

Understanding Children with ASD

Social Skills

- Lack of or total avoidance of eye contact does not mean disrespect. It does not mean they are not listening to you. It does mean that the autism makes it very difficult for them to make eye contact, and demanding it can lead to behaviors.
- Struggles with understanding and is often unaware of other people's feelings. May laugh at inappropriate times, say the wrong thing, or show lack of sympathy/empathy/compassion. They are not intentionally being insensitive. Understanding people's feelings must be taught, not expected.
- Does not understand how to play or engage with other children.
- Prefers to be alone. Can be seen as anti-social by others.

Speech and Non-Verbal Communication

- May be non-verbal or has delayed language development. Will only interact to achieve a specific goal.
- The mutual give-and-take of typical communication and interaction is often particularly challenging, awkward, and inappropriate. Will favor a narrow range of favorite topics, with little regard for the interests of the person to whom they are speaking.
- Don't be surprised if they don't respond to their own name when called.
- May give unrelated answers to questions.
- Can have a hard time using and understanding non-verbal cues such as gestures, body language, or tone of voice.

Repetitive Behaviors

- Repeats words or phrases over and over and over.
- Performs repetitive behaviors such as flapping, rocking, spinning, or twirling.

Other Characteristic Behaviors

- Gets upset by minor changes in routine or surroundings. A simple unexpected stop on the way home from school can lead to behaviors.
- Has highly restricted interests.
- Have unusual and often intense reactions to sounds, smells, tastes, textures, lights and/or colors.
- Can be impulsive.
- May become preoccupied with parts of objects like the wheels on a toy truck.
- May become obsessively interested in a particular topic such as airplanes or origami, like my friends son.
- May begin to engage in self-abusive behaviors like head banging.

What Autism Is Not

- Contrary to popular belief, children with ASD are not without feelings and emotions. Some children and adults with ASD do express affection, smile and laugh, and show a variety of other emotions, but in varying degrees.
- Although children with ASD are often described as being “aloof” or “self-absorbed,” many of them would like to have friends. However, the very nature of their disability makes it difficult for them to establish or maintain the basic peer relationships that ultimately develop into friendships.
- Autism is not the result of poor parenting, lack of attention, or not enough love.
- Children with autism are not just unruly or spoiled kids with a behavior problem.
- The vast majority of persons with autism are not just savants, like the character portrayed by Dustin Hoffman in the movie Rain Man.