

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Fact Sheet



Signs of ASD

Social impairment and communication difficulties

- Many people with ASD find social interactions difficult. The mutual give-and-take nature of typical communication and interaction is often particularly challenging. Children with ASD may fail to respond to their names, avoid eye contact with other people, and only interact with others to achieve specific goals.

Repetitive Behavior

- Many children with ASD engage in repetitive movements or unusual behaviors such as flapping their arms, rocking from side to side, or twirling. They may become preoccupied with objects or specific topics. Many people with ASD seem to thrive so much on routine that changes to the daily patterns of life can be very challenging.

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a group of complex neurodevelopment disorders characterized by repetitive and characteristic patterns of behavior and difficulties with social communication and interaction. The symptoms are present from early childhood and affect daily functioning.

The term "spectrum" refers to the wide range of symptoms, skills, and levels of disability in functioning that can occur in people with ASD. Some children and adults with ASD are fully able to perform all activities of daily living while others require substantial support to perform basic activities.

Definition of Autism Spectrum Disorder under IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines Autism Spectrum Disorder as...

a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engaging in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term autism does not apply if the child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance, as defined in #5 below. A child who shows the characteristics of autism after age 3 could be diagnosed as having autism if the criteria above are satisfied. [34 CFR §300.8(c)1]

In the Classroom

In addition to academic instruction, special education programs for students with autism focus on improving communication, social, academic, behavioral, and daily living skills. The classroom environment should be structured so that the program is consistent and predictable. Students with autism often learn better and are less confused when information is presented visually as well as verbally.

NOTE: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) has recently proposed changes to eligibility criteria for ASD. A summary of these [changes](#) are listed on their website. Questions? Call ECAC.