



# Autism 101



## Autism an epidemic?

You might be surprised to learn that a new case of autism is diagnosed nearly every 20 minutes. Some may even describe autism as the epidemic of our time.

- As many as one in 110 children are diagnosed with autism
- Once considered a rare disorder, autism now occurs in two to six individuals per 1,000
- Today, more than 1.5 million Americans experience autism
- Autism is the fastest growing developmental disability in the world, increasing at a rate of 10-17 percent a year

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009, National Institutes of Health, 2004 and U.S. Department of Education, 1999

## What exactly is autism?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or autism is a developmental disability considered the result of a neurological condition affecting normal brain function, development and social interactions. Children and adults with autism find it difficult or impossible to relate to other people in a meaningful way, may show restrictive and/or repetitive patterns of behavior or body movements, and often have some degree of mental retardation.

While great strides are being made, there is no known cause or cure, nor a known singular effective treatment for autism.

The common term of "autism" collectively represents a set of five closely related conditions that fall under the umbrella of Pervasive Developmental Disorders.

## Opening the door to autism

There are five developmental disorders that fall under the Autism Spectrum Disorder umbrella and are defined by challenges in three areas: social skills, communication, and behaviors and/or interests.



**Autistic Disorder** – occurs in males four times more than females and involves moderate to severe impairments in communication, socialization and behavior.

**Asperger Syndrome** - sometimes considered a milder form of autism, Asperger's is typically diagnosed later in life than other disorders on the spectrum. People with Asperger syndrome usually function in the average to above average intelligence range and have no delays in language skills, but often struggle with social skills and restrictive and repetitive behavior.

**Rett Syndrome** – diagnosed primarily in females who exhibit typical development until approximately five to 30 months when children with Rett syndrome begin to regress, especially in terms of motor skills and loss of abilities in other areas. A key indicator of Rett syndrome is the appearance of repetitive, meaningless movements or gestures.

**Childhood Disintegrative Disorder** – Involves a significant regression in skills that have previously been acquired, and deficits in communication, socialization and/or restrictive and repetitive behavior.



**Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)** – includes children that do not fully meet the criteria for the other specific disorders or those that do not have the degree of impairment associated with those disorders.

**There is hope – autism is treatable**

Autism is a baffling, life-long disability. And while there is no cause or cure, nor a known singular effective treatment it is treatable. People with autism—at any age—can make significant progress through therapy and treatments, growing to lead meaningful, productive lives.

However, experts agree that early diagnosis and early intervention are critical – because the earlier people with autism get help, the better their outcomes will be in the future.

**Did you know?**

The annual cost of providing services for people with autism is \$90 million dollars, in 10 years that number is projected to be \$200-400 billion. With early diagnosis and intervention, the overall cost of treatment can be reduced by two-thirds over an individual with autism's lifetime.

London School of Economics Study, 2001

**Follow your instincts**

Parents should get their child screened for autism if:

- They feel something might not “be right” with their child – 18 months or older
- Their child isn't meeting developmental milestones as identified by their pediatrician



**Living with autism**

People with autism have challenges in the areas of communication, socialization and restricted/repetitive behaviors. A few examples:

Communication	Socialization	Restricted/Repetitive Behavior
Development of language is significantly delayed	Difficulty developing peer relationships	Preoccupations atypical in intensity or focus
Some do not develop spoken language	Difficulty with give and take of social interactions	Inflexibility related to routines and rituals
Experience difficulty with both expressive and receptive language	Lack of spontaneous sharing of enjoyment	Stereotyped movements
Difficulty initiating or sustaining conversations	Impairments in use and understanding of body language to regulate social interaction	Preoccupations with parts of objects
Robotic, formal speech	May not be motivated by social reciprocity or shared give-and-take	Impairments in symbolic play
Repetitive use of language		
Difficulty with the pragmatic use of language		

Made possible by:



To help families living with autism visit [actforautism.org](http://actforautism.org)