

Empowering Teenagers with ASD to understand the 4 Challenges

Sensory Processing Challenges	Information Processing Challenges
Light, noise, touch, taste, smell. Sensory overload is the primary reason for rising anxiety and a panic 'fight or flight' response. You cannot filter out or tone down these stimuli.	The world moves too fast and this creates too much information for you to process. Neuro Typical people can filter out and process much of this information subconsciously but you find this difficult. You have to process information received simultaneously and consciously, which quickly drains your mental energy.
What you can do about it Understand your sensitivities and how to avoid sensory overload or modify it. Appraise the school environment and know how much you can handle before needing a break. Use moulded ear plugs if noise sensitive. Create a colour-coded timetable to show where sensitivities may erupt and interfere with learning.	What you can do about it Be conscious of how much mental energy you have. Learn what to avoid and when to ask for help. Eat a good diet, sleep well and exercise daily. Develop interests and hobbies to help you to relax. Don't wait until you feel yourself melting down – slow it down, tone it down and give yourself breaks. Realise that you will get things done but it just might take you a bit longer, Use visual strategies to make sense of information and help organise and learn it. Extra time in exams if exam concessions apply.
As an adult you will.... Know what to disclose and ask for, make modifications to your work environment. Your home will need to be a safe haven, a sensory-friendly escape to re-charge.	As an adult you will Appraise things in your life to assess how draining they will be. You may need to take a break to re-charge – a brisk walk or going to get a drink of water. Be honest with people about how much you can effectively handle. You may not be able to multi-task but will need to be given the information sequentially and visually. Tell your colleagues to use clear language when explaining tasks to you, or get written instructions.
Executive Functioning Challenges	Social and Communication Challenges
You will have a hard time organising yourself to get things done: you may forget to do things or where you put things, have difficulty judging how much time you will take to do things, have problems doing several jobs at once and struggle with transitioning from one job to another. You will struggle to make deadlines, to plan things and then organise what is needed. This is all due to weak neurological connections in the frontal lobes of the brain.	You have a hard time reading social cues and reading the thoughts, feelings and emotions, perspectives and intentions of others. This can make you quite vulnerable as you may not see the real motives behind people's actions. You are pragmatic, intellectual and factual. You may be good at interacting with one person at a time but may struggle in a group. You may find it difficult to keep up with non-verbal information, reading between the lines and understanding the many different invisible social cues and rules.
What you can do about it Use lists, calendars, written instructions. Keep routines for everyday activities – 'To Do' lists. Use smartphones, ipads and wristwatch alarms to help keep track of time. Colour-code files and information so that you can categorise and retrieve information when you need it. Preview and prepare for non-routine events – develop a script, social story or map to show how to do it. Have an exit plan if it does become overwhelming for you.	What you can do about it You love and care for others in your own way and can be a committed friend and partner. You will be there and do things for others in a practical way but may struggle at supporting people emotionally. Once you trust someone you can be upfront about your strengths and weaknesses. They will have to spell out their thoughts and feelings to you and you will both clarify and verify information with each other to stop any misunderstandings or upset.
As an adult you will Have a few supportive people around you to help out. Tell people at work about your challenges and get help with timing and making plans.	As an adult you will Have to be upfront with your boss and co-workers. They need to know that although you may seem rude or overbearing, you don't mean to be. You may not realise that it is hurting their feelings. You may need key figures in your life to tell you when you are stepping out of line and what you need to do about it. These people need to be able to tell you to stop quickly, saying not only what you are doing wrong, but what you need to do to put it right. They can help you to interpret the many different invisible social rules.