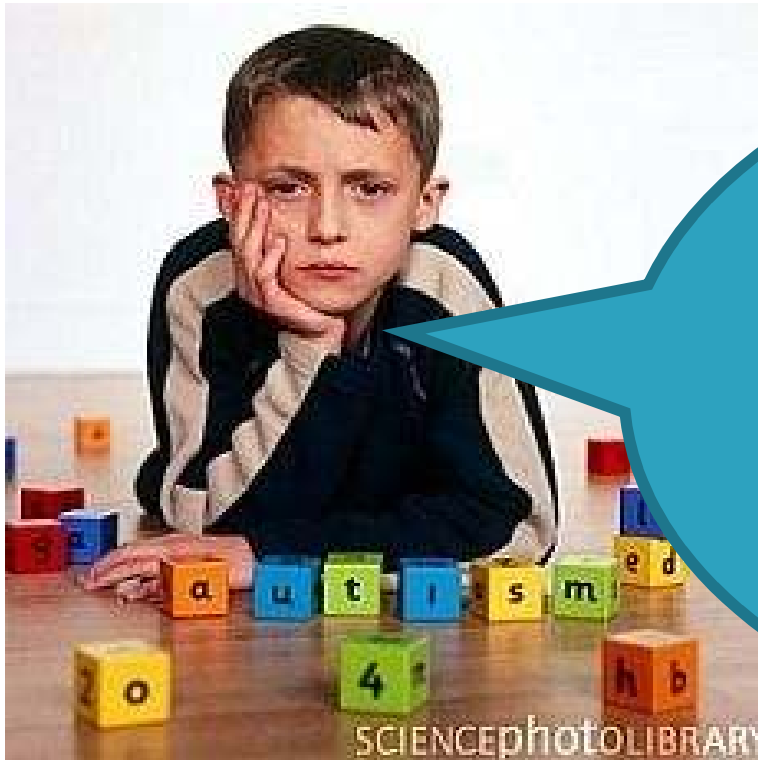


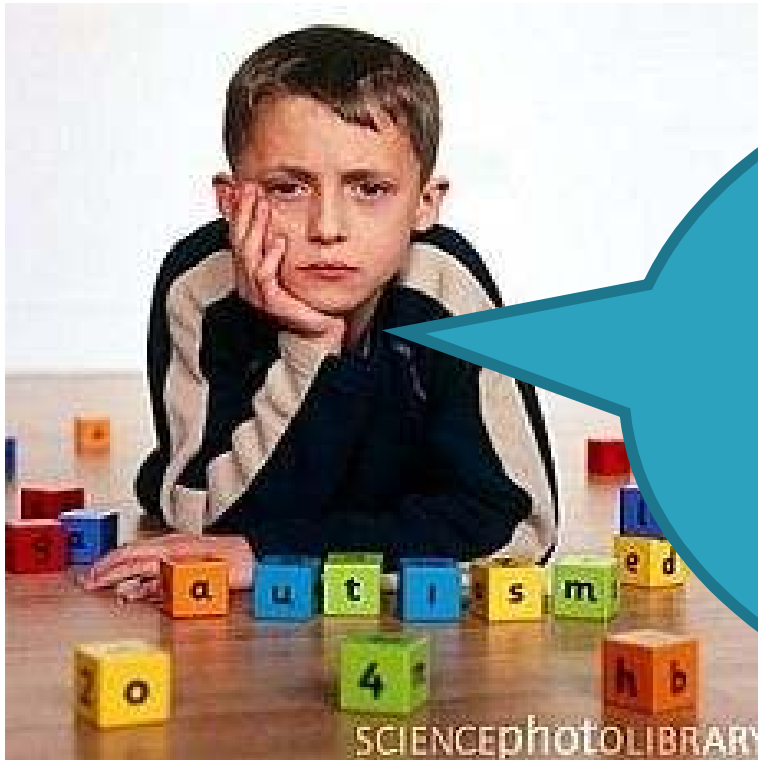
Can I tell you about
Autism?





