

## What is Autism?

Autism is a complex and varying array of behavioral excesses and deficits.

Autism is a spectrum of behaviors.

Autism is a neurological disorder that produces significant impairments in:

### **1. Difficulty with social interaction**

- Nonverbal: eye gaze, facial expression, body postures
- Peer relationships
- "Joint attention"
- Social/emotional reciprocity

### **2. Difficulty with communication**

- Delayed or lack of spoken language
- Trouble sustaining conversation
- Stereotyped, repetitive, or idiosyncratic language
- Lack of varied spontaneous make-believe play

### **3. Restricted, repetitive or stereotyped behaviors, activities, and interests**

- Intense focus on restricted interests
- Nonfunctional routines or rituals: inflexibility
- Repetitive motor mannerisms (i.e. hand/finger flapping)
- Preoccupation with parts of objects

Prior to the age of 3 years, delays or abnormal functioning in at least one of these areas:

- Social interaction
- Language as used for social communication
- Symbolic or imaginative play

## What is Asperger's Syndrome?

Asperger's Syndrome is at the **mildest and highest functioning** end of the Autism Spectrum.

It is characterized by difficulties with:

- Social relatedness and social skills
- Pragmatic or social language (with normal overall language development)

- Repetitive and perseverative behaviors
  - (i.e. "The rule is *I always do math homework before dinner.*")
- Limited, but intense range of interests

People with Asperger's Syndrome have at least average (and sometimes very high) IQ levels.

### What might be difficult for people with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome?

- Listening skills  
(People with autism tend to be stronger visually.)
- Spontaneous conversation
  - Making small talk
  - Using appropriate nonverbal signals (facial expressions, eye contact, and proximity)
- Abstract or conceptual thinking
  - Describing events that are not immediately present
  - Discriminating between real and fake
  - Understanding cause and effect (in their environment and in behavior)
- Engaging in meaningful and symbolic play
- Manipulating others  
(People with autism tend to be egocentric and are seldom capable of being manipulative. They behave in ways that will get their own needs met. Don't take their behavior personally.)
- Taking another's perspective
- Interpreting facial expressions and other social cues
- Figurative or sarcastic language; knowing when someone's joking
- New events; changes in routine; being flexible

- Understanding and interpreting inconsistency
  - Work best with rules
  - Rules provide order and control in an otherwise disorganized and overwhelming world
- Sensory Processing

(People with autism can be easily overloaded and underestimated.)

### **Strategies for working with people with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome**

Make things **VISUAL, ORGANIZED, and CONSISTENT.**

- Calendars, schedules
- Pictures
- Organization of toys on the table
- Routine of session

Use a **PICTURE SCHEDULE** or an activity board to help with transitions and predictability.

Create a **SOCIAL STORY** to review or plan for difficult events:

- Person connection
- Pictures or photos
- Sequences to learn
- Right way/Wrong way

**PREVIEW** and **REHEARSE** difficult events and changes. **REVIEW** routines and topics from previous sessions.

Use **CONCRETE language** (i.e. "after lunch) rather than open-ended (i.e. later). Better yet, show it visually.

Break tasks down in **SMALL STEPS** or present it in different ways (visually, verbally, and physically). **USE SHORT, CLEAR SENTENCES.**

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Allot specific, limited times for intense areas of interest. Use timers, clocks, and other visual cues to help with the transition of these topics.

## **Recognize, use and accept DIFFERENT MODES of communication.**

- Pointing, gesturing, reaching to request and object
- Physical manipulation (placing hand or object)
- Giving/showing objects
- Simple or single-word speech or signs
- Imitation as a form of connection
- Aggression as a form of protest, rejection, or escape
- Crying, tantrums, self-injury to indicate frustration, distress, or anger
- Incessant questioning/arguing is a sign of stress in people with Asperger's

**An increase in unusual or difficult behaviors probably indicates an increase in stress.**

## **Resources**

### References:

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Guld, Amanda, Ph.D., "Effective Teaching Strategies, PBS, and Ethical Behavior Interventions." Presentation.

Levenberg, Rebecca, MS, "Working with Children with Autism." Presentation.

Ortiz, John M., Ph.D., "Neurodevelopmental Disorders: Unraveling the Tapestry." Presentation.

Prizant, Barry, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, "The SCERTS model: Enhancing Communicative and Socioemotional Competence in Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders." Presentation.

Tincani, Matt, Ph.D., "Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder." Presentation.

### Resources and further reading:

*Child Sexual Abuse Curriculum for the Developmentally Disabled*, Charles C. Thomas, Ph.D., Sandra A. Burkhardt, Ph.D., Anthony F. Rotatori, Ph.D., Charles C. Thomas, Ltd., 1997.

*Just Say Know*, David Hinsburger, Diverse City Press, 2004.

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*Rachel in the World: A Memoir*, Jane Bernstein, University of Illinois Press, 2007.

*Sexuality: Your Sons and Daughters With Intellectual Disabilities*, David Hinsburger, Karen Melberg Schwier, Brookes Publishing Company, 2000.

*Teaching developmentally disabled children: The ME book*, O.I. Lovaas (with Ackerman, A., Alexander, D., Firestone, P., Perkins, M., Young, D.B., Carr, E.G., & Newsome, C.), PRO-ED, 1981.

*Ten Things Every Child With Autism Wishes You Knew*, Ellen Notbohm, Future Horizons, 2005.

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (novel), Mark Haddon, Random House, 2003.

*The Out-of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder*, Carol Stock Kranowitz, M.A., Berkley Publishing Group, 2005.

*The Social Skills Picture Book*, Jed Baker, Ph.D., Future Horizons, Inc., 2001.

## Articles:

Autism Spectrum Disorders, B. M. Kuehn, CDC; Autism spectrum disorders common. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 297, 940, 2007.

Content and contingencies: Considerations regarding curriculum development for young children with autism. S. K. Lund, *The Behavior Analyst Today*, 2, 187-191, 2002.

Educating children with autism, National Research Council, Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001.

Sexual Abuse Prevention Strategies and Programs for Persons with Developmental Disabilities, Lynne Muccigrosso, *Sexuality and Disabilities*, Vol. 9, No 3, 1991.

Tips for Teaching High Functioning People with Autism, Susan Moreno, Susan and Carol O'Neal, O.A.S.I.S. (Online Asperger's Syndrome Information and Support).

"Working with Families with Children/Parents with Developmental Disabilities." Virginia Cruz, D.S.W., The Social Work Program, Metropolitan State College of Denver, P.O. Box 173362, Campus Box 70, Denver, Colorado, 80217.

Facts of Traumatic Stress and Children with Developmental Disabilities, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Margaret Charlton, Ph.D., Matthew Kliethermes, Ph.D., Brian Tallant, MS, Anne Taverne, Ph.D., Amy Tishelman, Ph.D., 2004.

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## Online Resources:

[www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

[www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/autism.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/autism.htm)

[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/dd1.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/dd1.htm)

[www.NCTSnet.org](http://www.NCTSnet.org)

[www.autismnj.org](http://www.autismnj.org)