



Meet the Children

Autism is a perplexing learning difficulty and there are several conditions that fall within the 'autistic spectrum' of disorders. In this chapter, you will meet the children concerned and come to understand what features they share in common with each other.

▲●■ Ben

Ben is nearly three and described by his parents as 'living in a world of his own'. He doesn't take any notice of other people and can scream and flap his hands if other children come too close to him. If he wants anything, he will take his mother's hand and push it towards the fridge or the biscuit tin as if she were a tool. He comes in for cuddles but tends to climb over people as if they were pieces of furniture. He doesn't like to look people in the eye and it is hard to know if he listens to people talking though parents know that his hearing is fine. Ben does not talk. He seems very content to play with two favourite cars which he carries around most of the time and carefully arranges in a certain order on the edge of shelves and tables. His favourite activity is a rough and tumble game with his big brother when he will laugh and giggle with glee.

▲●■ Mia

Mia is four and her parents say that she likes everything 'just so'. She enjoys coming to nursery and will join in enthusiastically with other children's games though usually fails to negotiate at all so that other children tend to wander away. She looks surprised if other children are upset by her and will offer cuddles and hugs, though rather over-enthusiastically for some! Mia's behaviour is unsettled when she first comes to the group but when she gets into the familiar routine she is fine. She can become highly anxious, shaking her head in her hands and making a humming sound if there is anything new or unusual going on. Her language is coming on well, though she does not always understand what is said to her.

▲●■ Adam

Adam is four and has excellent language skills. He loves to talk, though staff members feel that he tends to talk 'at' people rather than 'to' them and it is usually about his favourite topic of the moment – which is the drains! He has noticed in great detail where the drains are and has asked questions so that he can explain just how the system works. It does not seem to matter that other people do not listen; he will still happily continue his lecture! His small-world play and artwork tends to be stereotyped as he reproduces drain systems in the sand or in his drawings. Adam is a clever little boy who seems to be picking up early number work very quickly. He is most settled in a small group and can become quickly 'overloaded' if there is too much stimulation – rocking and repeating the same phrase over and over. Staff members understand what triggers this behaviour and help him to stay calm and settled.