# Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Fact Sheet

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- "Autism is a **lifelong developmental disability** that affects how a person **communicates with, and relates to, other people**. It also affects how they **make sense of the world** around them" (National Autistic Society, 2017).
- Asperger's Syndrome falls under the umbrella of ASD.

How is ASD characterised?

The main characteristics of ASD include (American Psychiatric Association, 2013):
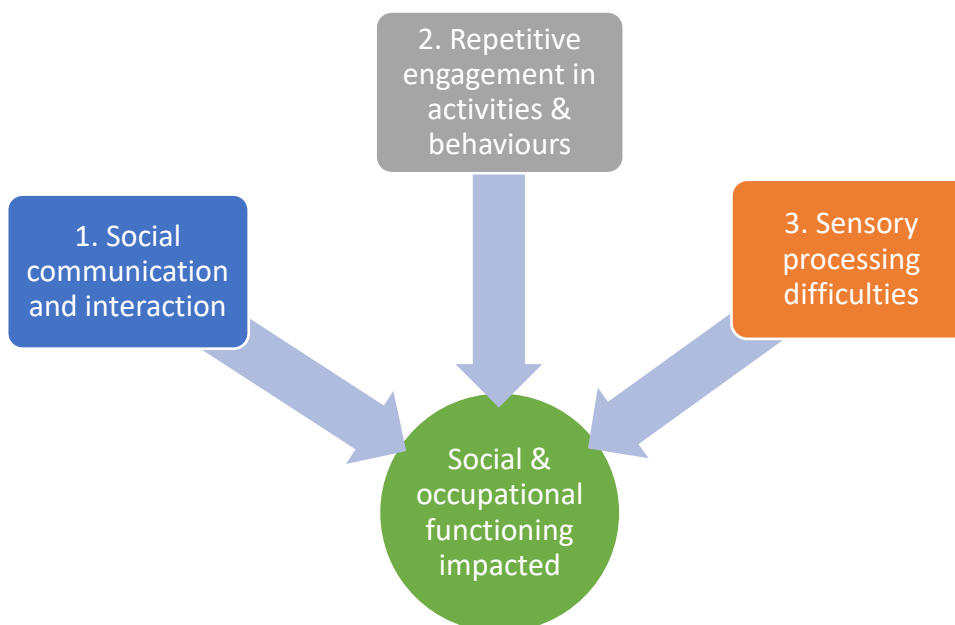
Important to remember that ASD is a Spectrum:

If you've met one person with ASD, **you've only met one person with ASD**

Anyone with ASD is unique with their own abilities, challenges, characteristics and strengths

How can ASD impact a student's college experience?

Characteristics	Possible impact in College
1. Social Communication & Interaction	• Difficulties with **back & forth conversation & initiating interactions.** • Difficulties with **non-verbal communication** such as use of eye contact, body language. • Difficulties understanding abstract concepts and sayings/phrases/rhetorical questions due to **thinking literally**. • Difficulties **developing and maintaining relationships** with peers and staff and **adapting to social situations** (thinking on the spot). • **Giving presentations and working in groups** can be particularly difficult and stressful for students with ASD.
2. Repetitive engagement in activities and behaviours	• **Changes in routine can be stressful**, particularly as student's manage an irregular and ever-changing college timetable. • **Transition into the college environment** can be difficult. • **Difficulties seeing alternative perspectives** and understanding the reasoning for something if it not explicit. • Some students with ASD may **have certain intense interests**, which can make it difficult to complete modules of less interest.

3. Sensory Processing Difficulties (how one experiences the world through the senses)	• Can be **highly sensitive to sensory input** (e.g. specific sounds, bright lights, textures, weird smells etc.).
	• In college, difficulty with:
	   o **Big lecture theatres/labs with many distractions** (people, lights, noises).
	   o **Noisy & crowded environments** (e.g. bus, moving between classes).

Other Characteristics	
Executive functioning (higher-thinking skills)	• Difficulties **managing multiple deadlines** in self-directed manner. • Difficulties with **time management and organisation.**
Central Coherence (seeing the 'big picture')	• Can get **caught up with small details.** • Difficulty **pin-pointing the main message** of a lecture.
Independent living skills	• **Living out of home** for the first time. • **Managing life skills** (e.g. cooking, cleaning, managing finances, transport etc.) on top of college work can be stressful.

To find out more about ASD:

- www.aspireireland.ie
- www.autism.org.uk
- www.aspergersyndrome.org

How can you support students with ASD?

1. **Student-Centred Approach:**
   - Ask yourself, **'how can I support this student and their individual needs?'**
   - Create a space for students to **feel comfortable approaching you** (e.g. provide contact and student office hour details etc.).
   - Implement any [classroom](#) and [exam](#) accommodations which were determined at the **student's Needs Assessment**.

2. **Communication:**
   - Ask **one question at a time** and give them time to answer.
   - Be **literal and explicit in your language** - avoid the use of saying/phrases etc.
   - If a student looks anxious, **use less non-verbal communication**.
   - Be aware that they **may find it difficult making eye contact**.
   - Be aware of the **environment you are in** (is it noisy/crowded?).
   - Be **watchful for possible bullying** from other students.
   - Inform students about **college supports** (e.g. Maths Support Centre, Writing Support Centre, UCD Access and Lifelong Learning Centre, Student Counselling Service).

3. **Teaching and Learning:**
   - Be guided by [Universal Design principles](#) when designing coursework.
   - **Highlight the main point of a lecture**.
   - Provide information **in more than one way** (e.g. visual and verbal explanations etc.).
   - Give **clear and explicit instructions on what is expected of them for assignments** and assessments, possibly providing an example of good work.
   - Give **notice for changes in routines where possible** (e.g. change of lecture time/location, deadlines).
   - Some students may be very uncomfortable with giving presentations. **Offering to listen to the presentation privately or allowing the student to complete an alternative assessment** can be very helpful.
   - **Group work** can also be particularly difficult:
     - **Guide all students about how to effectively communicate** within a group.
     - Give students a **template which allows them to complete all steps** of the group work.
     - Spend some time with the groups to ensure they **start in a structured manner**.

For more information, please contact disability@ucd.ie