



Autism Spectrum
Information Advice
and Meeting Point

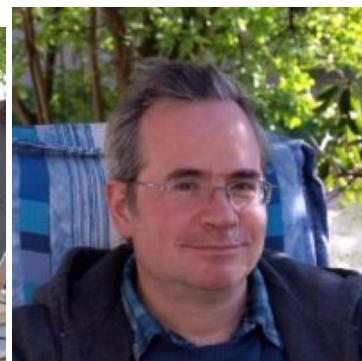
Creating Inclusive Schools for Autistic Students

Adam Harris

TUI Education Conference

9th November 2019

Who here has Autism?



Introducing Adam Harris



Introducing AsIam



What I will cover today...



Autism Spectrum
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- What is Autism?
- My own experiences progressing through the education system
- Autistic thinking & how it interacts with the education system
- How to make schools accessible for autistic student



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**Today is just the start of the
conversation...**

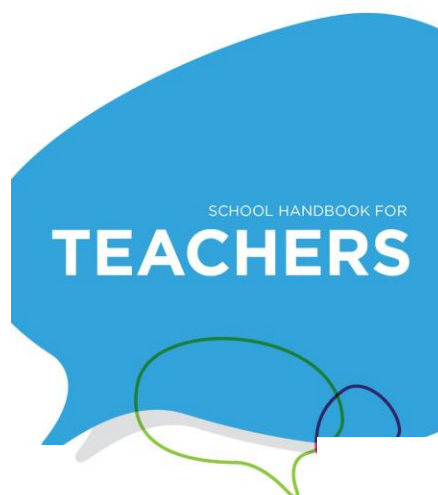
“Back to School” Handbooks



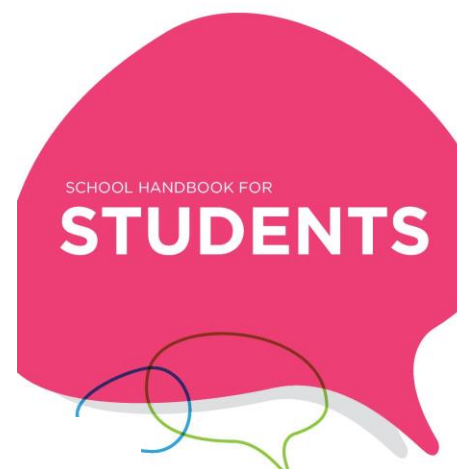
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AsIAm Secondary School Workshops



- 🗨 Delivered in over 50 secondary schools over the past 18 months
- 🗨 90 minutes in duration
- 🗨 Interactive experience of autism which allows students to “step into the shoes” of their autistic peers
- 🗨 Small groups / whole school

World Autism Month Resource Pack



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Primary and Secondary Schools Pack, April 2019



This is AsIAM's Primary and Secondary Schools Packs for World Autism Month, April 2019. The content and resources below, once accessed via password, are free to download and use in your school, library, or service. These resources were developed in conjunction with our Youth Leadership Team, a group of young autistic people across Ireland training to be self-advocates for the autism community.

There are general resources to use in schools, and some resources specific to primary or secondary education.

General:

- [Teacher/Staff Handbook for Autism Aware Schools, April](#)
- [Introduction Video for Students from AsIAM](#)
- [Introduction Video for Teachers and Staff from AsIAM](#)
- [Understanding, Acceptance, and Inclusion Video from AsIAM's Youth Leadership Team](#)
- [Poster: What you can do to make your school Autism-Friendly](#)
- [Poster: What I want teachers and school staff to know about autism](#)
- [Poster: What I want students and classmates to understand about autism](#)
- [Sensory Environment Checklist for Schools](#)

Autism Experience, Mini Version:

- [Autism Experience Mini Version Handbook for April Autism Aware Schools](#)
- [Autism Experience Mini Version Demonstration Video – Touch Exercise \(Surprise Box\)](#)

Primary:

- [Primary Worksheet](#)
- [Primary Story with Points of Discussion](#)



Autism Friendly Schools Sensory Environment Checklist

“Autism-Friendly Schools” Framework



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- AsIAM / JMB / IPPN collaboration
- Cross-sectoral resource
- Maps Inspectorate Frameworks / Middletown Framework to best practice ideas for schools
- Online resource & three free hours of online training per teacher



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What is Autism?

