

What to do if you suspect autism is present

It is important that you refer your child for a specialist diagnostic assessment as soon as possible following discussion with your GP, your child's paediatrician or local community health centre professionals. If you cannot find a local expert, contact Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) who will be able to help you with a referral to your nearest source of expertise.

Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) services

Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) is the leading service provider for people with an autism spectrum disorder in Australia. Aspect provides a broad range of specialist services to people with autism regardless of age or degree of disability, including:

- Assessment and diagnosis
- BUILDING BLOCKS® Early Intervention Service
- Schools for Children with Autism
- School Outreach Service for children in mainstream settings
- Family support networks
- Training courses
- Autism Information Line
- Employment and Community Participation
- Research



How to Contact Us

www.aspect.org.au

Autism Information Line Phone 02 8977 8377
E-mail infoline@aspect.org.au

Donations Phone 1800 AUTISM (1800 288 476)
E-mail donor.relations@aspect.org.au

Central Office
41 Cook Street (PO Box 361)
FORESTVILLE NSW 2087
Phone 02 8977 8300 Fax 02 8977 8399
E-mail contact@aspect.org.au

Administration centre for:
Outreach & Consultancy
Employment & Community Participation

Centre for Western Sydney
PO Box 770
SEVEN HILLS NSW 1730
Phone 02 8868 8500 Fax 02 9896 5266
E-mail education_research@aspect.org.au

Administration centre for:
Education & Research
Schools for Children with Autism

- Central Coast
- Hunter
- South Coast
- South East Sydney
- Vern Barnett
- Western Sydney

Far North Coast Centre for Autism
1/106 Main Street (PO Box 937)
ALSTONVILLE NSW 2477
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overcoming the isolation of autism



What is autism?

Information on autism spectrum disorders

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What is autism?

The term *autism spectrum disorders* (more commonly referred to as *autism*) is an umbrella description which includes:

- Autistic disorder
- Asperger's disorder
- Atypical autism

Autism spectrum disorders are lifelong disabilities that affect the way a person communicates and relates to other people and the world around them. People affected by autism typically display major impairments in three areas:

- Social interaction
- Communication
- Behaviour (restricted interests and repetitive behaviours)

These are commonly referred to as the Triad of Impairments.

Many people with an autism spectrum disorder also have sensory sensitivities, i.e. over- or under-sensitivity to sight, touch, taste, smell, sound, temperature and pain.

Because of their impairments, people with autism spectrum disorders often experience overwhelming anxiety, frustration and confusion when faced with the demands of everyday life.

The majority of people with an autistic disorder also have an intellectual disability, whereas those with Asperger's disorder are typically of average or above average intelligence, may have relatively intact

communication skills, and have specific learning disabilities.

Although autism spectrum disorders are usually present at birth, they often do not become evident until the age of 2 or 3 (or 5 or 6 in the case of Asperger's disorder).

Autism spectrum disorders are about four times more prevalent in boys than in girls. Recent international research suggests that 1 in 166 people may have some form of the disorder.

Possible behavioural indicators

This is not an exhaustive list; behavioural indicators vary from person to person.

- Impaired communication, e.g. limited joint attention, difficulties in interpreting and using gestures
- Flat facial expression and vocal tone
- Repetition of phrases and words
- Impaired comprehension
- Severely impaired social skills, e.g. an apparent lack of interest in other people, not returning a smile or greeting, difficulties initiating and sustaining conversation
- Very specific and unusual preoccupations and attachments
- Preference for routines

What causes autism spectrum disorders?

There is no single known cause, although recent research has identified strong evidence of a genetic factor for many people.

For some individuals, there may be evidence of damage or developmental abnormalities in the brain occurring before, during or soon after birth.

Because varying factors are considered to contribute to autism spectrum disorders, people display varying degrees of impairment.

Is there a cure for autism?

There is currently no known cure for autism. However, early intervention, specialised education and structured support can help develop a person's skills and minimise behaviour problems and enable each person, whatever their level of disability, to achieve as great a degree of independence as possible.

The importance of early diagnosis

Research and experience have shown that the earlier a child diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder can be enrolled in an early intervention program, the better his or her outcomes. A combination of special education, speech therapy, occupational therapy and behavioural interventions has proved to be successful in helping people with an autism spectrum disorder.

Early diagnosis and intervention is also essential to ensure families and carers have access to appropriate services and professional support.