

# WHAT IS AUTISM?



Autism, now referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) medically, is a disorder that affects social skills, speech and non-verbal communication, developmental, cognition, and behavioral functions. Autism is often accompanied by other medical issues, mental health disorders, and sensory sensitivities.

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association merged four distinct autism diagnoses into one umbrella diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). They included Autistic Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger Syndrome. According to the CDC, Autism affects an estimated 1 in 54 children today.

Each person with Autism has a distinct range of strengths and challenges, which is why it is called a spectrum disorder. Some individuals with Autism have unevenly developed skills - someone who has trouble with social skills might be a gifted musician, academic, or an artist.

Signs and symptoms vary from mild to severe. Children and adults with mild to moderate autism usually need minimal to basic support after therapy and intervention, with some of them able to lead a completely independent life. Severe autistic people need assistance throughout their lives, sometimes needing round-the-clock assistance.

## **CAUSES, SIGNS, AND SYMPTOMS**

Signs of Autism usually appear before the age of 3, with some children exhibiting enough symptoms to be diagnosed as young as 18 months. Autism manifests due to many factors, sometimes a combination of factors is known to play a role. Risk factors include brain physiology, genetics, metabolic imbalances, maternal health, and exposure to certain substances, drugs in the fetal stage.

### **Common symptoms in a child with Autism include:**

- Missing developmental milestones
- Doesn't make eye contact, engage or respond when spoken to
- Usually wants to be left alone, doesn't like being hugged, cuddled
- Having a high sensitivity to sights, sounds, touch, smells
- Problems understanding speech, tone, facial expressions, gestures
- Trouble adapting to changes in routine
- Repetitive movements, motions, or speech patterns
- Excessive interest in niche topics

These symptoms grow into adulthood as well and sometimes worsen with age. With the right therapy and treatment, many children with Autism grow up to lead a regular, independent life. Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) Therapy, Play Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Speech Therapy are some of the treatments prescribed to manage Autism.



Read more about **AUTISM** and other mental health related articles on

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[telehealth@pamllc.us](mailto:telehealth@pamllc.us)

**NOTE**

If you are in immediate distress or are thinking about hurting yourself, call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline toll-free at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or the toll-free TTY number at 1-800-799-4TTY(4889). You also can text the Crisis Text Line (HELLO to 741741) or go to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline website at <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>



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