



### Autism Spectrum Disorders

**W**hat are autism spectrum disorders? According to the National Institute of Mental Health, “Autism Spectrum Disorders (also known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders) cause severe and pervasive impairment in thinking, feeling, language, and the ability to relate to others. These disorders are usually first diagnosed in early childhood and range from a severe form, called autistic disorder, through pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and to Asperger’s Syndrome.” These disorders are “characterized by varying degrees of impairment in communication skills, social interactions, and restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior” (American Psychiatric Association, 2007-10-16).

#### How common is the occurrence of autism in children?

It is estimated that 3.4 of every 1,000 children who are between 3– to 10- years old has autism. Children who are diagnosed and treated at an early age show significant improvement. However, only 50 percent of children with autism are diagnosed before kindergarten.

#### When and how does autism become apparent?

“Pediatricians, family physicians, daycare providers, teachers, and parents may initially dismiss signs of ASD, optimistically thinking the child is just a little slow and will “catch up.”

Children with ASD do not follow the typical patterns of child development. In some children, hints of future problems may be apparent from birth. In most cases, the problems in communication and social skills become more noticeable as the child lags further behind other children the same age. Some other children start off well enough.

Oftentimes, between 12 and 36 months old, the differences in the way they react to people and other unusual behaviors become apparent.

Some parents report the change as being sudden, and that their children start to reject people, act strangely, and lose language and social skills they had previously acquired. In other cases, there is a plateau, or leveling, of progress so that the difference between the child with autism and other children the same age becomes more noticeable,” according to NIMH.

#### What is Asperger’s Syndrome?

Asperger’s Syndrome (AS) is a developmental disorder characterized by major difficulties in social interaction, and restricted and unusual patterns of interest and behavior. Asperger’s Syndrome is considered part of the autism spectrum.

#### What are some specific behaviors that children who have autism exhibit?

According to Kyle’s Tree House, an association of Autism Spectrum Support groups (2007-10-16), some of the symptoms may be exclusivity or a lack of significant age appropriate relationships with others, which may be exhibited by:

- Repetitious and self-stimulating behaviors
- Lack of eye contact
- Low attention span.

#### Autism is exhibited by developmental delays but can vary greatly. They include:

- Language difficulties
- Self-help skills such as dressing and toilet training,
- Academic challenges
- Injurious behavior to oneself or others.

#### What can I do if I suspect that my child has autism?

- I. Language difficulties
- Contact your pediatrician for a consultation and referral to a certified mental health clinician who has expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders.

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- Call the school to find out about services available in your district. Talk to the counselors, social workers and teachers who may be working with the child.
- Join a support organization for autism and become involved with other families who face the same challenges.
- Educate yourself and your family with as much information as you can about this disorder.
- Explore all funding sources; the treatment of autism can be expensive.



### References used in this article

*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-IV-TR* (fourth edition, text revision). Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/autism/introduction.shtml>

Dingfelder, Sadie F. *The Dilemma of a Definition*. *American Psychological Association*, APA Online, volume 35, number 11, 2004, page 48. <http://www.apa.org/monitor/dec04/definition.html>

Klin, A., Ph.D. and Fred R. Volkmar, M.D. (1995). *Asperger's Syndrome: Guideline for Assessment and Diagnosis*, published by the Learning Disabilities Association of America. <http://www.med.yale.edu/chldstdy/autism/asdiagnosis.html>

Yeargin-Allsopp M, Rice C, Karapurkar T, Doernberg N, Boyle C, Murphy C. *Prevalence of Autism in a US Metropolitan Area*. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.. 2003 Jan 1; 289(1):49-55. Cited by the National Institute of Mental Health. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/autism/symptoms.shtml>

Kyle's Tree House. [http://www.kylestreehouse.org/autism\\_symptoms.cfm](http://www.kylestreehouse.org/autism_symptoms.cfm)

### Resources Available From the FCARC Lending Library:

- [Facing Autism: Giving Parents Reasons For Hope and Guidance For Help](#), [Could It Be Autism?](#) A multifaceted disorder, autism has long baffled parents and professionals. With intensive, early intervention, some children have recovered from autism.
- [Overcoming Autism](#). There have been huge advances in our ability to diagnose autism and in the development of effective interventions that change children's lives. This book by Lynn Kern Koegel and Claire LaZebnik reminds parents to never lose sight of the humor that lurks in the disability's quirkiness or the importance of enjoying your child.
- [Different Like Me: My Book of Autism Heroes](#). This book by his book Jennifer Elder introduces children ages 8-12 to inspirational famous and historical figures from the worlds of science, art, math, literature, philosophy, and comedy. All excel in their own particular fields, but are united by the fact that they are often found it difficult to fit in.
- [The Jumbled Jigsaw](#). This book by Donna Williams empowers and challenges families to look at what they can do to alter their child's environment and address the combination of underlying issues by exploring everything from mood, anxiety, obsessive compulsive and the disorders to dependency, identity and personality issues, information processing, sensory perceptual problems and gut and immune disorders.

### Other Resources:

- <http://www.kylestreehouse.org>
- <http://www.med.yale.edu/chldstdy/autism/index.html>
- <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/autism/introduction.shtml>
- [http://www.apa.org/topics/topicautism\\_b.html](http://www.apa.org/topics/topicautism_b.html)
- <http://www.autismspeaks.com>