

Autism Spectrum Disorder

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. ASD is a developmental disability and people with ASD may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to severely impaired. Some people with ASD need high support (a lot of help and intensive intervention) while others need low support (less help and less intensive intervention).

Developmental indicators

- Little awareness of others
- Self-injurious behaviour, e.g. head banging, scratching or biting
- Imaginative play may be poor. E.g. cannot play with a wooden block as if it is a car
- Unusual habits such as rocking, hand flapping, spinning of objects etc.
- The development of speech and language may be atypical, absent or delayed
- Indifference to, or dislike of being touched, held or cuddled
- Minimal reaction to verbal input and sometimes acts as though he/she is deaf
- Sense of touch, taste, sight, hearing and/or smell may be heightened or lowered
- Changes in routine or the environment may cause distress
- Sudden laughing or crying for no apparent reason
- Pursues activities repetitively and cannot be influenced by suggestions of change
- Uneven gross/fine motor skills
- Inappropriate attachment to objects
- Abnormal sleeping patterns
- Displays extreme distress and/or tantrums for no apparent reason
- Prefers to play alone
- Difficulty in interacting with others and little or no eye contact
- No real fear of dangers.

Signs & causes of ASD

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are characterized, in varying degrees, by

- difficulties in social interaction;
- verbal and nonverbal communication;
- repetitive behaviours; and
- differences in sensory perception.

ASD is thought to have a genetic component which results in atypical neurological development and functioning. A lot of research is being done to try and find the cause of autism, but as yet there are no definite answers. There is agreement however that autism is no-one's fault. It is not a parent's fault that their child has been born with autism. It is NOT a psychological or emotional disorder. It is NOT the result of bad parenting and children with ASD do NOT choose to misbehave. Misbehaviour are often reactions to the environment and are expressions of the difficulties people with ASD experience.

6 Facts about autism

1 Developmental disabilities such as ASD are brain-based, neurological conditions that have more to do with biology than with psychology

2 Not one person with ASD is affected in the same way

3 Usually diagnosed by the time a child is 3 years old

4 Found in every country, every ethnic group, and every socio-economic class

5 Diagnosed four times as often in boys than in girls

6 Children who are diagnosed with ASD need early intervention as soon as possible

