

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

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Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by social communication impairments, and restrictive and repetitive behaviors. The concept of a “spectrum” disorder means that the number of symptoms can range from few to many.

Current Diagnostic Criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder (based on the DSM-5):

- A) Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, currently or by history, in all of the following areas:
 - 1) Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity
 - 2) Deficits in non-verbal communication
 - 3) Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships

- B) Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities as manifested by at least two of the following currently or by history:
 - 1) Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
 - 2) Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, and/or ritualized behaviours
 - 3) Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity and/or focus
 - 4) Hyper- or hypo- reactivity of sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment

There are three levels of “severity of ASD” which translates to specific levels of support:

Level 1, Requiring Support;
Level 2, Requiring Substantial Support; and
Level 3, Requiring Very Substantial Support

These levels of support are based separately on both social communication and social interaction impairments, and restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior.

The diagnosis of ASD also must include whether the child is:

- with or without an intellectual impairment; and
- with or without a language impairment

Finally, three other conditions must be met:

1. Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period
2. Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning
3. These disturbances are not better explained by an intellectual developmental disorder (intellectual disability) or global developmental delay.

At times, children with a diagnosis of ASD might also present with:

- An uneven profile of skill development
- Abnormalities in mood
- Self-injurious behaviors
- Unusual fears and anxieties
- Sleep difficulties
- Abnormalities in eating and drinking
- Toileting difficulties

Please Note:

While many of the children with ASD have delays in their development, having a delay in development does not necessarily mean the child's behaviour meets diagnostic criteria for ASD.

It is also important to note that, all children with ASD are different from one another just like all children are different from one another.

References

American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders. 5th ed. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association; 2013.