

# A GUIDE FOR TUTORS



# SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH AN AUTISM SPECTRUM CONDITION (ASC)



**WE HAVE PUT TOGETHER SOME TIPS AND SIMPLE ADJUSTMENTS WHICH CAN HELP OUR STUDENTS WITH AN ASC TO GET THE BEST OUT OF ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 SITUATION. THESE TIPS MAY ALSO BE USEFUL IN FACE TO FACE LEARNING.**

### **Autistic Spectrum Condition: A brief description**

Having an Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) means that the person has a different way of understanding other people and the world around them. ASC is a lifelong developmental disorder, not an illness or a disease so there is no 'cure' but there are many ways that difficulties can be managed.

Autism can significantly and visibly impact every area of your life, or you may be 'high-functioning', and that impact is less obvious. So autism isn't like a light switch, which is either on or off. It's more like a dimmer switch, with many variations of brightness. That means no two people with autism are exactly alike.

# COMMON FEATURES



## SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

- Have difficulty interpreting facial expressions, tone of voice and body language
- Taking things literally
- Not always understanding sarcasm or jokes in some people
- Lack of eye contact in some people
- Seeks time alone when feeling overloaded
- May have difficulty forming friendships and with social interactions

## REPETITIVE PATTERNS AND ROUTINES

- People may prefer to have a daily routine so they know what is going to happen each day
- They may always want to do things in the same way
- It helps to make sense of what can be a confusing world, and reduces anxiety
- Rules and structure can be important
- May find changes difficult to cope with, but it helps if they can prepare for any changes in advance



# COMMON FEATURES



## PARTICULAR INTERESTS

- May have highly focussed interests, e.g. art, music, computers, trains, or more unusual interests
- Many people channel their interests into study, work or volunteering

## SENSORY ISSUES

- Difficulty processing sensory information
- Over or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, taste, smells, light, colours, temperature or pain. For example, background sounds may seem very loud or distracting



If you require further training, please speak to our Disability Team who may be able to organise an autism awareness session for you or your staff. Call 01782 734481 or email [support.ddse@keele.ac.uk](mailto:support.ddse@keele.ac.uk)



# THE EFFECT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS

During Covid-19 and the lockdown many students with an ASC will be feeling particularly anxious. Learning and working routines have been changed (sometimes on a daily basis) and they will be feeling uncertain about the future and what is expected of them. Mixed messages are being given out by the media. Everyone is concerned for their families and unable to meet with friends but this can cause additional anxiety for students with an ASC. Repetitive behaviours used as a coping mechanism to reduce stress may be exacerbated. Some of the support they may have relied on will be available in a different way or maybe not at all. Some students may struggle with online learning, virtual tutorials and 'phone calls, having been used to face to face delivery. **These students require support, reassurance and possible adjustments to enable them to reach their academic potential.**



# HOW CAN WE SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH AN ASC?



## HIGHLIGHT STRENGTHS

Identifying a student's strengths, skills and talents is a positive way of helping them fulfil their potential. Students with an ASC can have a number of strengths including enthusiasm, determination, reliability and specific interests which can increase productivity. Many students with an ASC have great attention to detail and accuracy, which can be a great asset in some group work situations

## BE AWARE OF THE SENSORY ENVIRONMENT

Some students with an ASC can become anxious and stressed in noisy and crowded environments. Ask your students what their specific requirements are. Try to minimise any distractions, such as flickering lights or background noise, if possible during your online tutorial.





## PROVIDE RESOURCES IN ADVANCE

Provision of reading lists, lecture slides, handouts, notes and articles for discussion in advance helps students with an ASC to adequately prepare themselves for lectures

## GIVE NOTICE OF CHANGES IF POSSIBLE

Give as much notice as possible if you need to change times or topics of sessions. This is not always possible, but it will help your students with an ASC to prepare and will help them get the most out of their learning



## CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Check that the information you are giving is clear and concise, and cannot be interpreted in other ways, especially in exams. and assignments. Give step by step instructions where possible, and prompt and constructive feedback. Allow extra time for understanding and processing of information. Use direct language and plain English as much as possible, and try to avoid sarcasm. Students with an ASC may also be direct in their communication with you, which can sometimes be misinterpreted and appear abrupt.

In presentation of documents, avoid high contrast colours. Resources with visual images, photographs, audio and videos can be helpful for many students with an ASC.