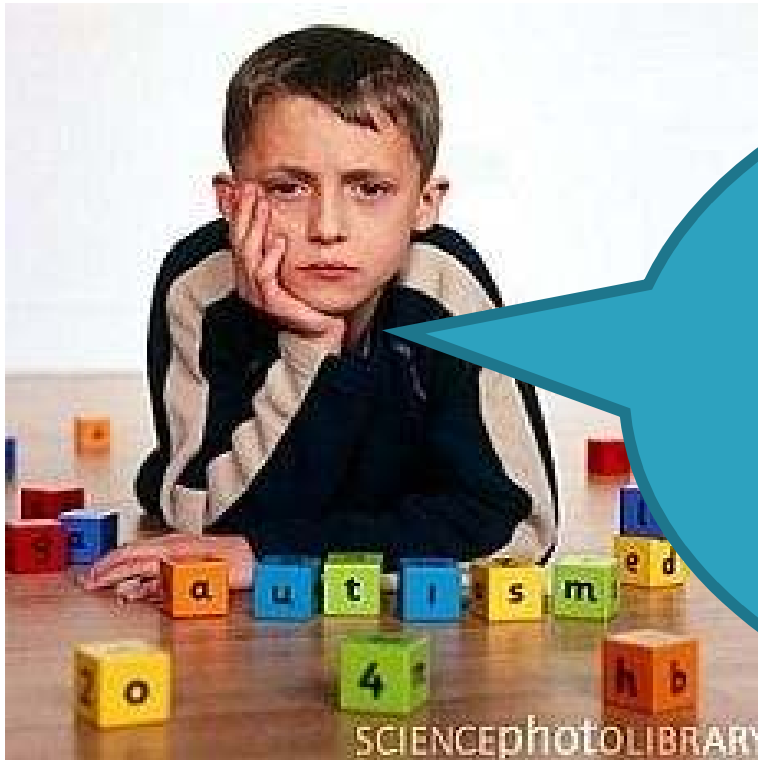
Hi, my name is Mike. I have autism. I look like most boys, but having autism can affect how I behave and talk in some situations. I have problems making sense of the world, especially making sense of what other people say or do.

It is difficult for people with autism to imagine what other people may be thinking or feeling, this can make communication difficult. Change is also another barrier, people with autism do not cope well with things that are not planned; this may make them very anxious and affect their behaviour. Children with autism can have difficulties with learning in school.



In school we are taught about the senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. However there is another sense– social sense. This is something which I have problems with.

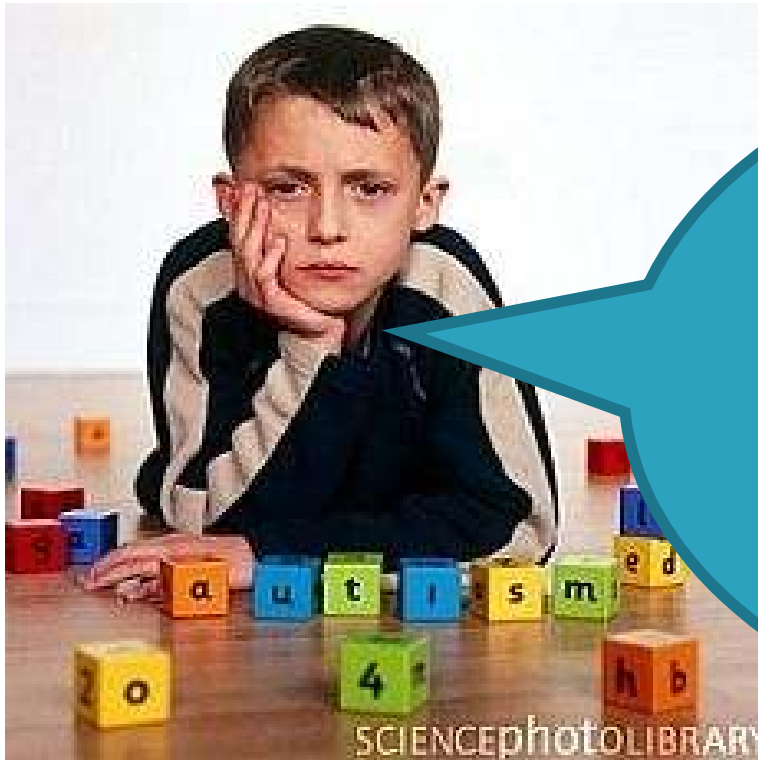
Most people can work out what other people are feeling or thinking or intending to do from their body language, tone of voice and their gestures, people with autism find this very difficult which puts them at a disadvantage. People with autism also find it very difficult to look at someone when they are talking to them, it is a bit like being overloaded with information and makes them very uncomfortable. It may appear that they are not listening, but they are, they just don't need to make eye contact to understand the message.



