

What does Autism look like?

Autism is a term commonly used for a group of neuro-developmental disorders also known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD) or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The core symptoms of autism are challenges related to:

- Communication
- Social Interaction
- Restrictive or Repetitive Behaviors and Interests

Individuals with autism can also experience other difficulties, including medical issues, differences in coordination or muscle tone, sleep disturbances, altered eating habits, anxiety or disordered sensory perceptions.

- ***Autism is a neurological/biological disorder, not a psychological or emotional condition.***
- ***There is no known cause of most cases of autism. The best scientific evidence points to a combination of genetic & environmental influence.***
- ***Autism occurs in 1 out of 88 children.***
- ***The features, abilities & severity of symptoms vary considerably among individuals with autism.***

Things that make the child with autism seem different may also seem like exceptional abilities. Autism occurs with or without other learning challenges. It is important to think of him as intelligent, even if language or behavioral difficulties do not reveal abilities in the way you expect. He may display some or all of the following characteristics, which may be challenges from one perspective, or strengths from another (for example, a child who seems inflexible or rigid may also be the most compliant with rules of a classroom):

- Difficulty understanding language, gestures and/or social cues
- Limited or no speech, or verbalizations that repeat or maintain a particular topic
- Limited or no eye contact
- Difficulty relating or participating in back-and-forth conversations or interactions
- Social awkwardness
- Intense or odd interests in unusual topics or objects, unusual play
- Repetitive behaviors, such as pacing or lining things up, spinning, hand flapping, or rocking
- More or less sensitivity to light, sound, smell taste or touch than usual
- Abnormal fears and/or lack of appropriate fear of real dangers
- Difficulty managing transitions, changes in routine, stress, frustration
- Strong visual skills & good rote and long term memory (math facts, sports stats, etc.) skills
- Adherence to rules, Honesty
- Intense concentration or focus, especially on a preferred activity
- Ability to understand and retain concrete concepts, patterns, rules
- A strong interest or ability in mathematics, technology, music or art

How can I make a difference?

- Be welcoming & supportive. Meet the child where he is & learn from him. Respect the individual. Please do not talk about him in his presence.
- Recognize that behavior IS communication.
- Use the child's interests to engage & motivate him.
- Educate others. Promote acceptance & understanding.
- Ask questions.

What do I need to keep in mind?

- Individuals with autism can learn and make many dramatic improvements, especially with early & intensive intervention
- Communication challenges can encompass a broad range, both in terms of understanding of gestures or spoken language, delays in processing, inability to form sounds or full sentences, word retrieval difficulties, misunderstanding idioms or sarcasm, timing of body, movements or conversational exchanges, remaining on topic, etc.)
- Many people with autism are visual learners, or have attention difficulties what make visual supports essential
- Most people with autism are concrete thinkers & literally interpret jokes, idioms or sarcasm
- Social skills are underdeveloped, but interest in friendships and social situations is often present
- Anxiety & frustration are common
- Each child is an individual – with a distinct set of likes & dislikes, strengths & challenges, & a unique personality.

You Can Make a Difference In The Life Of Someone Struggling With Autism!

Just by becoming more aware and sharing that information with people you know.

- Studies from multiple communities across the country suggest that about 1 in 88 American children, and 1 in 54 boys, has an autism spectrum disorder
- Autism occurs in all racial, ethnic and social groups
- Autism spectrum disorders can be reliably diagnosed by age 2, but many children can be diagnosed at even younger ages
- Early intervention can make a huge difference in a child's life

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