

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)



Disclaimer: No two individuals with autism spectrum disorder are the same. Symptoms or even the severity of symptoms will not be the same. What works for one individual may not work for another.

Definition and Statistics

(Suarez & Ellsworth, 2017; Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2020a and 2020b)

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is characterized by insufficiencies in developing appropriate social communication and social interaction. It can be characterized by restricted and repetitive behaviors, interests, and/or activities
- Can range from mild to severe and will vary from child to child
- Typically appears during a child's first three years of life; life-long, with no cure
- 3.5 million Americans have ASD; 1 in 54 children have been identified to be on the spectrum

Symptoms/Characteristics

(Suarez & Ellsworth, 2017; Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2020a)

- Common symptoms/characteristics
 - Difficulty with social interactions; limited eye contact, facial expression, physical contact
 - Difficulty with interpreting body language and facial expressions; limited understanding of jokes, sarcasm, or teasing
 - Challenges with developing friendships; prefer to play alone
 - Prefer routine and patterns (difficulty with transitions, likes sticking to schedule); could result in aggression, self-injury, temper tantrum (sometimes their way of communicating)
 - Repetitive use of oral and/or motor patterns such as hand-flapping, twisting objects, repeating words, or plays with toys the same way every time
 - Obsessive interests; very informative about specific topics
- Other potential symptoms/characteristics
 - Delays in language development (e.g. limited vocabulary, word or phrase repetition)
 - Uneven development of gross motor skills (e.g. poor coordination, poor balance, difficulty with eye-hand coordination, difficulty in kicking or throwing a ball)
 - Uneven development of fine motor skills (e.g. difficulty holding pencils, difficulty with writing, difficulty with stringing beads, difficulty managing buttons)
 - Hyperactivity or impulsivity
 - Short attention span on things of little interest
 - Unusual mood or emotional reactions
 - Lack of fear or more fear than expected
 - Unusual reaction to the way things sound, taste, feel, smell, or look



Adaptation Considerations

*If youth needs reasonable accommodations, please work with county Extension staff. Details are outlined on the Reasonable Accommodation Practices website: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/reasonable-accommodation-practices>

- When making adaptations, try to make the change for everyone, not just one individual. Do not single them out
- Set clear expectations and boundaries around the room or building. Collaborate with youth to have them develop these rules and expectations
- Be consistent and develop a routine
- Be aware of sensory needs (overstimulation and under-stimulation); provide a space without noise, reduce loud noises, provide headphones
- Recognize and understand the youth's behavior is a means of communication
- Provide a schedule of activities. If the schedule needs to change, introduce it gradually
- Cut down on distractions (e.g. during judging day, have a separate room available to talk with the judge, if desired)
- Use visual aids such as a communication board with pictures of activities. First this, then that
- Build up handles if working with food or tools with handles; use markers or big crayons
- Provide gloves or utensils when making food, have a back-up snack which youth enjoys (ask parent or guardian to fill form out prior to activity)
- Provide breaks to allow for transitions, and announce transitions a couple of minutes before they happen
- Supply fidgets; create an activity to make them
- Involve the youth during the meeting or when giving instructions (e.g. have them pass out materials)
- Use interests to motivate the youth

Additional Resources

There are numerous websites that provide valuable information related to ASD.

- The National Institute of Mental Health: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/index.shtml>
- Autism Society: <http://www.autism-society.org/about-autism/>
- Autism Speaks: www.autismspeaks.org

References

1. Suarez, M., & Ellsworth, K. (2017). Autism spectrum disorder. In B. J. Atchison & D. Powers Dirette (Eds.), *Conditions in occupational therapy* (pp. 28-39). Wolters Kluwer.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020a). *What is autism spectrum disorder?* <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html>.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020b). *Data & statistics on autism spectrum disorder*. <https://cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism.data.html>.

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