



What is Autism?

Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and is the result of a neurological disorder that affects the normal functioning of the brain, impacting development in the areas of social interaction and communication skills.

Both children and adults with autism typically show difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions and leisure or play activities. One should keep in mind however, that autism is a spectrum disorder and it affects each individual differently and at varying degrees.

Although autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors, children and adults with autism can exhibit any combination of these behaviors in any degree of severity. Two children, both with the same diagnosis, can act completely different from one another and have varying capabilities.

Every person with autism is an individual, and like all individuals, has a unique personality and combination of characteristics. Some individuals mildly affected may exhibit only slight delays in language and greater challenges with social interactions. They may also have difficulty initiating and/or maintaining a conversation. Persons with autism may also exhibit some of the following traits:

- Insistence on sameness; resistance to change
- Difficulty in expressing needs; using gestures or pointing instead of words
- Repeating words or phrases in place of normal, responsive language
- Laughing (and/or crying) for no apparent reason
- Showing distress for reasons not apparent to others
- Preference to being alone; aloof manner
- Tantrums
- Lack of desire for physical contact
- Little or no eye contact
- Unresponsive to normal teaching methods
- Sustained odd play
- Obsessive attachment to objects
- Apparent over-sensitivity or under-sensitivity to pain and other sensory stimuli
- No real fears of danger
- Noticeable physical over-activity or extreme under-activity
- Uneven gross/fine motor skills
- Unresponsive to verbal cues although hearing tests in normal range.

The rate of autism is on the rise. With an annual growth rate between 10 and 17 percent, autism is the fastest growing developmental disability in the United States. Current statistics state that one out of every 150 children born will have a disorder on the autism spectrum. According to the Autism Society of America, approximately 1.5 million individuals in America are believed to have autism.

There is no one cause for autism. While there is no known cure, The Center for Autism's services are focused on the reality that autism is treatable. Early diagnosis and appropriate intervention are vital to successful treatment and set the foundation for future success.