



Autism Association of the ACT Inc

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Autism: What To Look For

What is autism?

Autism is believed to result from problems in the way a person's central nervous system functions, in particular how it processes and organises information. The causes of autism are not known for certain and there are many theories. There does not appear to be a single cause. What is true, however, is that the style of parenting used for raising and managing children does not cause autism.

Autism is life-long. There is no cure, although with early diagnosis, appropriate therapy and educational programs, it is possible in many cases to make significant progress. With appropriate therapy and educational intervention the impairments that an autistic child has may diminish, however, they will always exist to some extent. Consequently, a person with autism will always need some form of assistance, depending upon their level of disability. When diagnosed, usually as children, autistic people have significant impairment in three specific areas of their development: communication, social skills, and flexible, adaptive behaviour.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is often difficult and needs to be made by a pediatrician or a psychologist who specialises in children's problems. In the past, diagnosis and treatment have sometimes been delayed because parents have been told that they were 'imagining things'. It is very important that professionals take parents' concerns seriously, especially as parents feel instinctively that there is something wrong with the child. While accepting that some professionals are reluctant to label children as having autism, from a parent's point of view, the term brings meaning to a bewildering condition.

Autism Checklist

Individuals with autism usually exhibit at least half of the traits listed below. These symptoms can range from mild to severe and vary in intensity from symptom to symptom. In addition, the behavior usually occurs across many different situations and is consistently inappropriate for their age. Please note this symptom list is not a substitute for a full-scale diagnostic assessment. Consult your health care provider to obtain a complete diagnostic evaluation.

- Difficulty in mixing with other children
- Inappropriate laughing and giggling
- Insistence on sameness; resists changes in routine
- No real fear of danger
- Little or no eye contact
- Sustained odd play
- Apparent insensitivity to pain
- Echolalia (repeating words or phrases in place of normal language)
- Prefers to be alone; aloof manner

Autism: What To Look For

- May not want cuddling or cuddle-up
- Spins objects; twirls string
- Not responsive to verbal cues; acts as if deaf
- Inappropriate and obsessive attachment to objects
- Difficulty in expressing needs and feelings
- uses gestures and pointing instead of using words
- Noticeable physical over-activity extreme under-activity
- Unresponsive to normal teaching methods
- Tantrums -displays extreme distress for no apparent reason
- Uneven gross fine motor skills. (May not wait to kick ball but can stack blocks.)

Autistic behaviours

- Withdrawal from other people
- No eye contact - looking at people as if they were not there
- Acting as if deaf
- Resistance or indifference to physical contact, such as cuddling.
- Little or no language skills
- Body language may be limited
- Speech may be delayed. (Some autistic children never learn to speak.)
- Words may be used inappropriately, or the child may use such gestures as pointing, instead of speech
- The child may repeat word for word what is said to them. (This is called echolalia)

Strange physical behaviour

- Laughing or giggling for no apparent reason
- Flicking fingers, flapping hands, standing on tips of toes or rocking the whole body, twirling string
- Appearing not to feel pain. (Not crying after a heavy fall)
- Being very active. The child will rarely stand still
- Poor sleep patterns

Resistance to change

Children with autism often become upset when their routines are altered even if the change is very small. They are also unwilling to learn anything new. While children with autism have no fear of such real dangers as road traffic, they may have an unreasonable fear of such harmless things as a whistle or a toy train or a soft toy.

Strange play habits

- Spinning or flicking objects endlessly
- Tearing paper into tiny bits
- Twirling thread
- Collecting such things as combs or rubbish
- Arranging items into patterns or lines

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Diagnosis

Autism is diagnosed by observing behaviour. These are some of the crucial features:

- Emergence of the problem before the age of 30 months.
- Failure to form normal social relationships.
- Difficulty or delay in developing language.
- Strange obsessive and ritualistic behaviour.
- As they grow older, children with autism may sometimes develop epilepsy.

Getting help

In the ACT, the Child Health and Disabilities Service (CHADS), and agency of the ACT Department of Education, arranges assessment and also provides a range of services for children who are suspected of having some sort of pervasive developmental disorder, of which autism and Asperger's Syndrome are examples. The CHADS telephone number is 6205 1277 or 62059198. If you would like more information, feel free also to contact the Association.

The Autism Association of the ACT, Inc

The Autism Association is a voluntary organisation. It works to improve the life and opportunities for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, their families and their carers. The Association is a non-profit charitable organisation. All Donations to the Association are tax deductible. The Association provides:

- Support to people who have ASD, their families, carers, teachers and therapists;
- Information on autism, on living with ASD, and information on the services available in the ACT;
- Advocacy to improve services and opportunities;
- Close work with service providers to improve service delivery;
- Seminars and workshops and information forums;
- A newsletter, "Autism Awareness"
- Monthly meetings and speakers;

Membership of the Association is open to any person with ASD, their family, carers, teachers or other interested person. If you would like to join the Association or attend our meetings or assist in any other way, please contact us at the SHOUT offices.

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