

Supporting Students on the Autistic Spectrum

What is Autism?

- ▣ Every autistic child is unique
- ▣ There is a “spectrum” of symptoms
- ▣ The main feature is difficulty in social interaction and understanding of social clues
- ▣ There may be difficulties in speech and communication
- ▣ There might be sensory sensitivity
- ▣ They might be preoccupied with routines and dislike change

Signs of Autism

Some signs may include:

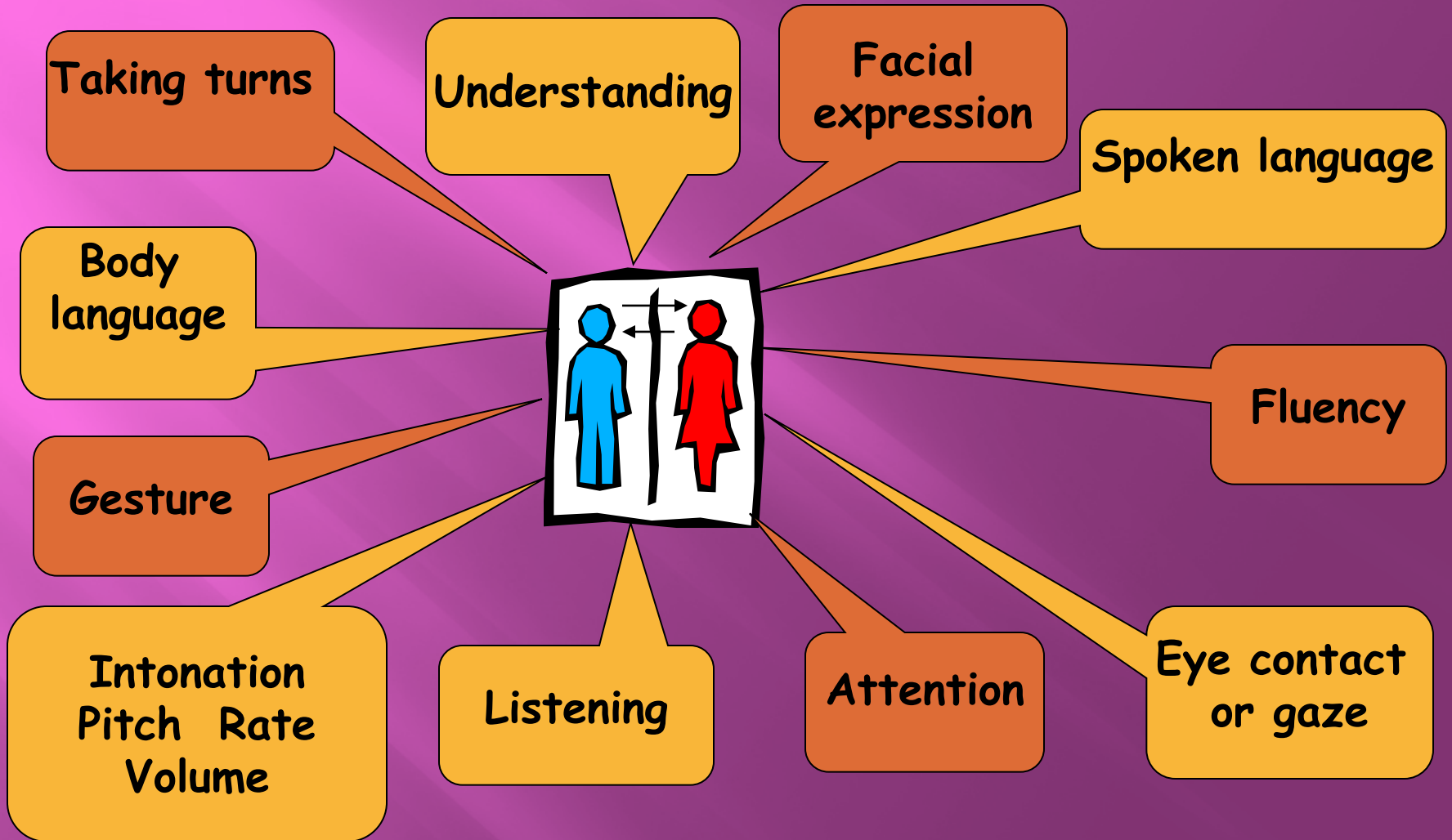
- ▣ Avoidance of eye contact
- ▣ Difficulty with empathy
- ▣ Difficulty with social clues
- ▣ Literal understanding
- ▣ Like repetitive activities
- ▣ Have fixations and preoccupations
- ▣ Difficulty with social imagination

Strengths in Autism

Areas of strength may include:

- ▣ Good memory
- ▣ Good attention to detail
- ▣ Good attention span
- ▣ High IQ
- ▣ Respond well to routine and structure
- ▣ Good vocabulary

What is communication?



True or False?

