

An ASD is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people communicate with, and relate to, other people and how they make sense of the world around them. Over half a million people in the UK - that's around 1 in 100 - have an ASD.

'Spectrum' means that, while all people with an ASD share three main areas of difficulty, their condition will affect them in different ways and the nature of the support and services needed will differ from person to person.

The three main areas of difficulty (sometimes known as the 'triad of impairments') are:

- > **social interaction**
This includes understanding unwritten social rules, and recognising and understanding other people's feelings and expressing their own. This can make it more difficult for people with an ASD to fit in socially and to make friends.
- > **social communication**
This includes verbal and non-verbal communication, such as gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice.
- > **social imagination**
This includes the ability to understand and predict other people's intentions and behaviour, not coping very well with change, and adopting a narrow and repetitive range of activities.

People with an ASD may also experience some form of sensory over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, lights or colours.

Some people with an ASD may also have an accompanying learning disability and/or learning difficulties, such as dyslexia.

Current issues facing families

Staff awareness of autism

Parents are concerned that staff working with their children, often in non-autism-specific services, do not have a good enough understanding of ASDs. There is a need for an approach that provides structure, consistency and frequent one-to-one support.

Impact of behaviour

Parents are also concerned about the impact of their child's unusual or 'challenging' behaviour on other children and also on staff who are inexperienced or insufficiently trained in ASDs. Challenging behaviour is one of the key reasons why children with an ASD are waiting for short-break provision, as many existing services are unable to manage these children.

Assessment and eligibility

Children and young people who have high-functioning autism or Asperger syndrome are often unable to access short-break services because they do not have a recognised learning disability, although they are recognised as 'children in need' under the Children Act and in need of services in Valuing People.

Principles of good practice

Short breaks can reduce the stress on hard-pressed families – allowing them to 'recharge their batteries' and helping them to avoid crisis.

Understanding ASDs is the key to providing children, young people and their families with suitable and beneficial short breaks.

Here are some principles of good practice in planning and providing short breaks for children and young people on the autism spectrum.

- Target those children and families who aren't accessing provision because of geography or behaviour and those who seem to be "just about coping".
- Be creative, flexible and innovative when planning short-break options.
- Offer a short-break package that meets a family's assessed needs.
- Provide appropriate training for staff.
- Accept the child as they are and adopt a child-centred approach to planning the service.
- Learn about the child with an ASD and be able to view the world from his or her perspective.
- Keep the approach and expectations positive.
- Build and maintain strong links with parents and other agencies.
- Take care and time with matching and introductions.
- Plan thoroughly to reduce anxiety.

- › Choose suitably-sized, safe and relaxing environments and take account of sensory issues.
- › Use a calm, focused and non-confrontational approach.
- › Adopt visual and other communication systems used by the child.
- › Prepare for and manage change and transitions.
- › Provide structure and clear expectations for undirected time.
- › Be consistent: use the same staff and stick to timetables, where possible.
- › High staffing levels will be needed to provide suitable support.

Short breaks for children and young people with an ASD might be:

- › family-based placements
- › befriending/mentoring schemes
- › domiciliary/outreach support
- › personal assistants employed by the family
- › residential/overnight
- › holiday play schemes
- › youth and out-of-school clubs.

"I find I can relax and enjoy myself knowing that Amy is having fun with an understanding, responsible adult who is solely for her."

Autism Accreditation

Autism Accreditation is a quality assurance programme managed by the NAS and approved by ISQUA (The International Society for Quality in Health Care). It awards accreditation status to services that, by review, are able to demonstrate:

- › knowledge and understanding of ASDs
- › that this knowledge and understanding informs the way the organisation operates, people are assessed and services are planned.
- › that this knowledge and understanding informs all aspects of practice.

Autism Accreditation has a set of standards for those service providers specifically providing short-break services for children and young people with an ASD.

For further information, please email accreditation@nas.org.uk or call 01454 423 780.

