UNDERSTANDING THE DIAGNOSIS

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Autism spectrum disorder (autism or ASD) is a brain-based disorder that affects about 1 in 31 children. Autism is characterized by deficits in two core areas of functioning:

- Impairments in social interactions & communication
- Restricted, repetitive behaviors or interests

These characteristics are present from very early childhood, and most children begin showing signs before 2 years old. Symptoms may become more apparent when entering preschool and being in more social situations. Autism looks different in every person, and no two cases are the same. That is why we call it a *spectrum*.

Possible Signs & Symptoms

Restricted, repetitive behaviors or interests

Stereotyped, Repetitive Speech & Motor Movements

- Unusual use of words and phrases (jargon, odd sounds, echolalia, repetitive speech)
- Lining up, stacking, organizing things
- Stimming body movements (hand flapping, spinning, jumping)

Insistence on Sameness

- Inflexible routines or ritualized patterns
- Extreme distress during transitions or small changes
- Little variation in daily activities, prefers doing things the same way each time

Fixated Interests

- Intense focus or strong attachment to specific interests
- Preoccupation with unusual objects, ideas, and/or topics
- Difficulty transitioning between activities

Sensory Processing Differences

- Unusual response to various textures, sounds, smells (covers ears, seeks/avoids touch)
- Fascination with lights, movement; picky eating habits
- Indifference or high tolerance to pain and temperature

Impairments in social interactions & communication

Social-Emotional Reciprocity

- Difficulties initiating and responding to social interactions
- Language delays and trouble with back-and-forth conversation
- Little understanding of emotions, feelings, and affect

Nonverbal Communication

- Limited use or understanding of facial expressions, body language, and gestures
- Difficulty using verbal and nonverbal communication together
- Unusual eye contact (lack of, inconsistent, overly intense)

Social Relationships

- Difficulty developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships.
- Difficulties adjusting behaviors across social settings
- Little imaginative play, sharing, or interest in peers

ABS Kids is here to support your child with individualized ABA therapy. This evidence-based approach can help autistic children thrive in their environment through developing social skills, school-readiness skills, daily-living skills, and more. Please visit abskids.com for more resources about your child's diagnosis.

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AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

What do the different levels mean?

Level 1

Requiring Support

Without supports in place, impairments impact everyday life.

These may not be obvious to casual observers, may seem odd.

- Odd or unsuccessful initiations or responses in social situations
- Limited or peculiar interests
- Some inflexible behaviors
- Rigid thinking
- Trouble shifting focus
- Difficult transitions
- problems with organization, self-care, and independence

A child who speaks in full sentences but struggles with back-and-forth conversation and whose attempts to make friends are odd and generally unsuccessful. May have difficulty shifting between activities and completing everyday tasks as expected for age.

Level 2

Requiring Substantial Support

Difficulties are apparent even with supports in place.

Repetitive behaviors and social differences may be obvious to casual observers.

- Limited or infrequent initiation of social interactions
- Few or atypical responses to others in social interactions
- Rigid or inflexible behaviors or thinking patterns
- Frequent distress when shifting focus and during transitions

A child who uses words or gestures to express themselves, whose social interactions are limited to specific interests, and who uses noticeably odd nonverbal communication or restricted, repetitive behaviors. Others may comment on behaviors or think the child seems different.

Level 3

Requiring Very Substantial Support

Significant and noticeable impairments even with supports in place.

Symptoms may be very obvious to casual observers.

- Very limited social initiation
- Minimal social responses
- Very rigid and inflexible behaviors and thinking
- Extreme difficulty coping with changes and transitions
- Restricted behaviors and interests that impair abilities across almost all settings
- Great distress with transitions

A child with few or no spoken words, who rarely initiates interactions, does not seem aware of others, or uses obivously odd or unusual approaches and responses with others.
Behaviors may seem very immature than expected for child's age. Differences from peers are obvious.

**Levels of support may change over time depending on age and learned skills.*

What else should I be on the lookout for?

Psychological & Mental Health Conditions

- Language Disorders
- Intellectual Disability
- Developmental delays
- Anxiety & depression
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Neurological & Genetic Conditions

- Epilepsy or seizures
- Fragile X Syndrome
- Rett Syndrome

Other Troublesome Conditions

- Gastrointestinal (GI) problems (reflux, constipation)
- Feeding difficulties
- Sleep disturbances

Treatment or follow-up with other professionals may include:

- ABA therapy
- Speech therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Feeding therapy
- Sleep study visit
- Parent training
- Home & school services
- Neurology follow-up
- Geneticist follow-up
- Psychiatry follow-up
- Medications
- GI follow-up
- Nutritionist follow-up

Call us with any questions!

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