

# AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

## ■ Definition of Autism under IDEA

Autism means 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 engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. 34 CFR 300.8(c)(1)

The Autism Spectrum includes: Autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), Asperger Syndrome (AS), Rett Syndrome (girls only), Childhood Disintegration Disorder (CDD – primarily boys only)

## EVALUATIONS

Assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorders  
Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS)  
Autism Diagnostic Interview - Revised (ADI-R)  
Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS)  
Social Communication Questionnaire (SCQ)  
High Functioning Autism Spectrum Screening Questionnaire (ASSQ)

## POSSIBLE CAUSES

The causes of autism and the other disorders on the spectrum are not known. Researchers are currently studying various areas including neurological damage, genetic mutations and chemical imbalances within the brain. These disorders are not due to psychological factors or childhood vaccines.

## INCIDENCE

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), some form of autism affects 2 – 6 of every 1,000 children, with most recent statistics being 1 in 88. Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are four times more common in boys than in girls.

## POSSIBLE SIGNS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Each of the disorders on the autism spectrum is a neurological disorder that affects a child's ability to communicate, understand language, play, and relate to others. They share some or all of the following characteristics, which can vary from mild to severe:

*These characteristics are typically evident before the age of three.*

- Communication problems (for example, with the use or comprehension of language)
- Difficulty relating to people, things, and events
- Playing with toys and objects in unusual ways
- Difficulty adjusting to changes in routine or to familiar surroundings
- Repetitive body movements or behavior

## ■ Teaching Tips/Instructional Strategies

- Make sure directions are given step-by-step, verbally, visually, and by providing physical supports or prompts, as needed by the student. Students with autism spectrum disorders often have trouble interpreting facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. Be as concrete and explicit as possible in your instructions and feedback to the student.
- Find out what the student's strengths and interests are and emphasize them. Tap into those avenues and create opportunities for success. Give positive feedback and lots of opportunities for practice.
- Build opportunities for the student to have social and collaborative interactions throughout the regular school day. Provide support, structure, and lots of feedback.
- If behavior is a significant issue for the student; seek help from professionals (including parents) to understand the meanings of the behaviors and to develop a unified, positive approach to resolving them.
- Have consistent routines and schedules. When you know a change in routine will occur (e.g., a field trip or assembly) prepare the student by telling him/her what is going to be different and what to expect or do.
- Work together with the student's parents and other school personnel to create and implement an educational plan tailored to meet the student's needs. Regularly share information about how the student is doing at school and at home.

## This information developed from the following resources:

- **National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities**  
[www.Nichcy.org](http://www.Nichcy.org)
- **Autism Speaks**  
[www.Autismspeaks.org](http://www.Autismspeaks.org)
- **Oklahoma Autism Center**  
[www.okautism.org](http://www.okautism.org)
- **Tulsa Center for Autism**  
[www.autismtulsa.org](http://www.autismtulsa.org)
- **Intervention Central** (behavioral supports)  
[www.interventioncentral.org/](http://www.interventioncentral.org/)
- **Centers for Disease Control**  
[www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov)