



Chapter of the Autism Society of America

FACTS ON AUTISM

Autism is a complex developmental disability, the result of a neurological disorder affecting the functioning of the brain.

Usually appearing during the first 3 years of life, an accurate diagnosis requires someone who specializes in diagnosing autism spectrum disorders. This may be a developmental pediatrician, a psychiatrist or psychologist, and other professionals that are better able to observe and test your child in specific areas.

The prevalence rate of 1 of every 150 makes autism the most common of the Pervasive Developmental Disorders, affecting an estimated 1 in 150 births (Centers for Disease Control Prevention, 2006). Roughly translated, this means as many as 1.5 million Americans today are believed to have some form of autism. And although the overall incidence of autism is consistent around the globe, it is four times more prevalent in boys than in girls, and frequently occurs in association with other disorders that affect the functioning of the brain, such as epilepsy or metabolic disturbances.

Impacts development in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. Both children and adults with autism typically show difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and leisure or play activities.

Symptoms can include any combination of the following:

- Abnormal responses to sensations, such as touch or hearing.
- Apparent over-sensitivity or under-sensitivity to pain
- Unusual ways of relating to people, objects and events.
- Disturbances in the rate of appearance of physical, social and language skills.
- Delays in language development are common.
- Echolalia, repeating words or phrases in place of normal, responsive language
- Insistence on sameness; resistance to change
- Lack of spontaneous or imaginative play.
- Social withdrawal.

Manifests as a spectrum disorder. Individuals with autism may display characteristics of the disorder that range from mild to severe. It affects each individual differently and at varying degrees—this is why early diagnosis is so crucial. By learning the signs, a child can begin benefiting from one of the many specialized intervention programs.