Definitions of Autism



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There are lots of different definitions of Autism including:

- Oxford Dictionary: “A mental condition, present from early childhood, characterized by great difficulty in communicating and forming relationships with other people and in using language and abstract concepts.”
- National Autistic Society(UK): “Autism is a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them.”
- Centre for Control and Prevention of Diseases (USA): “Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges.”
- HSE(Ireland): “Autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) are a range of related developmental disorders that begin in childhood and persist throughout adulthood.”

What is Autism?



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- Developmental Condition
- Spectrum
- Affects 1 in 100 people in Ireland and by extension over 243,000 people in Ireland, when family members are considered (DCU Study). 1 in 65 students (or 14,000 students) in the school system have a diagnosis of Autism
- Differences in communication and social imagination
- Differences in sensory processing
- Often includes heightened levels of anxiety, repetitive behaviours, a need for routine
- Autistic people are 3-D (or you could even say 4-D HD!)

Common Misconceptions



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- Autism is caused by (insert theory here)
- Autism is something which can be developed
- Autism is overdiagnosed
- Autism is a boy thing
- Autistic people are just over-protected
- Autistic people are violent and highly disruptive
- Autistic people wants to be left alone
- Autism is an intellectual disability
- Autistic people are all highly intelligent

How we explain Autism...



What would this feel like?



Common Differences



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-
- Social Communication & Interaction
 - Social Imagination
 - Sensory Processing
 - Concentration
 - Organisational Skills
 - Coordination
 - Stimming
 - Anxiety
 - Related Conditions
 - Attention to detail
 - Passion for areas of interest
 - Intense focus Loyalty and honesty
 - Thinking differently Diversity!



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How do these differences play out in school?



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Communication

In the Classroom



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- Autistic people often need more time to process instructions / questions
- Many autistic students will find written or visual instructions easier than verbal / rote instruction
- Communication needs to be explicit
- Teachers need to be clear in what they say
- Expectations need to be very clear and individualized
- LESS IS MORE
- Tone of voice is important to keep in mind
- Whatever a teacher normally understands as good communication likely needs to be set aside
- Group work may prove to be very difficult if it is not well managed and “paired”
- Teachers across classes need to show a consistency
- Just because someone doesn’t speak it does not mean they don’t have anything to say



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Empathise with the experience...



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I forgot my copybook



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Walking through the corridor was really stressful, I need to go somewhere quiet to calm down

More general thoughts on communication...



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- Be mindful of how things are written down
- All people within a school community need to understand this
- Make sure it is clear where a person can go to access help and support
- Be mindful of the “context” in which you are communicating with someone
- Only ask a question if you want an honest answer
- Don't take offence
- Don't overdo it



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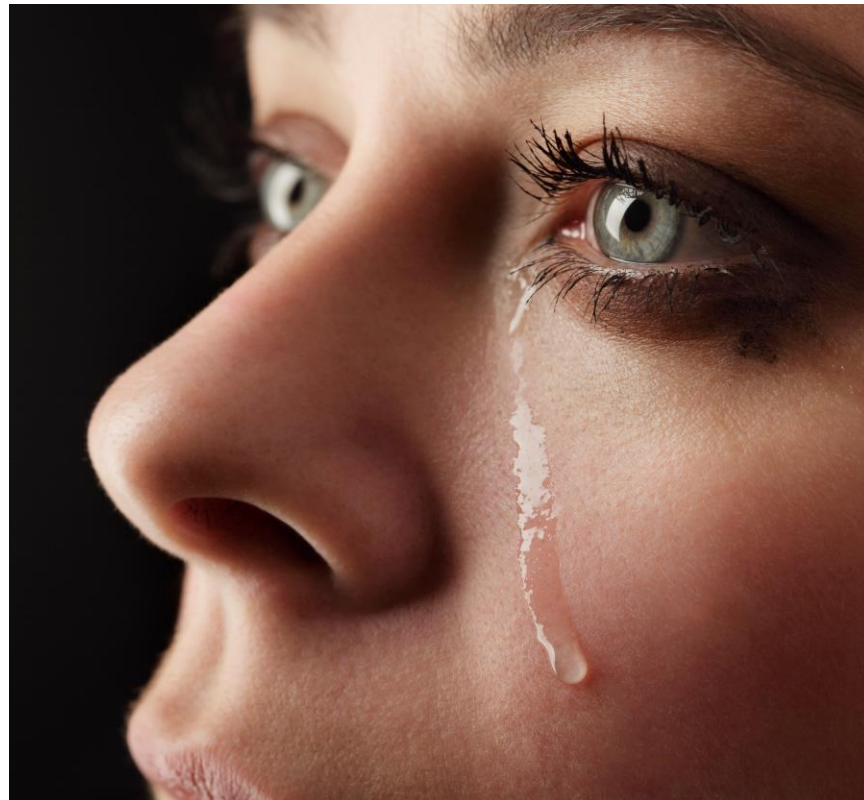
Context

