

What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others.

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people. If you are autistic, you are autistic for life; autism is not an illness or disease and cannot be '[cured](#)'. Often people feel being autistic is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

Autism is a spectrum condition. All autistic people share certain difficulties, but being autistic will affect them in different ways. Some autistic people also have [learning disabilities](#), [mental health issues](#) or [other conditions](#), meaning people need different levels of support. All people on the autism spectrum learn and develop. With the right sort of support, all can be helped to live a more fulfilling life of their own choosing

Diagnosis

A [diagnosis](#) is the formal identification of autism, usually by a multi-disciplinary diagnostic team, often including a speech and language therapist, paediatrician, psychiatrist and/or psychologist.

The benefits of a diagnosis

Getting a timely and thorough assessment and diagnosis may be helpful because:

- it helps autistic people (and their families, partners, employers, colleagues, teachers and friends) to understand why they may experience certain difficulties and what they can do about them
- it allows people to access [services and support](#).

How autism is diagnosed

The characteristics of autism vary from one person to another, but in order for a diagnosis to be made, a person will usually be assessed as having had [persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction](#) and [restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests](#) since early childhood, to the extent that these "[limit and impair everyday functioning](#)".