



What is autism?

Autism is also known as 'Autistic Spectrum Disorder' (ASD). This reflects the fact that, while children with Autism share certain characteristics, they will be affected in different ways and to different degrees. We have used the term 'Autism' on this website and this term is intended to represent the whole spectrum of needs associated with the condition.

There are three main areas of difficulty which affect all children with Autism. In order to receive a diagnosis, children will show characteristics from all three areas:

- Difficulties in flexible thinking affecting interests, routines, perspectives and rules
- Difficulties in communicating effectively with other people
- Difficulties in understanding how to behave and interact with other people

The following are a list of characteristics which may be associated with autism:

(Please note that:

1. Not all children with Autism show all of these
2. Just because your child shows one or some of these does NOT necessarily mean they have Autism – see 'Does my child have Autism?')

Children who are not yet speaking may show:

- Very little or no eye contact.
- Resistance to being held or touched.



- Preference to be alone
- Minimal acknowledgement of others.
- Lack of awareness or interest in what is going on around them.
- Repetitive play e.g. arranging objects in lines
- Lack of pretend or imaginative play
- Preference to have things done in a certain way or a certain order and may show extreme negative reactions if this is not done
- Physical behaviours such as spinning, flapping hands or rocking
- Looking very closely at objects and being very interested in specific details

Children who are speaking may show:

- Tendency to get too close when speaking to someone (lack of personal space / can be overly-friendly).
- Responses to social interactions, but do not initiate them (may not share observations or experiences with others).
- Difficulty understanding jokes, figures of speech or sarcasm.
- Difficulty reading facial expressions and body language.
- Difficulty understanding the rules of conversation.
- Difficulty understanding group interactions.
- Difficulty understanding another's feelings.
- Difficulty maintaining friendships.
- Aversion to answering questions about themselves.



They may also

- Make spontaneous comments which seem to have no connection to the current conversation.
- Make honest, but inappropriate observations (i.e. make a comment about someone's appearance which may be seen as rude or hurtful)
- Find it easier to socialize with people that are older or younger, rather than peers of their own age.
- Talk excessively / show obsessions with particular topics (dinosaurs, trains, etc.).
- Be overly trusting or unable to read the motives behinds peoples' actions.

There is a lot of incorrect information in the public domain about Autism. If you are trying to find out more about Autism, try to only use information provided by reputable charities and organisations or ask specialists or professionals in the area e.g. doctors, specialist teachers or Speech and Language Therapists.

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