



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave. Although autism can be diagnosed at any age, it is described as a “developmental disorder” because symptoms generally appear in the first two years of life. (Inimh.nih.gov)

Common Characteristics of Autism

- Difficulty with social communication and interaction with other people
- Restricted interests and repetitive behaviors
- Symptoms that affect their ability to function in school, work, and other areas of life

Autism is known as a “spectrum” disorder because people with autism have a range of characteristics, needs, strengths, and challenges.

Although ASD can be a lifelong disorder, treatments, services, and supports can improve a person’s health, well-being, and daily functioning.

What are the signs and symptoms of ASD?

The list below gives some examples of different types of behaviors that are common among people diagnosed with ASD. Not all people with ASD will have all behaviors, but most will have several of the behaviors listed below.

- Making little or inconsistent eye contact
- Appearing not to look at or listen to people who are talking
- Infrequently sharing interest, emotion, or enjoyment of objects or activities (including infrequently pointing at or showing things to others)
- Not responding or being slow to respond to one’s name or other verbal bids for attention
- Having difficulties with the back and forth of conversation
- Often talking at length about a subject of interest without considering social cues or conversational give-and-take
- Displaying facial expressions, movements, and gestures that do not match what is being said
- Having an unusual tone of voice that may sound flat, lacking emotion or tonal variation
- Having trouble understanding another person’s point of view or being unable to predict or understand other people’s actions



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- Difficulties adjusting behavior to different social situations
- Difficulties sharing in imaginative play or in making friends

Restrictive/repetitive behaviors may include:

- Repeating certain behaviors or having unusual behaviors, such as repeating words or phrases (a behavior called echolalia)
- Having a lasting intense interest in specific topics, such as numbers, details, or facts
- Showing overly focused interests, such as with moving objects or with parts of objects
- Becoming upset by slight changes in a routine and having difficulty with transitions

Autistic people often have sensory differences such as:

- Being more sensitive or less sensitive than other people to sensory input, such as light, sound, clothing, or temperature

People with ASD also may experience sleep problems and irritability.

People on the autism spectrum also may have many strengths, including:

- Being able to learn things in detail and remember information for long periods of time
- Being strong visual and auditory learners
- Excelling in math, science, music, or art

Resources to learn more about autism:

National Institute of Health

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/autism>

Local Resources and support

Autism Society of San Diego

<https://www.autismsocietysandiego.org/>

San Diego State Parent Support Corner

<https://autism.sdsu.edu/parent-support-corner/>

UCSD

<https://neurosciences.ucsd.edu/centers-programs/autism/about-autism/resources.html>



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Caregiver support

<https://www.couragetocaregivers.org/blog-onepaggers-1/2021/8/12/autism-spectrum-disorder>

Autism Parent and Caretaker Support groups (Virtual)

Parents Helping Parents

<https://www.php.com/autism-support-group/>

Have Dreams – a Free and Professionally run support group for Parents and Caretakers of individuals with Autism

<https://havedreams.org/free-support-parents>

Association for Autism and Neurodiversity (AANE) – Mentoring, Support Groups, and other resources

<https://aane.org/services-programs/>

Supporting Adults with Autism – Companion Guide

<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/Supporting-Adults-with-Autism-through-Uncertain-Times-Full-Packet.pdf>

San Diego Sheriff's Blue Envelope program

<https://www.sdsheriff.gov/community/blue-envelope>

San Diego Sheriff's Take Me Home registration

<https://www.sdsheriff.gov/community/take-me-home-registry>

See also the tab for Caretaker Support on the main Mental Health page.

For more information, resources, and Catholic therapists, contact Rich at hello@thechurchofstluke.org