

Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)



These are some of the characteristics of ASD:

- problems with social interaction with others. This may include problems talking back and forth, working, or playing with others.
- unusual interest in objects
- need for sameness
- great variation in abilities
- under or over reaction to one or more of the five senses: sight, touch, taste, smell, or hearing
- repeated actions or body movements
- unusual emotional reactions and expressions

Children with ASD usually have difficulty with social interaction. Some parents have said that before their child's diagnosis of ASD, they thought their child was just very shy.

Children with ASD may have an unusual interest in objects. They may play with toys in different or unusual ways. For example, they may be able to tell you

everything you need to know about car engines. Or they may be able to sit for hours spinning the wheels on a toy vehicle.

Children with ASD often have a need for sameness. They may have difficulty with changes in routines, clothes, food, caregivers, and other parts of their environment.

Children with ASD may have great ability in one area and great difficulty in another. But not all children with ASD have the same abilities. For example:

- A child with ASD may have difficulty holding a pencil but have a strong memory for the words of songs or movies. On the other hand, they could be fabulous artists or have perfect pitch.
- A child may have difficulty knowing how to play a game with a peer but may have a very good understanding of how computers work.
- A child who does not speak may be able to build complex structures out of Lego.

Children with ASD may also have unusually strong reactions to one or more of their five senses. For example, some children with ASD may react to bright sunlight. Others are excessively bothered by tags on their clothing or by loud noises. Many children may be bothered by these things, but children with ASD often have a stronger reaction to them.

Children with ASD often have difficulty with the colour, smell, or texture of certain foods.

This may limit what they will eat to only a few foods.

Children with ASD may also do the same thing over and over again. For example, they may repeatedly flap their hands, jump, or walk on tiptoes. This is common. It is something that many parents talk about when they describe their children. Your child may be doing these things to help calm himself during stressful situations or to help occupy or entertain himself.

Children with ASD may also have unusually intense and prolonged emotional reactions. For example, they may get very angry when asked to stop playing and get ready for lunch. These emotions do not match the situation they find themselves in. These reactions may occur as a result of anxiety they feel when making changes in routine.

Children with ASD may talk constantly about specific things that interest them and be unaware that other people might not have the same level of interest.

One adult with ASD (whose story is featured in the "Personal Accounts" section) was fascinated with washing machines. As an adult looking back on his childhood, he realized that his neighbours did not find washing machines as fascinating as he did. He understood that he needed help to decide when, where, and whom to talk to about his interests. That way he would not have to stop talking about washing machines altogether but instead could choose the right place and time to discuss his interests. He thought it would have helped if someone could have taught him this skill.