

ABOUT AUTISM...

Autism is one of a group of disorders known as autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). ASDs are developmental disabilities that cause substantial impairments in social interaction and communication and the presence of unusual behaviors and interests. Many people with ASDs also have unusual ways of learning, paying attention, and reacting to different sensations. The thinking and learning abilities of people with ASDs can vary—from gifted to severely challenged.

Autism interferes with the normal development of the brain in areas which control verbal and nonverbal communications, social interaction, and sensory development. Children or adults with autism may exhibit repeated body movements, such as hand flapping and rocking, show unusual responses to people or attachments to objects, and resist changes in routine. In some cases, aggressive and/or self-injurious behavior may be present.

Autism, classified under 299.0 of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV), is often referred to as a spectrum disorder, meaning the symptoms and characteristics of autism can present themselves in wide variety of combinations, from mild to severe. Although autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors, children and adults can exhibit any combination of the behaviors in any degree of severity. Two children, both with the same diagnosis of autism, can act very differently from one another.

Autism knows no racial, ethnic, or social boundaries. Family income, lifestyle or education levels do not affect the chance of occurrence. **Autism and its associated behaviors occur in approximately 1 in 150 individuals and 1 in 94 males.** Approximately 450,000 children under the age of 18 in the U.S. today have some form of autism. ASDs are the second most common serious developmental disability after mental retardation/intellectual impairment.

The majority of the public, including many professionals in the medical, educational and vocational fields are still unaware of how autism affects people and how to effectively work with individuals with autism.

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