I understand things in a literal way, for example if the teacher asked me to paint the person next to me, I would put paint on that person. I often copy the words people use, so I used to call myself “you” because other people used that word when referring to me.

Some people with autism may not talk very much and have to be encouraged to use language in order to develop effective communication. People with autism often have a limited number of facial expressions.

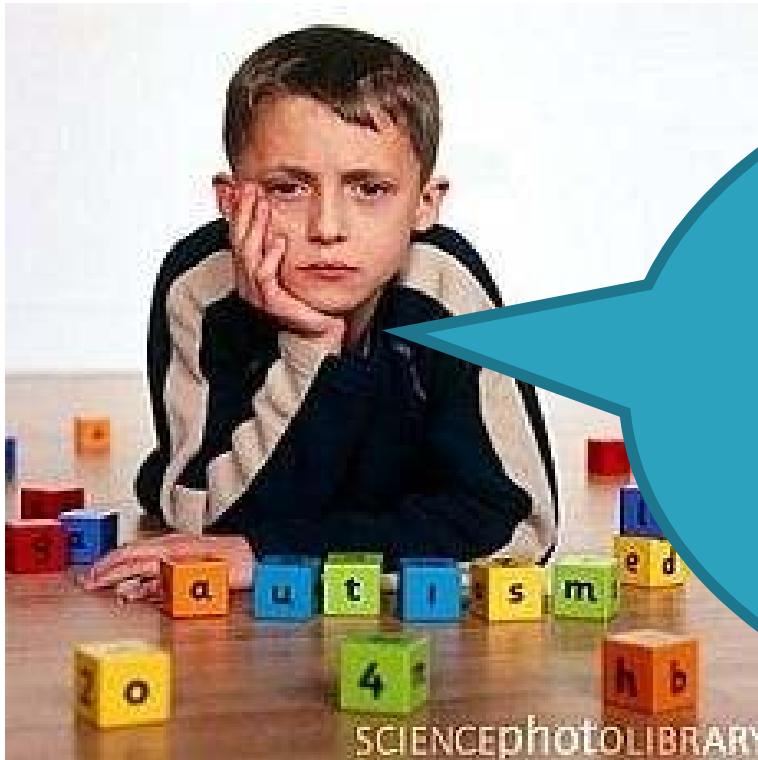
Children usually enjoy playing with other children, having autism often means that this is a challenge they may prefer to play alongside or play with things instead. Repeating things such as playing the same game, spinning round and round or watching the same DVD over and over can be reassuring and create a feeling of calm.



Having routines is very good for me, I prefer to know what is going to happen next. I need to be prepared for changes as this helps me cope with them. A visual timetable is very useful in preparing me what is going to happen next, so that I can keep calm and cope better.

Visual timetables are used both in the home and at school to assist people with autism and help them cope with changes in routine. Social stories are also useful in helping with preparation for changes. Being told when changes are going to occur is also very useful, coping with a sudden stop or change can be very difficult to handle if you have autism.

