

Autism, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD), Asperger Syndrome (AS)

We receive many questions from parents, teachers, and health care providers about special education services for children with autism. If you are a parent, you need to educate yourself about your child's disability, effective educational methods and medical treatments, and how to present your child's problems and needs to school staff so they want to help.

On the Autism, PDD & Asperger Syndrome page, you will find FAQs, articles, legal resources, recommended books, free publications, and a short list of information and support groups.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has opened the Autism Information Center. You can find out exactly what Autism and other Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD) are on this website.

What is Autism?

Autism is a neurological disorder that can impair communication, socialization and behavior. It is usually diagnosed within the first three years of life and is four times more common in boys than in girls. However, some types of Autism may not be diagnosed until years later when the child enters school, due to late-occurring social deficits or difficulty playing with others. When this occurs, the child is usually too old to take advantage of early childhood intervention services and is evaluated for entry into the special education system.

Though awareness and understanding have greatly increased over the past few decades, many people are still unaware of the true affect of Autism. It can become an overshadowing factor in every aspect of life, including education, establishing and maintaining relationships, responding to pain and discomfort, and even in the ability to express emotion.

Symptom severity in Autism can range from mild to severe. For example, one child may intensely flap their arms to show excitement, another may display a smile under the same set of circumstances, while another child may sit in the corner and rock, leading the observer to believe that they may be incapable of showing or feeling emotion.

As parents reach the diagnosis, treatment and education stages of Autism, they will hear many different terms used to describe their child. This may include words such as autistic-like, non-verbal, developmentally delayed, autistic tendencies, savant, high-functioning, and low-functioning. The important thing to realize is that all children with Autism are different. What works for one may have zero effect on another. The combinations of signs and symptoms are endless. More important than the words used to describe the child is the underlying understanding that whatever the diagnosis is, children with Autism are able to learn, function productively in society and show positive gains with

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appropriate education and treatment plans in place. Without appropriate support, the child may never realize his full potential. (Source)

According to the National Academy of Sciences, "the diagnosis of autism can be made reliably in two-year-olds by professionals experienced in the diagnostic assessment of young children" with autistic disorders. Early diagnosis is crucial because education is the primary form of treatment, and the earlier it starts, the better." Autism and PDD: Fact Sheet.

New! Clarification of Medicaid Coverage of Services to Children with Autism. Informational Bulletin (July 2014) from the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, (CMS).

Note: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) 2013 changes diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Using DSM-IV, patients could be diagnosed with four separate disorders: autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, or the catch-all diagnosis of pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified. Researchers found that these separate diagnoses were not consistently applied across different clinics and treatment centers. Anyone diagnosed with one of the four pervasive developmental disorders (PDD) from DSM-IV should still meet the criteria for ASD in DSM-5 or another, more accurate DSM-5 diagnosis. While DSM does not outline recommended treatment and services for mental disorders, determining an accurate diagnosis is a first step for a clinician in defining a treatment plan for a patient.

DSM-V Diagnostic Criteria. Full-text of the diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the related diagnosis of social communication disorder (SCD), as they appear in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5).

Updated 2011 NIMH Parent's Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorders. This comprehensive document from the National Institute of Mental Health is designed to help parents understand the different types of autism spectrum disorders, the diagnosis process, treatment options and available resources.

What is Asperger's Syndrome?

Asperger Syndrome (AS) is a severe developmental disorder characterized by major difficulties in social interaction, and restricted and unusual patterns of interest and behavior. There are many similarities with autism without mental retardation (or "Higher Functioning Autism"). (see Resources: Asperger's Syndrome; information & support).

What Can You Tell Me About Asperger Syndrome? Asperger syndrome (AS) is a neurobiological disorder, which most researchers feel falls at the "high end" of

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the autistic spectrum. Individuals with Asperger syndrome can have symptoms ranging from mild to severe. While sharing many of the same characteristics as Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified and High-Functioning Autism, Asperger syndrome is a relatively new term in the United States, having only recently being officially recognized as a diagnosis by the medical community.

Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) and Pervasive Development Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)

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The diagnostic category of pervasive developmental disorders (PDD) previously referred to a group of disorders characterized by delays in the development of socialization and communication skills. Parents may note symptoms as early as infancy, although the typical age of onset is before 3 years of age. Symptoms may include problems with using and understanding language; difficulty relating to people, objects, and events; unusual play with toys and other objects; difficulty with changes in routine or familiar surroundings, and repetitive body movements or behavior patterns.

"The term Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS; also referred to as 'atypical personality development,' 'atypical PDD,' or 'atypical autism') was included in DSM-IV to encompass cases where there is marked impairment of social interaction, communication, and/or stereotyped behavior patterns or interest, but when full features for autism or another explicitly defined PDD are not met.. (source)

Intensive Early Intervention

All available research strongly suggests that intensive early intervention makes a critical difference to children with autistic spectrum disorders. Without early identification and diagnosis, children with autism are unlikely to learn the skills they need to benefit from education.

Distinct Developmental Patterns Identified in Children with Autism During their First Three Years published in the journal Child Development, found that early in development, children who display early signs of ASD show greater initial delay

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across multiple aspects of development compared to children whose ASD symptoms emerge later.

From First Concern to Diagnosis and Beyond published in the IAN Research Report #13. The gap between the time parents began to worry and the time they got a formal diagnosis was often lengthy – a real problem when early intervention is so crucial. The nation's largest online autism research project, Interactive Autism Network Research Reports.

The National Research Council analyzed intervention models for young children with autistic disorders and concluded that intensive early intervention "makes a clinically significant difference for many children. Children who had early intervention had better outcomes. (See Current Interventions in Autism: A Brief Analysis)

What is Developmental Screening? In this CDC article, many questions are discussed regarding developmental screening. For example: What is developmental screening? Developmental screening is a procedure designed to identify children who should receive more intensive assessment or diagnosis, for potential developmental delays. It can allow for earlier detection of delays and improve child health and well-being for identified children.

The M-CHAT screening for Autism Spectrum Disorders in toddlers (i.e., over the age of 12 months, and ideally over the age of 18 months). A parent can complete the free screening for autism online prior to meeting with a health-care professional. It is scored instantly and once completed provides a print out of the results for parents to take into your pediatrician's office.

Early Intervention for Toddlers with Autism Highly Effective. The study, published online in the journal *Pediatrics*, examined an intervention called the Early Start Denver Model, which combines applied behavioral analysis (ABA) teaching methods with developmental 'relationship-based' approaches. Study finds significant gains in IQ, communication and social interaction. (November 2009)

Organizations

Autism Speaks

Autism Society of America (ASA)

Autism Coalition

Autism Answers.com

Autism Research Institute

Center for the Study of Autism

Families for Effective Autism Treatment (FEAT)

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National Autism Center

Unlocking Autism

Asperger Syndrome Education Network (ASPEN)

ASA's Autism Source Resource Directory. Find local resources, providers, services and support.

For information about Asperger's Syndrome, contact AspergerSyndrome.org

Directory of Disabilities Organizations and Information Groups. Groups that you can contact for more information about disabilities and educational methods.

Yellow Pages for Kids with Disabilities. Your state Yellow Pages includes evaluators, therapists, advocates, attorneys, health care providers, educational consultants, speech language pathologists, support groups, and more.

Legal and Advocacy Resources. Includes links to legal sites.

Schafer Autism Reports - Subscribe

Free Newsletters. You can't beat a good online newsletter for up-to-the minute information. Our list of free online newsletters is divided into four categories and has links that you can follow to subscribe.

Explaining Autism to Children

Just For Kids! What is Autism? (PDF). This document from the New Jersey Center for Outreach and Services for the Autism Community explains autism in a way that a child can easily understand - by comparing the child with autism to the child without autism - in a very positive way.

Growing Up Together: A Booklet About Friends with Autism (PDF). In this booklet, you will learn about kids you may meet who have autism and how you can be their friend.

My Brother Has Autism (PDF). This book, written by an 8-year-old girl, explains what it is like to be the sibling of a child with Autism. This book is now available in print.

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