- ▣ Autism is caused by bad parenting
- ▣ All children with Autism are highly intelligent
- ▣ Autism is easy to diagnose
- ▣ Autism can be cured
- ▣ Children with Autism find change difficult
- ▣ Children with Autism are badly behaved
- ▣ There is a genetic component to Autism
- ▣ All people with Autism have a special skill or talent
- ▣ Autism affects more boys than girls

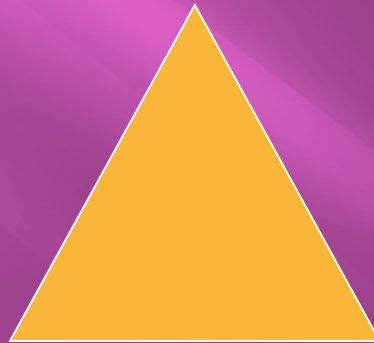
True or False?

- ❑ Autism is caused by bad parenting **FALSE**
- ❑ All children with Autism are highly intelligent **FALSE**
- ❑ Autism is easy to diagnose **FALSE**
- ❑ Autism can be cured **FALSE**
- ❑ Children with Autism find change difficult **TRUE**
- ❑ Children with Autism are badly behaved **FALSE**
- ❑ There is a genetic component to Autism **TRUE**
- ❑ All people with Autism have a special skill or talent **FALSE**
- ❑ Autism affects more boys than girls **TRUE**

The Triad – the 3 areas of difficulty

Communication

Difficulty understanding the communication of others and in developing effective communication themselves.*



Flexibility of thought

Difficulty adapting to new situations and insistence on keeping to familiar patterns and routines.*

Social relationships

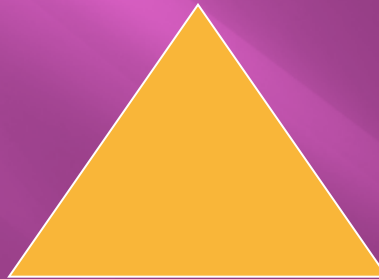
Difficulty understanding the social behaviour of others and behaving in socially appropriate ways themselves.*

*taken from DfES ASD Good Practice Guidance, 2002

Other Characteristics

Motor co-ordination

Can have problems with the planning and co-ordination of movements



Organisational skills

Can have difficulties planning tasks and organising information and materials

Sensory issues

May be under or over sensitive to particular sights, smells, tastes, textures, sounds

So...they can have difficulties with...

- ▣ listening to and understanding verbal instructions
- ▣ change of any sort, especially if unprepared
- ▣ following rules ~ either can't see the point or follow them ruthlessly to the letter
- ▣ social interactions ~ constantly mis-read situations and social contexts
- ▣ the non-verbal aspects of communication such as body language, tone of voice, humour, facial expression, etc
- ▣ understanding the views and needs of others
- ▣ sensory stimulation ~ can be over or under-sensitive
- ▣ co-ordination, finding their way around, being organised.

Strengths ... they are good at..

- ▣ concentrating on tasks and activities of interest to them
- ▣ logical thinking
- ▣ independent working (if they understand and are interested in the task)
- ▣ knowledge about subjects of special interest to them
- ▣ using visual information
- ▣ following the order and routine of timetable and school
- ▣ honesty (almost always tell the truth in response to questions)
- ▣ drawing or creative skills
- ▣ using clear and fluent speech
- ▣ learning and remembering new vocabulary



STRATEGIES!



USE VISUAL SUPPORT

- ▣ Research has shown that students with Autism are often visual learners
- ▣ Use pictures, photos, written cue cards, lesson plans, cartoons to help explain anything. Give them to be there as a prompt.
- ▣ Use planners and timetables ~ anything that gives the student a visual representation.
- ▣ Use colour coding
- ▣ Use symbols in the environment



REDUCE & MONITOR LANGUAGE

- ▣ Language is complicated, confusing and transient
- ▣ Reduce the amount of language you use to the minimum to get the message over effectively
- ▣ Forget about being polite! (would you like to...)
- ▣ Do not give long complicated instructions
- ▣ Try and reduce your use of sayings and metaphors ~ pull your socks up, get a move on, you're pushing your luck, etc
- ▣ Back up verbal information and instructions with visual support



SOCIAL SKILLS

- ▣ Explain behaviours ~ why someone is cross, what it means if you shrug your shoulders, how close to stand, etc
- ▣ Do not expect them to be able to conform to 'acceptable social standards' ~ they do not have the level of understanding.
- ▣ Teach them the behaviours that would make a difference, eg, looking at someone when you first speak to them.
- ▣ Remember how difficult it is to read social situations if you don't understand body language, facial expression, etc
- ▣ Use social stories to explain and teach social situations

STRESS LEVELS

Pupils with ASD can be very anxious provide opportunities to:

- ▣ Talk about thoughts and feelings
- ▣ Give more time to think before responding
- ▣ Try to give warnings to changes in routine
- ▣ Try to reduce loud noises, strong smells, busy displays
- ▣ Give support during social interactions
- ▣ Explicitly teach social rules

Summary of Strategies

- ▣ When working with students on the autistic spectrum we you need to consider the following points.
- ▣ Visual support
- ▣ Monitor your use of language
- ▣ Be aware of sensory issues
- ▣ Use plans and schedules everyday
- ▣ Prepare them for changes

The National Autistic society – www.masbranch.org.uk and The Autism Education Trust – www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk are great sources of information .