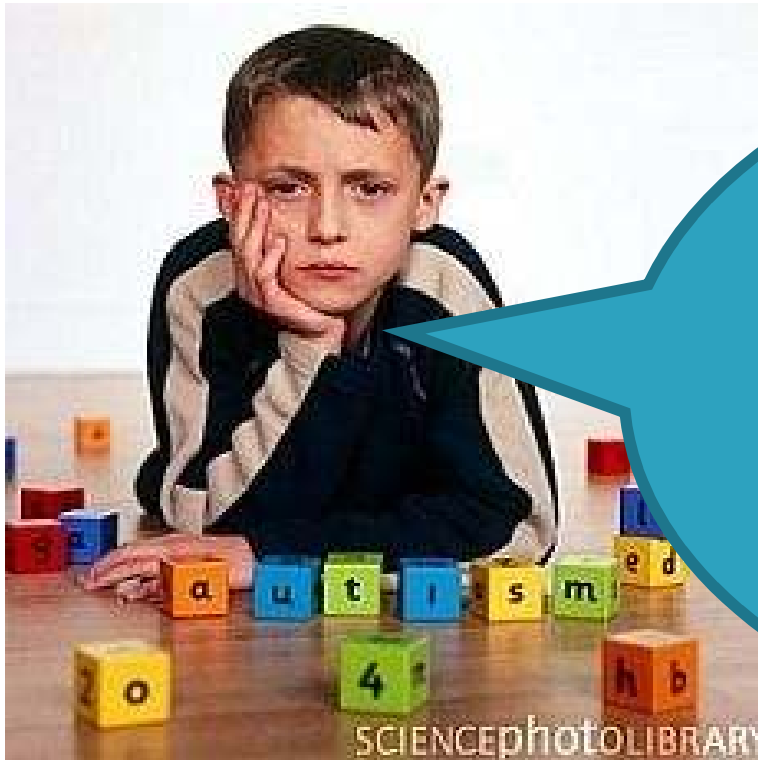




I am not very good at picking up on social rules, for example standing too close to someone or appearing to be rude until I am taught that this is not the correct thing to say or do.

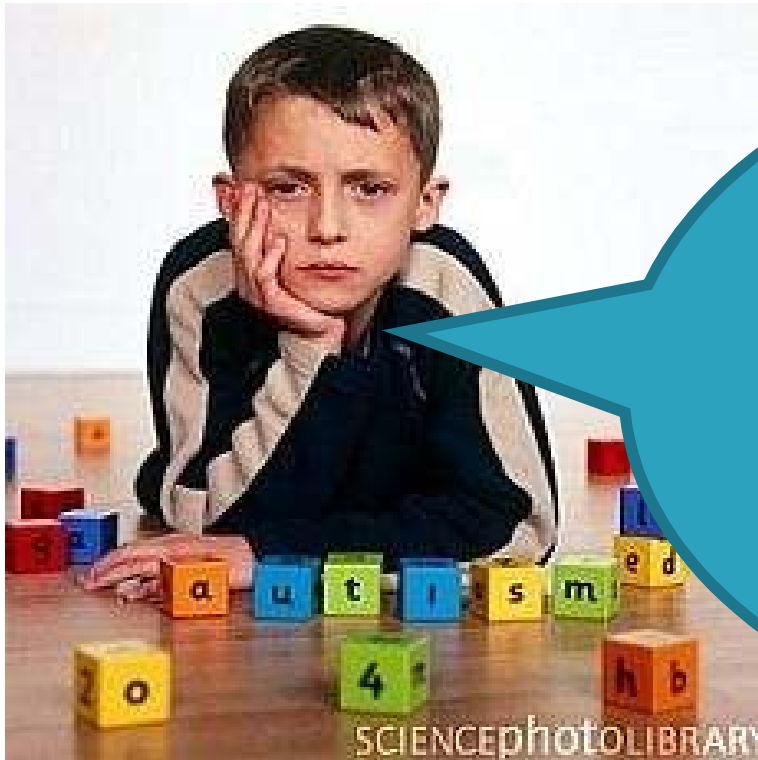
Children with autism will not understand that some games have a winner and loser, they have to be taught this. This can cause difficulties in handling being the loser or being at the back of the line rather than at the front. People with autism often will interpret this as an injustice and become upset.





