

## What are the Signs of Autism?

People with ASD may have problems with social, behavioral, and communication skills. They might repeat certain behaviors and might not understand change in their daily activities. Many people with ASD also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things.

### A child or adult with an ASD might:

- **have severe language deficits or differences;**
- **talk about or show interest in a restricted range of topics;**
- **not point at objects to show interest** (point at an airplane flying over);
- **not look at objects** when another person points at them;
- **have trouble relating to others** or not have an interest in other people at all;
- **avoid eye contact and want to be alone;**
- **have trouble understanding other people's feelings** or talking about their own feelings;
- **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;
- **repeat or echo words or phrases said to them**, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language (echolalia);
- **have trouble expressing their needs** using typical words or motions;
- **laugh, cry, or show distress** for no apparent reason;
- **repeat actions over and over again;**
- **have trouble adapting when a routine changes;**
- **have unusual reactions** to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound;
- **be oversensitive or under-sensitive to pain;**
- **lose skills they once had** (for instance, stop saying words they were once using).

## What is the Autism Society of North Carolina?

Founded in 1970 by a dedicated group of parents seeking services and support for their families, the Autism Society of North Carolina is the best source in the state for connecting people who live with autism (and those who care about them) with resources, support, advocacy, and information tailored to their unique needs. The Autism Society of North Carolina is committed to providing support and promoting opportunities which enhance the lives of individuals within the autism spectrum and their families.

The Autism Society of North Carolina offers a variety of ways for you to become involved and help us increase options for individuals with ASD in our state. If you are interested in finding out how you can help, or if you have questions about autism, please contact us.

### Contact Information:

Autism Society of North Carolina  
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Raleigh, NC 27605  
919-743-0204  
1-800-442-2762 (NC only)  
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# What is Autism?



## What is Autism?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a group of developmental disabilities—including classic autism, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PPD-NOS), and Asperger's Syndrome—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. Individuals with ASD typically have difficulty understanding verbal and nonverbal communication and learning appropriate ways of relating to other people, objects, and events. No two people with ASD are the same. As its name implies, ASD is a spectrum disorder that affects individuals differently and with varying degrees of severity. Additionally, ASD is often found in combination with other disabilities.



*No two people with  
ASD are the same!*

## What Causes Autism ?

Although it was first identified in 1943, to this day no one knows exactly what causes ASD. However, research to discover its cause is ongoing. Many researchers believe that there is a strong genetic component. Some research suggests a physical problem affecting the parts of the brain that process language and information; other research points to an imbalance of brain chemicals. A variety of possible external or environmental triggers are also being studied. It is possible that ASD is caused by a combination of several factors.

Whatever the cause, it is clear that individuals are born with ASD or with the potential to develop it. ASD is NOT caused by bad parenting, and children and adults with the disorder are not people who choose to misbehave and cause trouble.



## How Common is Autism?

Autism spectrum disorder is the second most common developmental disability following mental retardation. ASD is more common than childhood cancer, cystic fibrosis, and multiple sclerosis combined. It is estimated that one out of every 166 people born today has some form of ASD. This means that approximately 1.5 million Americans (children and adults) have ASD today, and that more than 15 million Americans (loved ones, caregivers, educators, and healthcare professionals) are directly impacted by the disorder. In the state of North Carolina alone there are nearly 30,000 individuals living with ASD.

The overall incidence of ASD is consistent around the globe, but is four times more prevalent in boys than girls. Autism spectrum disorder knows no racial, ethnic, or social boundaries, and family income, lifestyle, and educational levels do not affect the chance of the disorder's occurrence. While ASD is typically diagnosed in children, it is a lifelong disorder that affects individuals of all ages.

## How is Autism Diagnosed?

There are no medical tests that diagnose autism spectrum disorder. An accurate diagnosis is made by a team of multi-disciplinary professionals and is based on observation of an individual's communication, behavior, and developmental levels. However, because ASD shares behavioral characteristics with other disorders, medical tests may be ordered to rule out other possible causes for the symptoms being exhibited. A brief observation in a single setting cannot present a true picture of an individual's abilities and behaviors. Parental (and other caregivers') input and developmental history are very important components of making an accurate diagnosis.

## How is Autism Treated?

At this time, no cure has been found for autism spectrum disorder. However, with individualized treatment, education, and support, children and adults with ASD can improve and develop skills that will allow them to live and participate in their community. Studies show that individuals with ASD respond well to a highly-structured, specialized education program tailored to their needs, and that early intervention provides the most positive outcomes.

Because ASD is a spectrum disorder, no single method is effective in treating every individual. Treatments that may help include but are not limited to: medicine, diet, and occupational, speech, and sensory therapies.



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