

WHAT IS AUTISM?

- A developmental disorder of neurobiologic origin.
- Brain has marked differences in the areas that connect the two hemispheres, in the memory center, organization areas, processing, attention and motor coordination centers, emotional regulation, and excess white matter in some areas that make them “over connected”
- A spectrum of involvement and a variety of names: ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), PDD (Pervasive Developmental Delay) NOS (Not otherwise specified) and Asperger Syndrome, Atypical Autism, Autistic Like
- Asperger Syndrome often differentiated by a normal IQ (70 or above) and language development similar to non-disabled BUT marked impairment in social interactions, social communication, imagination, flexible thinking.
- Difficulty with topic management, conversational abilities, ability to deal with nonliteral language, participating, making and keeping social relationships and situations.
- PDD-NOS is characterized by some but not all of the characteristics of autism. Most common areas affected are communication and social skills.

CHARACTERISTICS:

- Limited facial expressions and use of gestures
- Unusual melody of speech
- Difficulty imitating sounds and actions
- Repeats (echoes) words and phrases
- Language difficult to produce and understand
- Difficulty understanding abstractions (does not understand jokes)
- Difficulty answering questions
- Difficulty participating in conversation: perseverates, timing, cannot follow exchanges
- Difficulty initiating conversation, may not ask for help
- Difficulty relating to people, understanding and using social cues – sense of humor is different
- Strong inappropriate attachment to objects
- Lacks understanding of the perspective of other people – may invade personal space or talk too loud.
- Not flexible in interactions with others
- Difficulty focusing on relevant information
- Difficulty with unstructured time and situations, waiting
- Unusual fears or lack of fear of real danger
- Repetitive motions, impulsive, inconsistent
- Resists change
- Greater or Less than Usual awareness of some or all sensory information
- May use peripheral vision
- May explore by licking, smelling, etc
- May seem to be deaf OR overly sensitive to sounds
- Often overwhelmed by sensory experiences and seek to avoid these
- BEHAVIOR is COMMUNICATION
- Behavior often results from fear, anxiety or illness
- Desire to please is not enough motivations to change the behavior
- Difficulty generalizing
- Short attentions span or perseveration

LEARNING STRENGTHS: Uses visual information well, remembers info for a long time, able to learn and follow specific rules, learns and completes long routines, focuses on info related to a special interest