## GROUP WORK

Enable students with an ASC to prepare for group work as the social interactions required can be overwhelming. Facilitate group discussions, perhaps offering clear roles, to enable students with an ASC to know when to make a contribution.

Encourage the group to set ground rules from the start, and provide support if communication fails, the division of work is unfair or any member of the group is excluded by others

## FLEXIBILITY AND ACCEPTANCE

Some students with an ASC will demonstrate repetitive behaviours which are a coping mechanism and should be respected. Could you allow students with an ASC the opportunity to temporarily leave a session if overwhelmed, without disadvantage? This can help them to regain calm and re join the session with an improved outlook



## CHECK HOW STUDENTS ARE FEELING

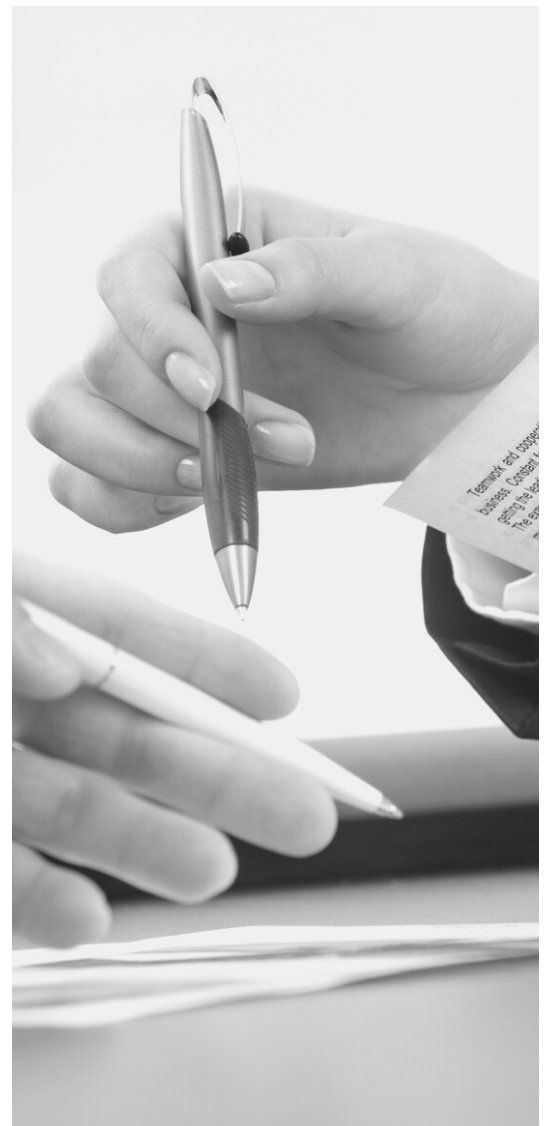
As well checking on academic progress, talk to your students about the current situation and find out how they are feeling. Some students with an ASC or a disability find it hard to speak up. Students need to know their University acknowledges the situation which may be causing them anxiety. Refer or signpost to Support Services as appropriate.





# LEARNING SUPPORT STATEMENT

All students with a diagnosed ASC should have a Learning Support Statement in place which identifies the specific accommodations and reasonable adjustments that should be put into effect to support the student's studies. Please refer to the Reasonable Adjustments Policy and if you have any questions about the Policy itself or any of the reasonable adjustments that it contains please refer to our Disability Support team on 01782 734481 or email [support.dds@keele.ac.uk](mailto:support.dds@keele.ac.uk)





**We currently encourage you to use the following ways of getting in touch with us:**

- By email: [support.dds@keele.ac.uk](mailto:support.dds@keele.ac.uk)
- By phone: +44(0)1782 734481 - if you need advice from one of our specialist advisers, we'll arrange a call back for you
- Through our [online form](#)
- [Book a virtual appointment with a DDS adviser](#) - through Microsoft Teams. Access Teams by going to [office.com](https://office.com), entering your Keele IT username/password, and choosing 'Teams'.



# FURTHER RESOURCES

**Further information and resources on ASD:**

[National Autistic Society](#)

[Stories from people on the spectrum](#)

[NHS website](#)

[Students with ASD share their experiences of remote learning.](#)

[Improving mental health during the covid-19 crisis](#)

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Developed by the Start to Success Team, November 2020

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