

GLIDING AND AUTISM - GUIDANCE

What you might notice in a person with autism

People with ASD often have problems with social, emotional, and communication skills. They might repeat certain behaviours and might not want change in their daily activities. Many people with ASD also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things. Signs of ASD begin during early childhood and typically last throughout a person's life.

Children with ASD might:

- not point at objects to show interest (for example, not point at an airplane flying over)
- not look at objects when another person points at them
- have trouble relating to others or not have an interest in other people at all
- avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings
- prefer not to be held or cuddled, or might cuddle only when they want to
- appear to be unaware when people talk to them, but respond to other sounds
- be very interested in people, but not know how to talk, play, or relate to them
- repeat or echo words or phrases said to them, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language
- have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions
- not play "pretend" games (for example, not pretend to "feed" a doll)
- repeat actions over and over again
- have trouble adapting when a routine changes
- have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound
- lose skills they once had (for example, stop saying words they were using)
- Take what you say very literally

Some key points to support safe and enjoyable flying

- Manage expectations.
- Talk to the individual and discuss what the key triggers and calming mechanisms are.
- Talk to parents/carers and discuss the key triggers and calming mechanisms for the young pilot (YP)
- The above will help others to avoid the triggers that can lead to difficult behaviour and assist with the calming process.
- Support the YP with a mentor, give the YP some choice in who this individual can be.
- Give the YP very clear instructions, such as when asking them (if already trained) to run with the wing make it clear for how long. Often instructions will be taken literally.
- Check understanding.
- Create a plan for them giving them the opportunity to input. Share this with instructors and other key personnel.
- Be aware the individual may have some sensory issues such as noise, crowds, and touch.
- They may become easily anxious.
- Be aware they might not always take the initiative, again the mentor can support this aspect.
- Probably worth carrying out a risk assessment for the individual and sharing with the club members who would need to know. The parent/care could support this process.

What we don't want is tiggers or anxiety in the cockpit to cause unsafe grabbing of items such as release cables.

- It might be that tandem flying is deemed unsafe for some YP.
- Some training for the key instructors teaching the YP to fly may be worthwhile, it is particularly important to explain why a certain method or instruction is being given.
- **Safe and enjoyable flying is the most important aspect.**

Great care and discretion must be used by clubs when addressing medical health queries including mental health issues and learning to glide. Individuals can be advised to approach their GP or an AME for advice.

NHS

NHS guidance is available here <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/>

CAA

General information for aeromedical examiners on dyslexia, Asperger syndrome and ADHD is available from the CAA website at <https://www.caa.co.uk/aeromedical-examiners/medical-standards/pilots-easa/conditions/mental-health/dyslexia-asperger-syndrome-and-adhd/>

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