



# Information Sheet:

## *What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?*

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Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopment disorder, characterized by social impairments, communication difficulties, and restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior.

Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum disorder" that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees. With the May 2013 publication of the DSM-5 diagnostic manual, all autism disorders were merged into one umbrella diagnosis of ASD. Previously, they were recognized as distinct subtypes, including autistic disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Aspergers syndrome.

There is no known single cause of autism, scientists believe ASD is likely caused by a combination of autism risk genes and environmental factors influencing early brain development.

### Signs and symptoms of autism spectrum disorder:

Basic **social interaction** can be difficult for children with autism spectrum disorders. Symptoms may include:

- ❖ Lack of interest in other people or in sharing interests or achievements (*e.g. showing you a drawing, pointing to a bird*).
- ❖ Unusual body language, gestures, and facial expressions (*e.g. avoiding eye contact or using facial expressions that don't match what he or she is saying*).
- ❖ Unlikely to approach others or to pursue social interaction; comes across as aloof and detached; prefers to be alone. Or socially awkward; misses social cues.
- ❖ Difficulty understanding other people's feelings, reactions, and nonverbal cues.

- ❖ Difficulty or failure to make friends with children the same age.

Problems with **speech, social communication and language comprehension**. Symptoms may include:

- ❖ Delay in learning how to speak or doesn't talk at all.
- ❖ Speaking in an abnormal tone of voice, or with an odd rhythm or pitch.
- ❖ Repeating words or phrases over and over without communicative intent.
- ❖ Trouble starting a conversation or keeping it going.
- ❖ Difficulty communicating needs or desires.
- ❖ Doesn't understand simple statements or questions.
- ❖ Taking what is said too literally, missing humor, irony, and sarcasm.

**Restricted interests, rigid/repetitive behaviors, or obsessive activities and interests**. Symptoms may include:

- ❖ Repetitive body movements (*hand flapping, rocking, spinning*); moving constantly.
- ❖ Obsessive attachment to unusual objects (*rubber bands, keys, light switches*).
- ❖ Preoccupation with a specific topic of interest, often involving numbers or symbols (*maps, license plates, sports statistics*).
- ❖ A strong need for sameness, order, and routines (*e.g. lines up toys, follows a rigid schedule*).
- ❖ Gets upset by change in their routine or environment.
- ❖ Fascinated by spinning objects, moving pieces, or parts of toys (*e.g. spinning the wheels on a race car, instead of playing with the whole car*).

For more information contact us at [info@respondingtoautism.net](mailto:info@respondingtoautism.net).