Social Imagination



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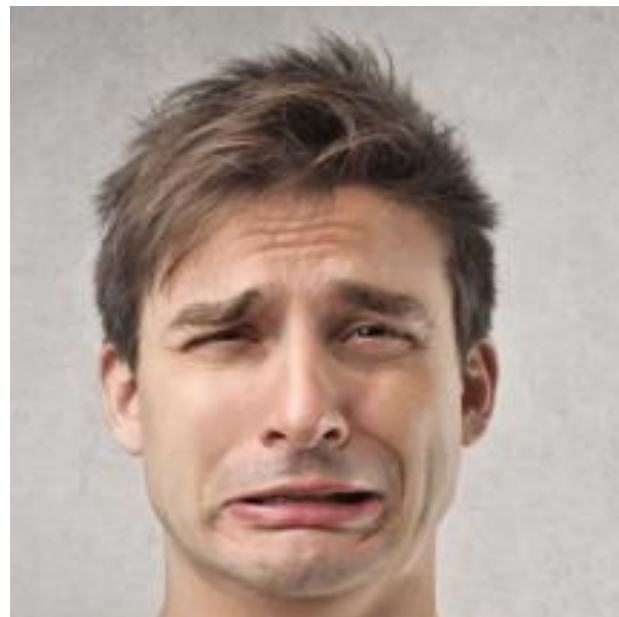
- Can you explain to me what sad looks like?



So these people are sad...



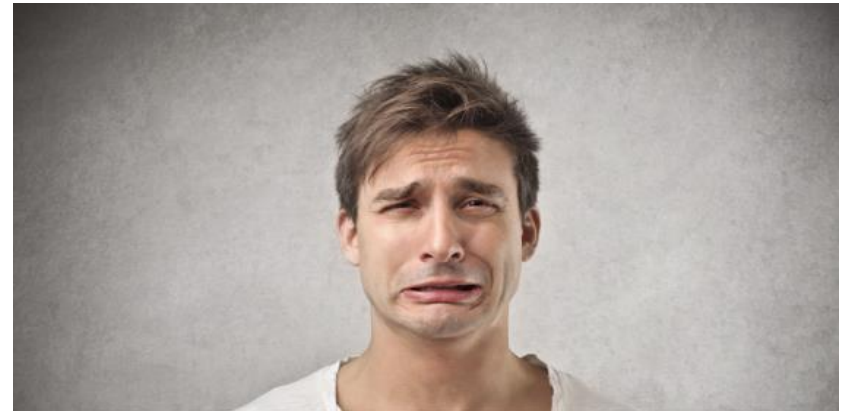
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Lets look at the bigger picture...



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**Things which are obvious to most people
are not necessarily obvious to an autistic
student..**

What impact does this have on school?



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- Routines and interests become very important
- Rules and procedures
- Misinterpreting social situations
- Breaks to changes in plan or routine
- Very high levels of anxiety
- Challenges in making friends or trying new things
- The need for additional processing time
- The need for clarity of expectation
- The need to teach concepts and subject “in context”



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Making friends



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Sensory Processing

Signs of Sensory Processing Differences



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- Hyper or Hypo Sensitivity
- Extreme response to changes in the environment
- Fleeing stimulation
- Resistance to change / trouble focusing
- Problems with motor skills
- Difficulty socialising
- Poor self-control and self-regulation

Possible Implications of Sensory Processing Differences



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- Poor fine and/or gross motor skills
- Difficulty concentrating and focusing
- Sensitive to loud noises like sirens or blenders
- Dislikes hair being washed, brushed or cut
- Resistant to new foods and textures
- Dislikes being tickled or loves being squeezed
- High pain threshold

Possible Implications of Sensory Processing Differences



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- Walks on tiptoes
- Dislikes particular textiles or tags on clothes
- Shields eyes from bright lights
- Likes to chew on different materials
- Likes to smell people, food or objects
- Likes to be barefoot or wear same shoes regardless of weather

Schools are sensory hell...



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- New buildings
- Withdrawal opportunities / movement breaks are non-negotiable
- The environment needs to be proofed through an autism lens
- INDIVIDUAL
- Students need to be educated
- Don't underestimate the influence of the environment
- Less is more!!!
- Coping mechanisms should always be encouraged - avoid the urge to normalise



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Stimming

Stigma and Autism...



