

# The Autism Sundae Dessert

## - Just for Kids!

Autism is a bit like an ice-cream sundae. There are lots of different things that go into it. Here's what goes into it:

### Chocolate Ice-cream

#### - Language

Everyone who has autism has some trouble with language. We represent this with a scoop of chocolate ice cream. Language isn't just how we speak, it's about hearing and understanding, too. We call this 'language processing'.

A bit like a computer, our brains understand words and their meanings extremely quickly. The autistic brain has a slower processor when it comes to language. This doesn't mean that it's slow at everything, though!

Some people with autism can speak really well, but



still find it difficult to take in lots of spoken information. Some people with autism can't speak at all, but do understand words.

If speaking and understanding is a huge deal in your autism, you get a large scoop of chocolate ice-cream. If it's less of a problem, you get a smaller scoop.

### Strawberry Ice-cream

#### - Rigidity of Thought

A great guy called Tony Attwood explained this really well. He said imagine you are in a huge four-wheel drive car and you hit a problem in the road. That's easy, you'll just steer round it – one way or another you'll still get there! With autistic people, it's as if their thoughts work on train tracks. What happens when a train approaches something on the tracks? It has to brake really suddenly and then it can't move around it.



This is what happens when you have autism. 'Rigid thinking' means that when you expect something to happen in a certain way and it doesn't, it's really stressful. Autistic people like things to stay the same, because their brains struggle to cope with change.

In our fifth birthday issue, we produced the Autism Sundae Dessert, a way of describing autism that all grown-ups could understand. But kids told us that they wanted their version, too! So for kids with autism, their brothers, sisters and friends – this is just for you...

### Vanilla Ice-cream

#### - Social Communication

Lots of people with autism can speak, but have difficulty understanding meanings. That's because we don't always mean what we say! Sometimes when we joke, we say the opposite of what we really mean. Maybe you can think of an example?

Sometimes, it isn't just words that tell us how people are feeling, but also their faces and their bodies. Most people are very good at 'reading' not only words, but how others are feeling when they say them. People with autism have trouble with that kind of stuff. It's called 'social communication'.

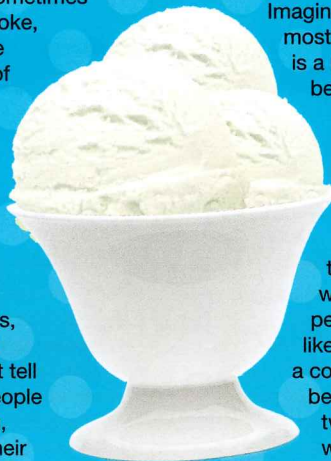
They might have trouble understanding how they feel and thinking about how others are feeling.

Why does this happen? Imagine that inside most people's brains is a motorway between their eyes and the part of their brain that understands feelings.

The two work together really well. For autistic people, it's more like they have a country road between those two places, with a tractor rumbling along it.

It takes a lot of hard work to decide how someone is feeling and why.

They do have exactly the same feelings as everyone else, but they just can't understand them as well.



### Scoops Change Sizes!

In some people with autism, rigid thinking (strawberry) is their biggest difficulty. In others, social communication (vanilla) is more difficult. So, you'll get different size scoops from person to person. Scoops can

also change size if someone is stressed out. If they are worried, some of those things might instantly get bigger, causing their autism to be very obvious indeed. It's as if someone has given you a double helping all of a sudden!



### Chocolate Sauce

Have you ever felt so cold or hungry that you can think of nothing else? When your body is in 'survival' mode, even having a chat with someone can feel like a big effort. For autistic people, differences in the way that their senses work can make them easily uncomfortable. Conversations that seem so quiet to you that they can be ignored may seem loud to some people. Lights that don't bother you could be painful to

them. Material that feels okay against your skin could feel scratchy to them. This is called 'sensory sensitivities' and a lot of autistic people have them.

We use chocolate sauce to cover the ice-cream, and it represents 'sensory issues'. When your body is in survival mode, it is difficult to see how well you can talk and understand. We need to understand that things in the room or outdoors may affect how a person acts.



### Sprinkles

#### - The best bits!

People with autism have different kinds of brains. In some ways this makes things difficult for them. But there are some things that they find a lot easier. Because they tend to learn by looking rather than listening, autistic people have great attention to detail and can often spot things that the rest of us wouldn't notice. They can also have extremely good memories. The straight pathways of their brains means that once they start something, they tend to finish it without getting distracted. When they love something, they become an expert on it, because they don't get bored. They are loyal friends. They say what they mean and they mean what they say. A lot of them (but not all) are great at maths and computing.

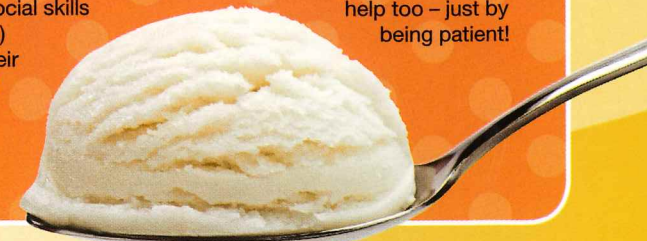


### A Spoon

#### - Help

If you had an ice cream sundae in front of you and no way of eating it, that would be sad. A spoon helps you to make those scoops smaller as you eat it! The same is true for autism. There are ways that we can help people to work on their language (chocolate), their social skills (vanilla) and their rigidity

(strawberry). There are even things that we can do to help them with their sensory sensitivities (chocolate sauce). People called Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists are sometimes asked to come in and help with these things. But friends can help too – just by being patient!



### The Flake

Lots of people think that autistic people get angry easily. We represent their anger with a Flake, because it's not actually part of autism at all. Anger is caused by being stressed, confused or uncomfortable. It's just that autistic people have to put up with those feelings a lot more than the rest of us, because of the other things that go into the sundae. With a bit of understanding from other people, we can take that Flake away.



### Cherry

#### - A genius

Some autistic people have really special skills and they are called 'savants' but you and I would call them geniuses. Because their brains aren't using up a lot of energy in getting on with other people or 'social communication,' all that energy goes into their interest instead. Autism has given us famous scientists such as Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein and Charles Darwin. Have you heard of them?



### The Sundae Glass

#### - Personality

Because we all have different personalities, autism doesn't seem the same in everybody. The sundae glass makes each ice-cream look different, just like people's personalities. The best we can do is get to know each person with autism, and find out how it affects them.