Not everyone with autism has the same sensory problems but some of the things that I find difficult are: coping with loud noises and strong smells. I also dislike foods which have a strong taste.

People with autism can suffer from hyper sensitivity. This means that a lot of things that most people are not even aware of can cause problems. Headphones can be used to block out noise, or going out when it is quieter. Some people with autism find touch is painful and may be over sensitive to things like clothing and labels. The texture of some foods can cause problems and having a meal that is a mixture of things. Getting over to sleep can be a problem, sometimes a weighted blanket can help to get people with autism settled at night as well as blackout blinds or a foot massage.

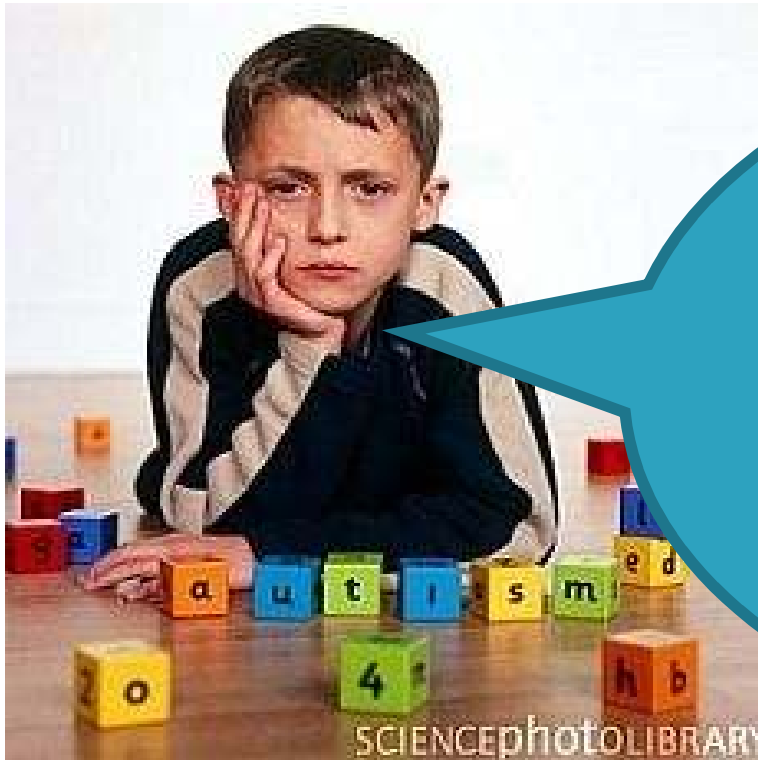


I have some problems with motor skills, I don't have great co-ordination over my body movements. It took me a long time to learn to ride my bike. Fiddly tasks are also tricky for me, but I am getting better with practice and help from my parents.

Buttons, shoes laces and using scissors can be difficult if you have problems with fine motor skills, not all children with autism have these difficulties.

Football can be quite confusing as it is a fast game and decisions have to be made quickly.





Most children with autism have special interests or things that they really like doing. Sometimes my parents and teachers will use my special interest as a reward.

People with autism are often very talented when it comes to their special interests, but they can also become very obsessive. Being asked to discontinue with a special interest can often cause upset. Playing at a special interest with friends can be most beneficial in developing important social and play skills/

Further help and support:

DVDs and CD ROMs

- A is for Autism, (1992)
- The Autism Puzzle (2002–3)– downloadable from the internet for free
- Mind Reading: The interactive Guide to Emotions. Simon Baron – Cohen. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Websites

- www.autismeducation.org.uk
- www.carolgraysocialstories.com
- www.researchautsim.net
- www.autismresearchcentre.com

National Autistic Society

- www.autism.org.uk
- Tel: 02078332299
E-mail: nas@nas.org.uk

