

A hand holding a green puzzle piece against a background of other puzzle pieces and a blue sky.

**GUIDELINES ON**

**Autism  
Spectrum  
Disorder**

**for PARENTS,  
CAREGIVERS and  
PROFESSIONALS**

## **Introduction:**

Child development is a crucial period, due to certain reasons there occur many developmental delays in children. Sometimes this delay can take the form of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Being parent knowing that your child has autism or s/he is on spectrum can be an overwhelming experience. This booklet is aimed at providing helpful guidelines that will help you in working with autism either you are a parent of a child with autism or a professional.

These guidelines will help you

- understand what autism is
- impact of autism
- discover ways to support your child

## **Autism Spectrum Disorder:**

Autism is a neurobiological developmental disorder that affects brain processing and affects individuals' social skills, communication, interest and behaviour. Children with ASD have difficulties in 4 main areas

1. impairment in social skills, /socialization
2. language and communication skills,
3. play,
4. restricted, repetitive, and stereotypical behaviors.

Level of difficulty in these areas can be of mild to severe degree. Autism is usually referred to as spectrum due to broad diversity in its symptoms as many different symptoms can manifest within each of these areas moreover two children with the same diagnosis can have different abilities, intellectual functioning and can behave in different ways. Being considered as spectrum individuals with autism can be low functioning requiring high level of support and high functioning requiring less support. ASD usually appears early in life, often before the age of three.

## **CORE SYMPTOMS**

Core symptoms of autism are divided into two broad categories according to DSM-V which include deficits in social communication and social interaction and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior. These symptoms must be present across multiple contexts. Further detail of symptoms is as follows,

### **Impairment in Socialization:**

Children with autism will face difficulty in giving and maintaining eye contact. They may use gestures or facial expression instead of verbal communication. Children with autism have difficulty understanding the emotions and feelings of others and inability to relate with others. They have limited social interest and usually prefer to be alone and had difficulty in playing with peers hence unable to make friends. They may show less sharing of interests with others. Small transitions can be very difficult for children with autism, and they prefer same routines on daily basis. Difficulty in understanding social 'rules' 'cues', behaviour and relationships in social setting is quite common among autism. Children on spectrum are more object oriented than people. They are more adult orientated than peer orientated. They don't want to be comforted in distress.

### **Impairment in Social Communication**

Most of the kids on spectrum are non-verbal, their speech and language milestones are delayed. In some children they will develop language on appropriate time but they may become mute or regress in their speech usually between the age of 2 to 2½ years. Some children may be verbal but their use of verbal language will be limited. They may not be eager to communicate and have difficulty making conversations. Sometimes children have unusual speech patterns like repeating words, sentences, may use unfamiliar words. Imitation skills and pretend play lacks in autism. They often use words out of context and without trying to communicate. Forth and back communication is usually missing in children with autism.

### **Repetitive Behavior/ Restricted Interests:**

Repetitive behaviors are very common among ASD children like they may have body rocking, spinning of objects or may spin themselves, hand flapping, flicks fingers, jumping etc. Their interests are uncommon, strong and limited like they want to talk about same topic or activity even for longer time. ASD kids usually focus on some

part of toy rather than playing the toy as a whole e.g. they might spin wheels of a car.

### **Sensory Difficulties**

Sensory difficulties are much common in autism. Most of the behaviours shown by children with autism are usually result of their sensory processing problems. Sensitivity could be more or less to sights, sounds, touch, smells and tastes than others. Visual sensory difficulties includes staring at lights, blinking, gazing at fingers, lining up objects, moving objects in front of the eyes, looking at minute particles, picking up smallest pieces of dust, fascination with reflections and brightly coloured objects. Auditory problems includes tapping fingers, snapping fingers, grunting, humming, covers ears, makes loud rhythmic noises. Olfactory (Smell) difficulties include smelling objects, sniffing people etc. Gustatory difficulties are licking objects and placing objects in mouth, holding water or food in mouth. Tactile problems are scratching, clapping, feeling objects, nail biting, hair twisting, toe-walking, resists touch Likes pressure, tight clothes Vestibular issues include rocking, spinning, jumping, pacing and Proprioceptive issues include teeth grinding, pacing and jumping

### **Emotional Difficulties:**

Children might face anxiety, depression, anger, mood swings and stress due to environmental stimuli. Frustration due to increased amount of verbal instruction, excessive noise, or a change in routine. Children may become withdrawn and resisting any interaction with others thus having distress. Anxiety due to difficulty making sense of the world around them and understanding social rules, meeting strangers, being given too many choices, not being able to communicate their needs Children with an ASD can be anxious about more than one thing at a time causing overload, which could then lead to extreme anxiety behaviours (meltdown).

