

Common Characteristics of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Each individual with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is unique and may demonstrate markedly different behaviors and skills. The following information provides an overview of some of the common characteristics seen in children with ASD.

- **Speech**

Speech is likely to develop much more slowly than is the norm. Speech may remain absent, or appear in the small child and vanish by the age of four. Speech may include peculiar patterns or intonations.

- **Social Interaction**

Most often noticeable is the failure to form social bonds. The child who has ASD may not follow the parents or other children around the house - or may cling to them. He may not go to others for comfort when hurt. The autistic child often avoids eye contact, resists being picked up, and does not seem to "tune in" to the world around him/her.

- **Sensory Differences**

The child with ASD may not react the same way to a variety of environmental stimuli. He may not respond to cold or heat - or over-respond. The child may exhibit hypersensitivity to light, noises, touch, smells, and tastes.

- **Peak Skills**

The child who has ASD may have strong peak skills in areas such as computations in math, drawing, music, or memory of data, whether trivial or important. At the same time, he may not be able to discuss the weather, understand time, or easily comprehend what he has read.

- **Play**

A child with ASD may not initiate play with other children. The child may prefer to be left alone. There is a lack of imitation of other children's or adult's actions.

- **Need for Sameness and Routine**

Such a child may throw a tantrum that lasts for hours because the seating was changed in the family car. Or he may engage in stereotyped behavior, such as flicking or flapping a hand, lining up toys, drawing the same picture, or seeking repeatedly to do what he is unable to do at the time.

- **Behavioral Problems**

Children with autism spectrum disorders can be very passive or hyperactive. They may also demonstrate obsessive interests in objects or activities. Aggression towards others or themselves is a possibility, especially when frustrated. Generally, people with ASD prefer to maintain certain routines and may respond negatively when a routine is changed or disrupted.

- **Management of a Child who has Autism Spectrum Disorder**

The management of a child with ASD falls into two areas:

- 1) providing understanding, training, and consultation for parents, teachers, and service providers as they seek to deal with the child's atypical and problematic behavior, and
- 2) providing a highly structured environment, including trained personnel, in which the child, adolescent, or young adult can learn.

If you would like information on autism or available services in your community, contact the

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