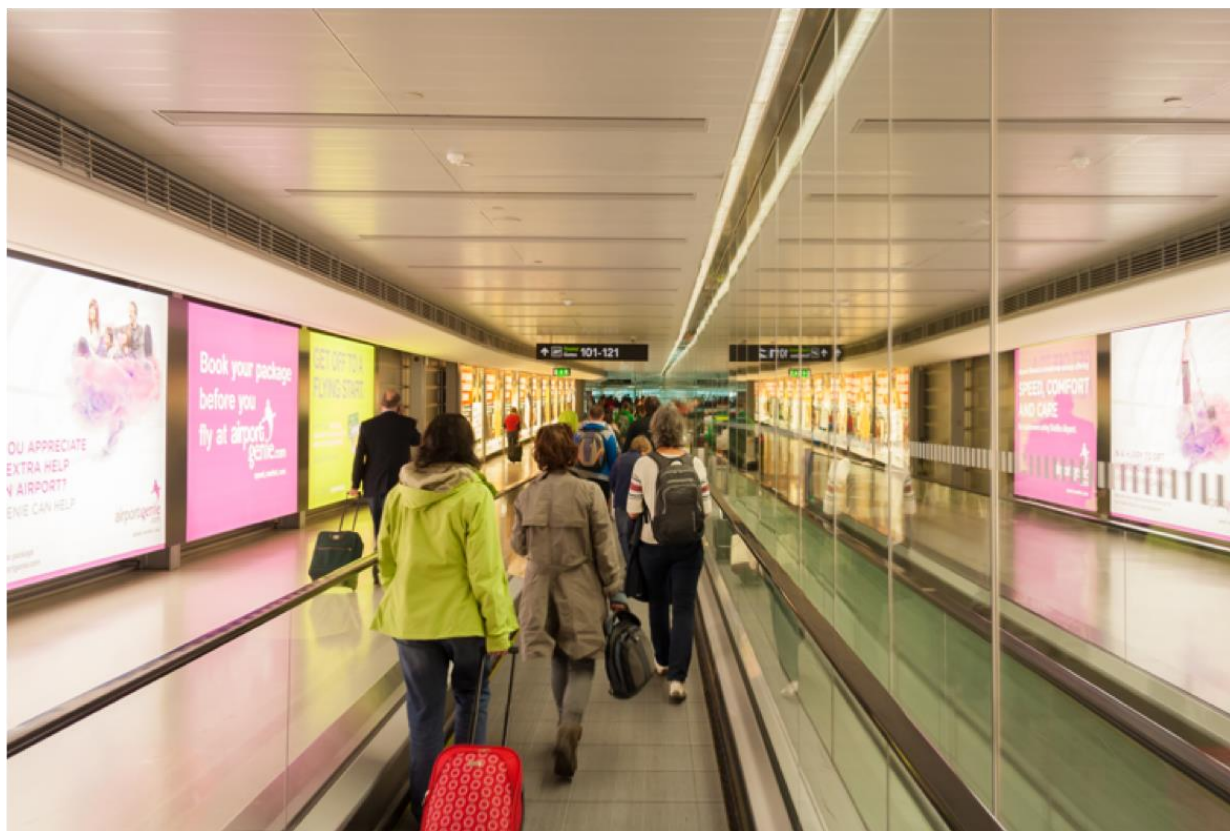
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- The lack of discussion
- The language we use
- The geography of our buildings
- Not being too nice / not being dismissive
- Acceptance and active involvement of the student in support planning is vital

Especially important in the teenage years...



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Strengths of Autistic People



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- Take a strength based approach
- Ability to focus on detail (Weak Central Coherence)
- Appreciate black and white thinking for what it is
- Loyalty
- Different way of thinking

Autism is an accessibility issue



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- Communication
- Predictability & Control
- Sensory Processing
- Judgement & Attitude

Practical steps every school should consider...



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- Promote a positive culture of engagement with parents and outside organisations
- Autism-proof policies (e.g. Code of Behaviour, Admissions)
- Encourage CPD among teachers
- Educate whole school community about autism
- Develop social opportunities around student's interests
- Improve your sensory environment (and plan for this as you would for physical disability access)
- Avoids segregating the responsibility of inclusive education
- Improve language
- Take a strength based approach
- Challenge your perception of success – and don't let the media get to you
- Allow people to fail and promote self-advocacy
- Ensure autism is considered as part of the UDL process



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Questions?