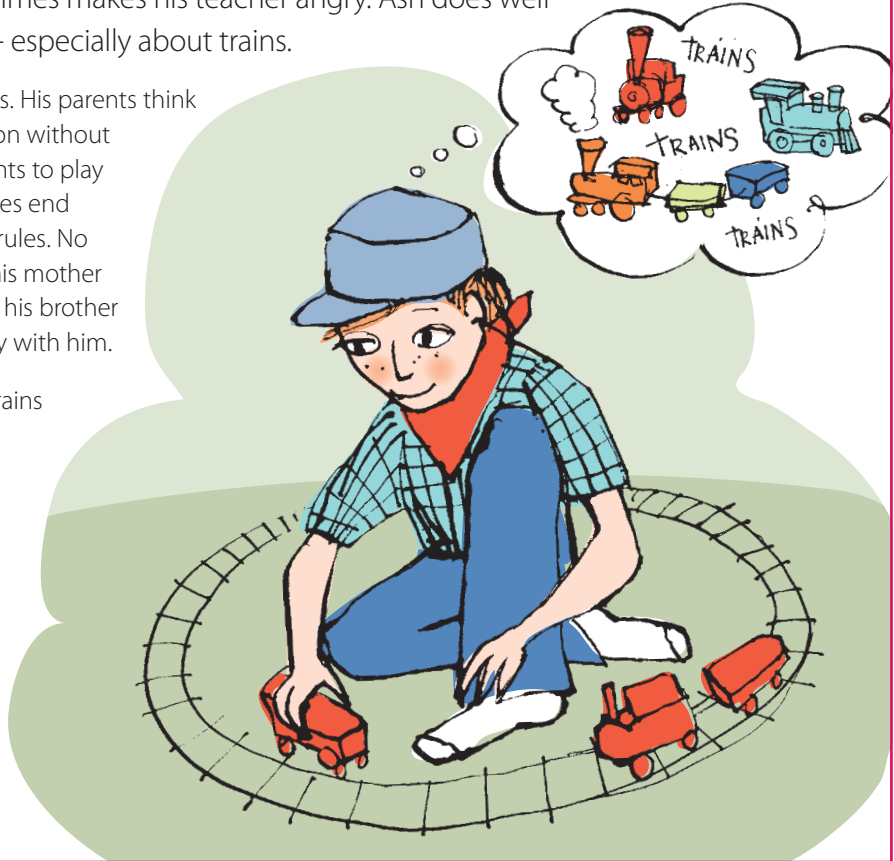


Ash is on his own track

Meet Ash. Ash is ten years old. He can tell you anything you want to know about trains. He can probably tell you things you don't want to know about trains too. Ash never stops talking, mostly about trains. He talks about which trains run better and which ones he wants to buy next time the family goes shopping. He talks on and on and doesn't seem to notice when people have stopped listening. He has been told many times not to talk so much but it doesn't help. He does it at school too, and it sometimes makes his teacher angry. Ash does well at school and loves reading - especially about trains.

Ash doesn't have any close friends. His parents think that it's because he talks on and on without listening to others. He usually wants to play games his way. But often his games end because he is obsessed with the rules. No one is having fun. He often asks his mother why boys come over to play with his brother but no one wants to come to play with him.

Ash seems to think more about trains than about people. Children who have difficulties with social communication like Ash benefit from learning how to tune into others' feelings and needs. Tuning into others helps them find better ways to relate and gives them tools to communicate more effectively in social situations.



How parents and carers can help

- Comment on what other people are feeling. For example, you may say "Your dad is frowning. He looks cross".
- Help your child to recognise social rules for communication. Try to make sure he/she listens to others and lets them take a turn in the conversation.
- Tell your child directly what to do if he/she is not sure how to communicate properly.
- When things go wrong, help your child to talk about what he/she was doing and feeling, what others were doing and feeling and to talk about what he/she could do next time to get a different result.
- Tune into strengths. Try to appreciate your child's unique perception of the world.

Does Ash have an Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Ash shows some of the behaviours that may be found in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. These are lifelong conditions that affect children's development in lots of ways.

Experts think that Autism Spectrum Disorders are due to differences in the way the brain develops and works. They cause problems for children who have them, especially social problems.

Diagnosing Autism Spectrum Disorders is not simple. Ash's behaviours can be seen in all children from time to time.

What you might see in a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder...

A child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may:	What parents and carers might notice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have trouble understanding nonverbal communication cues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • doesn't look at you when talking to you • doesn't notice if you are bored or in a hurry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have poor conversation skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talks on and on • talks over others and doesn't listen
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have strong memory for facts and details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remembers obscure information, and may insist on all fine details being right
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have interests that totally take over 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • obsessed with one thing – e.g. knows everything about a particular make of car and never stops talking about it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take things literally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if they are told to "hold on", may take it literally and take hold of something • doesn't understand jokes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be good with computers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may prefer to work with computers rather than with people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have difficulty making friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prefers to be with adults or younger children

To be diagnosed with one of the Autism Spectrum Disorders a team of mental health professionals will need to make a careful assessment. The team is likely to include a psychologist, a speech therapist, an occupational therapist and a paediatrician.

Are you worried that your child is a bit like Ash?

Here's how to get some help:

- ask to speak to the school psychologist or counsellor
- talk to your doctor and ask to be referred for assessment
- talk to your child's classroom teacher about ways to support him/her at school.

Further information on Autism Spectrum Disorders is available in the KidsMatter resource pack, *Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*.

The following web pages may also be of interest:

www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=122&id=1944

www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=287&id=2339

www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=122&id=1945

www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=282&id=2305

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Primary initiative. The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