### **Motor Problems:**

Motor issues include delays in both gross and fine motor skills, difficulties in holding utensils, getting dressed, brushing teeth, tying shoes, running smoothly, and riding a bicycle.

**These pin people illustrate some of the ways in which autism is displayed**

(Adapted from *Autism is...*, National Autistic Society, based on illustrations used by Professor J. Rendle-Short, Australia and National Society for Autistic Children USA)



**Displays indifference**



**Joins in only if adult insists and assists**



**Indicates needs by using an adult's hand**



**One-sided interaction**



**Echolalic - copies words like parrot**



**Inappropriate laughing or giggling**



Does not play with other children



Bizarre behaviour

Talks incessantly about only one topic



No eye contact

Variety is not the spice of life



Lack of creative, pretend play



Handles or spins objects



But some can do some things very well, very quickly, but not tasks involving social understanding

Below is the analogy of a bucket overflowing. When levels of anxiety get too high it can result in the extreme anxiety and inappropriate behaviour.



### **Early Indicators of Autism:**

There are certain signs that are indicators of early onset of autism in children. Parents should keenly observe their children and if they notice any sign they should get professional guidance. Early signs include absence of social smile and sharing of emotional experience of joy till the age of 6 months, no response on sounds, name and lack of facial expressions by the age of 9 months, delayed speech and language milestones, absence or lack of eye contact, less or inappropriate use of non-verbal gestures like pointing, waving etc. Repetitive movements of body (like hand flapping, body rocking etc.) and with objects (lining up objects, spinning the wheels etc.), at the age of 2-3 years. Loss of acquired skills like of language and socialization

### **What cause autism**

Till to date no single cause of autism is known. There is a great agreement of researchers that autism is caused by both genetic and environmental factors.

### **MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR AUTISM**

There is a wide variety of intervention techniques available for autism. There is no single intervention that can be applied to each every child. Every intervention technique has its own pros and cones. Best management practice is to use eclectic or multi method approach as this approach provides flexibility in management and it can be tailored to meet child's individual needs. A team of professional should work with ASD child which includes, special educationist, psychologist, speech therapist, occupational/sensory therapist, music therapist, self-care trainer etc.

- Functional behaviour assessment may helps in understanding purpose of any behaviour that it may be serving. This will help in understanding behaviour and then developing strategies for behaviour management.
- Use discrete trail training while working with your child. It involves a direction, behavior, and consequence. Direction will be instruction on part of parent or any care giver, behaviour is the desired response on part of child and consequences meant reinforcement provided that will strengthen behaviour.
- Occupational therapy will help in teaching activities of daily living.
- Sensory therapy will regulate sensory integration.
- Always consider anxiety levels when deciding how to manage your child's behaviour or when introducing them to change or new activities.
- Keep a diary of your child's behaviour and you may be able to identify a trigger for their anxiety
- Establish routines and stick to them. Prepared your child before hand for any change in routine. Explain what is going to happen instead. Small transitions can be a big deal to a child with an ASD eg taking a bath and then cleaning teeth straight away might cause anxiety. Allow time between activities wherever you can
- Give one instruction at a time
- Give your child time to process information
- 'Fiddle toys' such as stress balls, play dough, etc may help a child to lower their anxiety levels.
- Identify a 'safe place' and provide quite time (time out) that your child can go to when they are feeling anxious.
- Help your child to understand social rules. Social stories or visual structures can be helpful
- Be patient and tolerant — allow for the autism
- Priase your child on god behavior.



- Observe your child and try to learn which sensory issues they may have — the more you can learn and understand, the easier it will be to support your child
- Be aware that your child may only be able to utilize one sense at a time. For example, when they are looking at something they may not hear you
- When you've identified issues which trigger sensory problems, try to avoid these where possible
- Try to avoid sensory overload and stressful situations
- Ensure you have their attention, say their name before beginning
- Minimise sensory distractions such as noise, bright lights and busy rooms
- Use a clear, calm voice
- Keep things short and simple
- Beware of using idioms, metaphors and similes — ensure they know what you mean
- Don't rely on body language, gestures and tone of voice
- Ask specific questions
- Use pictures to help explain things
- Always check you have been understood

### **Whom should be consulted**

If you see any red flag in your toddler/child do consult child pediatrician, get him or her screened for autism via expert team of professionals including psychologist, speech therapist, sensory and occupational therapist.

### **Hope for Parents**

Getting a diagnosis of autism doesn't mean that your child lacks skills instead children with autism can have certain skills as their strength in comparison with other children like children with autism have singular and detail focus and can concentrate for longer time on a single activity. Children with autism have limitless potentials which are hidden. It depends upon us how we tackle them and provide them opportunities for utilizing their potentials.

