



UNDERSTANDING AUTISM
Autism affects people in different ways so it is important to know the different ways of managing it
PHOTOS: THE DISABILITIES TRUST, BRAINWAVE, RUSKIN MILL TRUST

Finding the right support is imperative to development

Question: How do you cope if your child is diagnosed with autism?

Answer: Get support from charity organisations and your school, talk with other parents and be positive, says mum of eight-year-old Alex, Susan Fairchild.

“I knew something was wrong from when Alex was 18 months old. I am a scientist and could see that she had the typical signs of autism. She would scream, avoid eye contact and just wouldn’t follow the usual development path. But the doctors were dismissive and Alex didn’t get diagnosed until she was three years old.”

Get support

“It was hard at first. We had no support and I couldn’t see any future.

Because autism affects



Susan Fairchild and eight-year-old Alex who has autism

the ability to filter environmental information, Alex would find colours and sounds distressing. Isolation was a problem, as other children wouldn’t play with her. Then we heard about the charity Brainwave, and things changed.”

Brainwave helps children with autism and their families since 1982. Its chief executive, Phil Edge, says: “We help with difficulties involved with attention and concentration, listening and memory skills, body awareness, as well as perceptual skills and sensory awareness techniques among others. Our therapy team has helped hundreds of children achieve major developmental milestones.”

Alex is one of these children. Her mum says: “We went there, and they performed exercises with Alex designed specifically for her problems. One day they rolled her in a blanket — she was five and had never spoken before. Her head stopped rolling around, she looked at me and said: ‘Mummy.’”

Significant changes

“After that, Alex showed promising signs of development. She stopped jumping off the furniture and putting objects in her mouth. She sleeps better and can walk holding my hand. She can communicate her needs and concentrate longer. And since be-

ing with Brainwave Alex has learned to read and talk. “Because of this, Alex has access to education, which means she has potential and can achieve independence — she has a future.”

School helps

A supportive school is crucial. Alex attends one for children with autism, where she found friends and is involved in educational and physical activities that help her improve.

“We receive regular feedback from the teachers, which is very important,” says her mum. “And I made a few friends myself. It’s really nice to have this kind of support. You can talk about the problems you have, but also share ideas and tips about best ways to cope with autism.”

Be positive

“I would recommend other parents to make sure they get a diagnosis as early as possible, because this is the single, most important step to find the right support.

“Autism is such a sensory condition that if you can get your child calmer and focused, then their learning begins. It may seem hard at times, but being positive is important, for there is help out there, and each day you will see improvements.”

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