

Autism

What is it?

Autism is a complex developmental disability that impacts the normal development of the brain in the areas of social interaction and communications skills. Children and adults with autism typically have difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and leisure or play activities. Autism makes it hard for them to communicate with others and relate to the outside world. (Autism Society of America, www.autism-society.org).

Common Characteristics

Persons with autism may exhibit any or all of the following characteristics. This list is very general. Not all persons with autism exhibit all of these; rather it is more likely that a person will only exhibit a few of them at one time and others at other times in their life.

- Sensitivities in the five senses (e.g., sensitive to touch, tactilely defensive, etc.)
- Impaired reciprocal social interaction - Examples include
 - Poor use of body language and nonverbal communication
 - Remaining aloof, preferring to be alone
 - Difficulty interacting with other people
 - Not responding to verbal cues (acting as if deaf)
- Impaired communication - Examples include
 - If speech is developed, it is abnormal in content and quality.
 - Difficulty expressing needs and wants, verbally and/or nonverbally
 - Repeating words or phrases back when spoken to (known as echolalia)
 - Inability to initiate or sustain conversation
- Restricted interests, behaviors, and activities - Examples include
 - Insisting on following routines and sameness, resisting change
 - Ritualistic or compulsive behaviors
 - Repetitive body movements (hand flapping, rocking) and/or abnormal posture (toe walking)
 - Preoccupation with parts of objects or a fascination with repetitive movement (spinning wheels, turning on and off lights)
 - Narrow, restricted interests (dates/calendars, numbers, weather, movie credits)
- Cognitive function: Occurs at all intelligence levels. Performance IQ is generally higher than verbal IQ
- Neurological function: Seizures may develop; uneven gross and/or fine motor skills
- Behavioral symptoms
 - Aggressive or self-injurious behavior
 - Noticeable extreme under activity or over activity
 - Throwing tantrums
 - Short attention span
 - Abnormal responses to sensory stimuli (expressing oversensitivity or under sensitivity to pain)
 - Abnormalities in eating or sleeping
 - Having inappropriate attachment to objects
 - Having no apparent fear of dangerous situations
- Mood and affect (vary considerably from one person to another, as well as from one day or time to another)
 - Unaware of the feelings of others, withdrawal, or emotionally labile
 - Outwardly anxious or depressed
 - Affection may be indiscriminate

Strategies for working with person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear, specific, consistent limits • Give clear directions • Provide immediate and specific feedback • Maintain eye contact whenever appropriate • Adapt the environment to fit the person not the other way around • Use games and stories to teach skills • Keep things lively • Provide a highly structured environment, including schedules • Visual aids are helpful • Each person may have different symptoms • Gear programming toward particular needs and interests • The best treatment plan may use a combination of techniques, including therapies and/or sensory integration
For more information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council for Exceptional Children (2006). http://www.cec.sped.org. Retrieved Dec 1, 2006. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities, and/or the gifted. CEC advocates for appropriate governmental policies, sets professional standards, provides continual professional development, advocates for newly and historically underserved individuals with exceptionalities, and helps professionals obtain conditions and resources necessary for effective professional practice. • Autism Society of America www.autism-society.org Retrieved Dec 1, 2006. This is a web-based site that offers information on autism to persons with autism, family members, caregivers, and advocates. • Health Line http://www.healthline.com a web-based service that allows users to input conditions and receive information relating to definition, causes, common characteristics, and potential treatments.
References	<p>Autism Society of America www.autism-society.org. (Retrieved December 1, 2006.)</p> <p>The Council for Exceptional Children (2006). http://www.cec.sped.org. (Retrieved December 1, 2006).</p> <p>E-medicine Health (2006). <i>Autism</i>. http://www.emedicinehealth.com/autism/article_em.htm. (Retrieved December 1, 2006).</p> <p>Healthline Beta (2006). <i>Autism health article</i>. http://www.healthline.com/adamcontent/autism. (Retrieved December 1, 2006).</p>

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