



# What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a complex, life-long developmental disability which is neurological in origin. Approximately 1 in 100 children in Australia is diagnosed with Autism.

The core features of Autism are differences in:

- Social communication and interaction.
- Restricted and repetitive behaviours.
- Sensory processing.

## Social communication and interaction

People with Autism may have very limited ability to communicate; or, may appear to be quite proficient with language. However, even those with good verbal skills often experience difficulties. Although they may be able to get their own message across, generally, people with Autism are less skilled at understanding other people's communication. They tend to be very literal in their understanding of words and have difficulty with abstract concepts and inferences. In addition, they are likely to have difficulty interpreting facial expression and tone of voice.

## Restricted and repetitive behaviours

The person may demonstrate a range of repetitive behaviours e.g., hand movements, the way they always enter a room or take a particular path across a certain space. It is sometimes considered that this desire for sameness stems from a sense of uncertainty—the world can be confusing, with Autism. Actions, over which they have some control, might be reassuring. People with Autism may have difficulty coping with change—especially from the familiar into the unknown.

## Sensory differences

People with Autism may experience sensations differently. This is most common with sound. To us the sound might not appear too loud but this could be experienced as painfully loud to some people with Autism. Some people may choose to wear headphones or earmuffs, while others may need quiet breaks.

Some individuals may want to avoid the body closeness of contact sports or in queue formation, as for them the sensation of touch is intensified. Contrastingly, others may be hyposensitive and seek the sensation of touch, frequently touching surfaces around them. N.B. not all people with Autism experience sensory differences, in these ways.

People with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD or Autism) may benefit greatly by taking part in cricket. With an understanding of the nature of Autism and the individual's strengths and difficulties, coaches may provide great support enabling people with Autism to acquire many new skills; and maybe succeed beyond expectation.

Following an overview of the main characteristics of Autism, we aim to show how support can best be provided to teach skills and encourage individuals with Autism, while guiding them into the world of cricket. The use of visual supports will be explained—and the value of their use in many different ways. Many of the examples of visuals/social stories that we provide have children in mind; but the format can be equally helpful for older individuals. Adaptations can be made according to the individual's ability and needs—the key is to provide information visually, when and where possible.

## Other features of Autism:

**Eye contact may be difficult**— but they may still be maintaining attention without looking at you. While this is fairly common to Autism, some individuals may present with good eye contact.

**Visual learners**— it has long been known that people with Autism understand and learn more from what they see, rather than from the spoken word. Demonstration, along with other visual resources will be valuable teaching tools.

**Not always able to see 'the big picture'**— people with Autism are inclined to focus on detail, rather than seeing the 'big picture'. Therefore, what might be obvious to others is not always obvious to a person with Autism.

**Not always able to see another person's perspective**—people with Autism are likely to have difficulty understanding the thoughts, feelings and intentions of other people. Never assume that they might 'get the message'. Be explicit with instruction.

**Special interests**— people with Autism often develop interests that may be unusual; or may feature with a great intensity of interest. Get to know their interests—they may provide a useful way to build their motivation.

