

Autism Society of NORTH CAROLINA

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a group of developmental disabilities that affect a person's ability to understand what they see, hear and otherwise sense. It is a brain disorder that impacts communication, social interaction and behavior. People with ASD typically have difficulty understanding verbal and nonverbal communication and learning appropriate ways of relating to other people, objects and events. As a spectrum disorder, autism affects people differently and with varying degrees of severity. No two people with ASD are the same, and it is common for ASD to be found in combination with other disabilities. With individualized treatment, education and support children and adults with ASD can improve and develop skills that will enable them to live and participate in their communities.

How Common is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder is the second most common developmental disability following mental retardation. It is four times more prevalent in boys than girls, and the disorder knows no racial, ethnic or social boundaries. While ASD is typically diagnosed in children, it is a lifelong disorder. It is estimated that one out of every 166 children born today will have some form of ASD. Approximately 1.5 million Americans (children and adults) have ASD today. In North Carolina there are nearly 30,000 people living with ASD.

How is Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnosed?

There are no medical tests that diagnose autism spectrum disorder. An accurate diagnosis is made based on observation of an individual's communication, behavior and developmental levels. Parental (and other caregivers') input and developmental history are very important components used to make an accurate diagnosis. The Autism Society of North Carolina can help connect families with professionals qualified to make an accurate diagnosis.

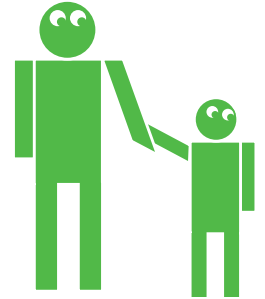
Information for Kids

People with ASD are born with brains that work differently than others, so they learn differently than others. Many times a person with ASD will have a hard time talking with people and understanding what they are saying. Some people with ASD cannot talk, while others talk a lot. Certain things may not feel, sound, smell or taste the same to a person with ASD, and sometimes this difference is upsetting. Sometimes people with ASD rock back and forth or wave their arms and hands. They may not know they are doing this or how looks to others. It is important to remember that each person is different whether or not he or she has ASD. We all have unique qualities that make us special.

Common Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Some people with ASD might:

- have severe language deficits or differences;
- **avoid eye contact and want to be alone;**
- have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions;



- have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings;
- **have trouble relating to others or not have an interest in others at all;**



- repeat actions over and over again;

- **repeat or echo words or phrases said to them or repeat words or phrases;**

- prefer not to be held or cuddled or might cuddle only when they want to;



- appear to be unaware when other people talk to them but respond to other sounds;

- **laugh, cry, or show distress for no apparent reason;**

- be over or under-sensitive to pain;

- have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel or sound;

- **have trouble adapting when a routine changes.**



For more information about autism spectrum disorder contact the Autism Society of North Carolina by calling (800) 442-2762 or visit www.autismsociety-nc.org.