

**Please note:** 'child' = 'child or young person'

## **EBSA and ASC – A common theme**

Children and young people with autism often face additional challenges in school which may make them anxious about school and experience EBSA.

Frequent sensory processing differences can make the world unpredictable. School life is full of sensory experiences ranging from busy corridors to colourful display boards to the materials in school uniforms being difficult to tolerate. If the triggers are not identified and addressed, it can lead to regular non-attendance at school and mental health difficulties.

Difficulties in understanding their emotions also makes the world feel more uncertain and unpredictable. This can be difficult to cope with and emotions can be difficult to regulate. It is this which causes anxiety. So, when autistic children and young people show signs of EBSA it is useful to unpick what they are finding difficult to tolerate. Schools can help with this and seek further advice from supporting teams and services.

Any child/ young person currently avoiding school is likely to become anxious when asked to talk about their difficulties or returning to school. For an autistic young person, they may have additional layers of anxiety as they face sensory and social challenges and/or may have difficulty in being able to identify how they are feeling.

Parents and carers generally know their children best and may already have helped them to find ways of managing situations and events outside school. This experience will be helpful for your child's school when working with you to put the right support in place.

## **Unique differences**

Pupils on the autistic spectrum have differences in:

**Communication** – differences in understanding and expressing communication and language, with skills ranging from individuals who are highly articulate (but may lack understanding) to others who may be non-verbal.

**Social understanding** – Differences in understanding social behaviour and the feelings of others, which informs the development of friendships and relationships.

**Sensory processing** – Differences in perceiving sensory information. Hypo (low sensitivity), hyper (high sensitivity) to touch, sight, hearing, smell, taste, vestibular inner ear (balance), proprioceptive (body awareness).

**Interests and information processing** – Differences in perception, planning, understanding concepts, generalising, predicting, managing transition, passions for interests and ability to absorb auditory or spoken information.

## **Common reasons for increased stress/anxiety in pupils with ASC**

- Transitions between lessons (noisy, crowded corridors)
- Unstructured times of day (break, lunchtimes)
- Sensory overload and/or fear of specific sounds
- Working co-operatively in groups or team situations
- Misunderstanding sarcasm, banter or dares
- Social issues with friendships, bullying, teasing, love, emotion
- Lack of personal space
- Unexpected change to the timetable
- Coping with the curriculum and striving for perfection
- Being away from familiar routines, family and home
- Disliking a particular subject or member of staff
- Not processing instructions and misunderstanding what is required

Any or a mixture of these factors can lead to anxiety, stress, sensory overload and meltdowns. Things often become more difficult at secondary transfer, with the added expectations in a new environment.

## Social Anxiety and Autism

There is a higher rate of social anxiety in teenagers with autism. Autistic teens can find reading other people and understanding social cues difficult to recognise and interpret. They can also find that it uses up much more energy than a neurotypical person and it becomes exhausting.

The National Autistic Society states that people with autism may:

- Appear to be insensitive.
- Seek out time alone when overloaded by other people.
- Not seek comfort from other people.
- Appear to behave 'strangely' or in a way thought to be socially inappropriate.
- Find it hard to form friendships.

## What can you expect school to do?

- Consider requesting involvement from other professionals at the earliest opportunity, such as the Local Authority's Autism & Social Communication Team.
- Listen carefully to you and your child or young person. They should acknowledge the challenges faced by your child and you as their parent.
- Refer to the West Sussex EBSA Guidance document.
- Work in partnership with you and your child to find out what difficulties your child is experiencing and find ways to improve their confidence and attendance.
- Arrange a meeting to devise a plan in conjunction with you and your child. The plan should include what the supported next steps will be.
- Respond to any school-based needs (especially Key staff) such as academic support, sensory sensitivities, dealing with bullying or support with social relationships.

*Above information taken from WSCC's 'EBSA and Autism' leaflet – see below.*

## Further Information

[West Sussex EBSA Booklets](#) for Parent Carers. Young people and schools -

**ASPENS** [www.aspens.org.uk](http://www.aspens.org.uk)

**National Autistic Society:** [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk). Helpline: 0808 800 4104 (10am–3pm Mon–Fri)

**Autistic Girls Network** - <https://autisticgirlsnetwork.org/>

West Sussex SEND Information, Advice and Support Service ([SENDIAS](#)) have a website with several resources, including guides and factsheets.

The [Local Offer](#) includes information on the local arrangements for EBSA.



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## Service Statement

The role of the SENDIAS service is to ensure all parents, children and young people have access to impartial information, advice and support so they can make informed decisions related to their situation. Any information that is shared with the service is in confidence unless permission has been obtained to share this with any individuals, services and agencies that may be able to help in the circumstances. For more detail, view our [policies and privacy notice](#) on our website.

**How to contact us:** Tel: 0330 222 8555 / Email: [send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk) or [cyp.sendias@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:cyp.sendias@westsussex.gov.uk) (up to age 25) / Website: [www.westsussexsendias.org](http://www.westsussexsendias.org)

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