

Understanding Autism - The impact on the family

- Children with autism are frequently labelled as 'naughty', especially as there difficulties are invisible. Carers may become isolated, feeling that no one understands, and may feel frustrated or confused by their child's behaviour and their ability to meet their child's needs.
- Carers may be unable to get babysitters or have friends in the house due to the child's anxiety
- Carers frequently experience feelings of guilt and depression, and recent studies have found significantly raised stress levels associated with low levels of family support and bringing up a child with challenging behaviour
- Relationship difficulties between parents are common
- Caring for a person with autism commonly impacts on the carer in their ability to work. A significant proportion of families rely on benefits, having given up their employment due to the demands of caring for their child. However, benefits do not meet the additional costs of caring for a child with autism
- Caregiving responsibilities are often life-long, as adults with autism may require varying degrees of ongoing support
- Siblings may feel they have less time spent on them
- They may need to be understanding 'beyond their years'
- They may be embarrassed by their sibling's behaviour and resent the resultant impositions
- Siblings may feel a loss of the usual sibling interactions
- They may live in an atmosphere of increased tension caused by difficult behaviour or relationship problems
- Studies have found that siblings of children with autism have high levels of loneliness and problems with peers
- It may be difficult to undertake family outings or holidays

'In contrast to other types of disabilities, parents of children with autism appear to be at greater risk for depression, anxiety, social isolation, fatigue and frustration in obtaining accurate diagnoses and services.' (NAS)

One study found that 81.9% of parents reported that they were sometimes stretched beyond their limits, and nearly half of these felt that way monthly or even weekly (Sharpley, Bitsika and Enfremidis, 1997).

