

Empowering parents to be their best.

Many parents ask Home-Start what the most common reasons for families wanting our help are.

Often these are issues such as post- natal depression, isolation and poor mental health.

However, lots of our families come to us because they are struggling with either their child's autism (or Aspergers Syndrome), or their own.

More than 600,000 people in the UK have autism, a developmental disorder which can cause problems with social interaction, language skills and behaviour.

Parents say it can cause isolation and problems at school, and make them feel separate from mainstream society.

This is where Home-Start steps in. Right from the start, parents are told Home-Start's ethos is not to judge, which is crucial for parents with additional needs.

What our volunteers do well is build a trusting relationship with the families. This is a gradual process and is taken at a family's own pace, so that they feel in control and not coerced into making quick changes. This is of paramount importance for a child or parent with autism, who may struggle with change.

We enable and empower parents to give their children the best possible start in life.

One mum whose son has autism said: "Before Home-Start I can honestly say I felt like a social outcast. I'd take him to playgroup and see other mums pulling their children in the other direction. It's heartbreaking to see this. I just wanted other mums to accept my son's differences. I had geared myself up for this becoming part of his childhood until I hear about Home-Start through a friend. It changed my life and it changed my son's life. It's a gradual, step-by-step process, but we're starting to get out and about, to the park and now swimming. Even walking to the shops with a son who has autism can be challenging, but having my Home-Start volunteer with me gives me so much more confidence."

Autism is a life-long condition, with no cure, but with non-judgmental, emotional and practical support from a charity like Home-Start, families with these additional needs can lead happy and fulfilling lives.

To find out more about Home-Start support or volunteering for the organisation, visit www.home-start.org.uk or call 0800 068 63 68.