



## Quick Facts About Autism Spectrum Disorder

**Autism is a spectrum disorder or neurological difference** that includes a broad range of symptoms. With autism, it is possible to be intelligent and verbal, or have intellectual impairments and be nonverbal. Individuals on the autism spectrum often have difficulty with social interactions such as eye contact, conversations and perspective-taking.

**Social Impairments:** Individuals with autism have difficulty with social interaction. It may appear that people with autism do not want to interact with others. Sometimes it's just that they don't know how to play with a friend or start a conversation. While reminders can be helpful, other times intensive teaching is needed. Specific instruction is often necessary for individuals with autism to learn basic interaction skills such as taking turns

**Communication Impairments:** Individuals with autism may have difficulty communicating their wants, needs and emotions. They may be able to speak or use an alternative means of communication such as sign language, picture exchange or a voice output device. Also, people with autism may take what you say literally. If you tell someone with autism that something is a "piece of cake," he or she may be looking for dessert rather than something that is easy to do. Sometimes people with autism don't understand jokes, puns or sarcasm.

**Sensory Perception and Unusual Behavior:** People with autism may have unusual sensory perceptions and seemingly odd behavior. They may be more or less sensitive to the ordinary sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches of everyday life. They also may have habits that seem unusual at first.

**Accept and Respect the Individual:** Autism is one aspect of an individual's character. With or without autism, every person is an individual with his or her own preferences, strengths and limitations. If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism. You may think you know what autism "looks like" but you may be surprised to find out that some people with autism are chatty and others are quiet. Some people with autism enjoy a hug while others do not. Some may act out and do things we don't understand. At these times, show respect and courtesy.

**Causes** - There are many ideas about the cause(s) of autism. At present, most researchers think autism is caused by genetic factors with possible environmental triggers. It's quite possible that different people's symptoms have different causes.

**Treatments** - Autism presents differently from individual to individual and as such, no one size fits all treatment exists. The symptoms of ASDs can severely limit an individual's ability to function in everyday life. Thus, early diagnosis and appropriate intervention are critical. Teaching must be individualized and delivered in a motivating and consistent manner. Evidence-based practices and educational interventions are known to be effective in helping children and adults learn however it is important to research each treatment carefully.

**Supporting Individuals & Families** - Individuals and families living with autism need help and support. Individuals and families may be under a great deal of stress and need all of the non-judgmental help they can get from friends, extended family and service providers. Coordinated and consistent help also can make a positive difference in the life of a family affected by autism.

**Find Support & Resources** at: <http://www.autismempowerment.org>, <http://www.facebook.com/autismempowerment> and **Autism Empowerment Radio** - <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/autismempowerment>