## Useful Links

[Parent's Corner - One-Stop-Shop for Autism - mindspec.org  
readingroom.mindspec.org/autism/overview](http://readingroom.mindspec.org/autism/overview)

[Free Autism Educational Tools - For Awareness and Inclusion  
www.geekclubbooks.com/autism-edu](http://www.geekclubbooks.com/autism-edu)

<http://aba.insightcommerce.net/main.php3?primNavIndex=0&> Early Learning Site

[www.autism-pdd.net](http://www.autism-pdd.net) Autism & PDD Support Networ

[www.autism.net](http://www.autism.net) Geneva Centre for Autism

[www.abaresources.com](http://www.abaresources.com) ABA Educational Resources P free downloads available

[www.aspergers.ca](http://www.aspergers.ca) Asperger Society of Ontario

[www.autismawarenesscentre.com](http://www.autismawarenesscentre.com) Autism Awareness Centre

[www.autism.com/ari](http://www.autism.com/ari) Autism Research Institute

[www.autismtoday.com](http://www.autismtoday.com) Autism Today P online magazine and information center

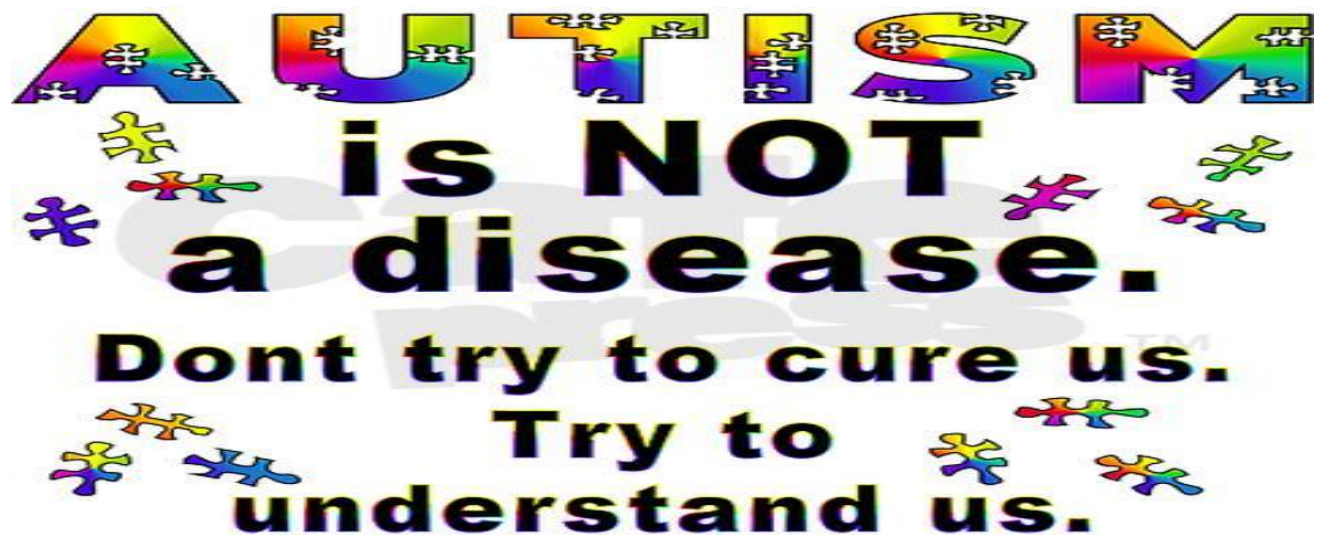
[www.do2learn.org](http://www.do2learn.org) Do 2 Learn P free printable games, teaching tools etc.

[www.tonyattwood.com.au](http://www.tonyattwood.com.au) Tony Attwood

<http://www.researchautism.org> Organization for Autism Research

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/kids/kautismpage.htm> ASD Kids Quest

[http://www.delautism.org/kids\\_only.htm](http://www.delautism.org/kids_only.htm) Autism Information for Kids



**AUTISM**  
**is NOT**  
**a disease.**  
**Dont try to cure us.**  
**Try to**  
**understand us.**

"Autism itself is not the enemy... the barriers to development that are included with Autism are the enemy. The retardation that springs from a lack of development is the enemy. The sensory problems that are often themselves the barriers are the enemy. These things are not part of who the child is... they are barriers to who the child is meant to be, according to the developmental blueprint. Work with the child's strengths to overcome the weaknesses, and work within the Autism, not against it, to overcome the developmental barriers."

—A person with Autism