

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Imagine how much more you can do for your child once you know the answer and are informed about how best to help him or her.

Not sure if you're observing normal developmental delays or early signs of **AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability marked by behavioral and communication difficulties. Individuals face a broad range, or spectrum, of functionality. Some will require significant support throughout their lives, while others can live more independently.

SYMPTOMS OF ASD

Autism can be detected in early childhood, and the symptoms typically persist throughout a person's life. By age two, a medical professional can give a fairly reliable diagnosis. Early intervention is beneficial.

DIAGNOSIS REQUIREMENTS

Symptoms indicating the disorder include

communication, social, and behavioral struggles.

• **Communication Deficits**

- Failure to engage in back-and-forth conversations or speak about emotions.
- Nonverbal communication struggles, including lack of eye contact, minimal facial expressions, and trouble understanding gestures.

• **Social Interaction Difficulties**

- Being unable to start and respond to social interactions. Lacking interest in peers or shared imaginative play.
- Struggle to change behavior to fit appropriate social context.

• **Repetitive Behaviors**

- Echoing words, phrases, or movements (e.g., lining up objects or toys).
- Fixating on interests with abnormally high intensity levels.
- Sensitivity or lack thereof to sensory input (i.e. lights, sounds, smells).
- Difficulty adapting to altered plans, patterns, or routines.

SEVERITY LEVELS

Because ASD is a spectrum of functionality and impairments, the support level needed varies from significant to very little.

• **Level 3: Very substantial support** – These individuals experience extreme social struggles and severe behavioral disabilities to cope with change.

• **Level 2: Substantial support** – There are still significant communication

deficits and limited social interactions associated here. Change is difficult, and individuals exhibit frequent repetitive and/or restricted behaviors.

• **Level 1: Some support** – Here, individuals experience some difficulty responding to social interactions and making friends. Some challenges occur when activities change. Independence can be gained but organizational struggles will likely present.

ACTION STEPS

- ✓ **Stay informed** – Take notes to aid decision-making when meeting with doctors, educational staff, and other health professionals.
- ✓ **Advocate** – Work with your child's school system to check for intervention services. Develop a plan to access your community's resources.
- ✓ **Seek support** – Ask your doctor or a health professional about support groups and other services for both you and your child.

KEEP IN MIND

An autism diagnosis can be initially overwhelming. However, there are many treatment options, programs, and resources available. Talk with your physician or pediatrician if you detect any symptoms.

What steps can you take today to educate yourself about Autism?