

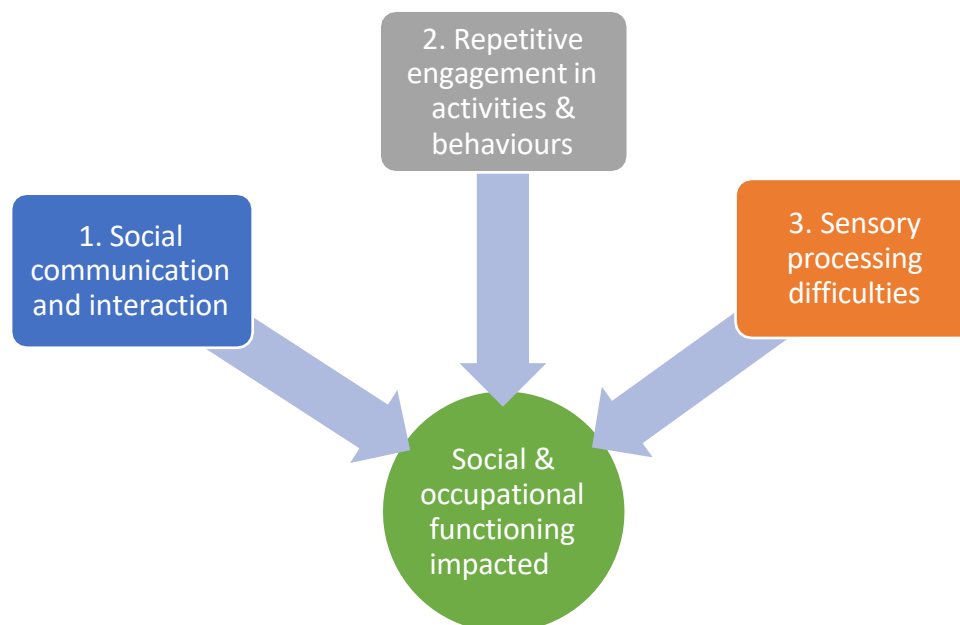
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Fact Sheet

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 have met one person with ASD, **you have 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in routine can be stressful, particularly as students 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 is 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)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be highly sensitive to sensory input (e.g. specific sounds, bright lights, textures, weird smells etc.). In college, difficulty with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big lecture theatres/labs with many distractions (people, lights, noises). Noisy & crowded environments (e.g. bus, moving between classes).
Other Characteristics	
Executive functioning (higher-thinking skills)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties managing multiple deadlines in a self-directed manner. Difficulties with time management and organisation.
Central Coherence (seeing the 'big picture')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can get caught up with small details. Difficulty pinpointing the main message of a lecture.
Independent living skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.

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 of 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