



Fact Sheet

Autism Spectrum Disorder: “Classic” Autism

What is Autism?

Autism is the 2nd leading childhood developmental disorder. Individuals with autism have impairments in the areas of communication, behavior, and socialization. In addition, many individuals also experience sensory processing and regulation issues. Autism is a spectrum disorder because the severity of impairment in each of these areas differs in each individual. Autism affects all walks of life without regard to race, religion, or socio-economic status.

What are some Characteristics of Autism?

Some of the characteristics of autism include a lack of formal means of communication; echolalia; stereotypical behaviors such as hand flapping, rocking, and head banging; lack of eye contact; lack of joint attention; an inability to engage in meaningful social interactions; as well as many others. While they share some common characteristics, every individual with autism is unique.

How is it Diagnosed?

Official diagnosis is made by professionals (physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, etc) according to set criteria listed in the DSM-IV. Some of the listed symptoms include:

- Limited eye contact, inappropriate facial expressions and emotional responses, avoidance of physical contact
- Delayed speech without communicative gesturing (e.g. pointing), inability to engage in conversation, lack of pretend play
- Inflexible routines, preoccupation with abnormal interests or parts/functioning of objects, repetitive movements (e.g. hand flapping or wringing)
- Onset of at least one symptom before age three.

Is There Treatment?

While there is no known “cure” for autism there *is* help. It is believed that early, intensive intervention can significantly improve the outcomes of individuals with autism. Most of the interventions fall under the category of special education as opposed to medical services such as prescriptions. Some of the more common therapies include:

- Visual and Environmental Supports (Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) (Frost & Bondy, 2002), visual schedules (Hodgdon, 2000), etc.)
- Applied Behavior Analysis
- Discrete Trial Instruction
- Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations (Gray, 2000)
- Speech and Language Services
- Physical and Occupational Therapy

Additional Resources

Books

- American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - IV*. American Psychiatric Association: Washington, DC.
- Frost, L., & Bondy, A. (2002). *The Picture Exchange Communication System Training Manual*. Newark, DE: Pyramid Educational Products, Inc.
- Gray, C. (2000). *The New Social Stories Book*. (illus. ed.). Austin, TX: Future Horizons.
- Hodgdon, L. (2000). *Visual Supports for Improving Communication*. QuirkRoberts:Troy, Michigan.
- Kluthe, P. (2003). “*You’re Gonna Love This Kid!*” Brookes Publishing: Baltimore.
- Schopler, E. (1996). *Parent Survival Manual*. Plenum: New York.
- Waltz, M. (1999). *Pervasive Developmental Disorders: Finding a Diagnosis and Getting Help*. O’Reilly:Sebastopol: California.

Websites

www.illinoisautismproject.org

www.cdc.gov/actearly

www.autismsocietyofamerica.org

<http://www.autismillinois.org>

Illinois Autism/PDD Training and Technical Assistance Project

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Autism Society of America

Autism Society of Illinois



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