

situations, that AS or ASC is recognised. It can go unrecognised in girls, as they often present differently to boys (see page 70 for more on girls with ASC).

## **I know loads of people who fit that description who have no diagnosis. So why is a diagnosis important?**

It's true, there will be thousands of people who have gone their whole lives undiagnosed and have suffered no ill effects from it. However, a diagnosis can help someone to understand why they have difficulties with some things. A lot of people with AS report that they've always felt 'different' from other people, but have not known why. My

favourite ever description of autism is from Siobhan Dowd's *The London Eye Mystery*, where the main character, Ted, describes himself as having a brain that runs on a 'different operating system' to everyone else's. A diagnosis of AS often helps people to understand this feeling of otherness and to be able to put strategies into place to help them adapt to situations they have previously found difficult.

It's very common for those with AS to feel a high degree of anxiety. Having a diagnosis can give access to strategies and treatments that may help them overcome their difficulties and lessen anxiety.

AS sometimes goes unrecognised in children, even right into adulthood, because they are likely to have average or above-average intellect and good language skills.

“My brain runs on a different operating system from other people's. I see things they don't and sometimes they see things I don't.”

London Eye Mystery, Siobhan Dowd

## **Everyone with AS is a genius, right?**

No, although television, the media and fiction often portray AS in this way. Some people with AS might be geniuses, but just because you have AS does not mean you are automatically a genius (see page 67 for more on this topic). However, those with AS can do very well at school, at work and in life. Often, people with AS are able to maintain a single-minded

focus on one thing, and therefore develop great depth of knowledge in that area. For some children, that area of special interest might be numbers, and they'll go on to be an ace mathematician. For others, the area of special interest could be a video game.

## What helps people with AS?

The greatest area of need is usually in social skills. Things that seem to come naturally to most don't for those with AS. Some of these skills can be taught and practised though. Social stories (see page 136) are often an effective way of doing this, identifying a situation that the individual needs help dealing with and then outlining an appropriate way to respond in that situation in future. For instance, for a child who has difficulty in taking turns, a social story could focus on how this affects others, and what to do while waiting for their turn.

Comic strip conversations (see page 30) are also helpful as a way of understanding what went wrong in a social situation. They focus on the events of a situation as well as the thoughts, feelings and speech of those involved. They can also help to teach a more appropriate way to deal with a similar situation in the future.

Therapies like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) (see page 29) can also be helpful for those with AS, as they teach strategies to help manage anxiety more effectively.

### CASE STUDY

#### *James*

My son, James, was angry and unhappy as a baby: super-sensitive to touch, he screamed and screamed and didn't sleep. He could be violent with other children, attacking them if they got in his way. I had to leave countless playgroups, and many outings were cut short due to his behaviour.

When he was young, his problems were sensory; touch, light and sound could overload him and he would explode into violence or tantrums. Not just in supermarkets – it happened in the child seat on the bike (too much whooshing of air or noise or speed, I guess). He hated the feel of fabrics on his skin and it was a real battle to get him dressed. He didn't wear socks or pants until he was 10. The