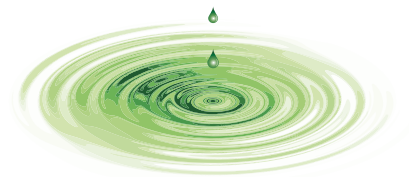


INFORMATION AND RESOURCES



ADDvanced Solutions
Supporting you to find the answers

A Brief History of Autism:

What is it and where does it come from?

Autism (originally derived from 'aut' meaning 'self') is a neurodevelopmental condition which affects the way an individual processes information from their own body or from their surroundings. It also impacts the way they can interact and communicate.

Autism occurs in varying levels of severity and is a lifelong condition; children with autism become adults with autism. It affects people of all levels of intellectual ability; all classes and ethnic groups.

Some individuals with autism will have a special skill, called savant (as seen in the film 'Rainman') in music, maths, art or another specific area. This only occurs in around 10% of all autistic people.

Autism was first described by Leo Kanner in 1943 who studied children more severely affected by autism and emphasised the impairment of the ability to interact with other people. Early research into ASD found that there were three areas in which people with autism were consistently challenged, known as the triad of impairments. These are social understanding, difficulties around communication and inflexibility of thought (this is now a dyad; see below).

During the same period, Hans Asperger was conducting his own research, he also identified children with similar characteristics. Although these children had average intelligence and good speech, when talking about things that interested them, they also had difficulties with social communication and appeared immature in their ways.

An increasing understanding of Autism Spectrum disorders has led to a more positive outcome for children and young people with the condition. The importance of early intervention was recognised, and the value of an increase in structure and routine. Also the value of using visual clues (photographs, symbols etc.) to support learning and engagement has been realised.

The 'Theory of Mind' (Simon Baron-Cohen) area of research studied the difficulty that people with autism have in seeing things from another person's perspective, and produced some useful ways of supporting this deficit.

Carol Gray has developed 'Social Stories' which are a very effective way of helping people on the spectrum to change their perception or thinking in a specific area. Her technique supports people to manage change by introducing the scenario in a story in a way that minimises anxiety and gives reassurance and understanding of the change.

More recently there has been an increased understanding of the impact of sensory impairment on individuals with autism (and other neurodevelopmental conditions), and a growing array of strategies are emerging based on this understanding.

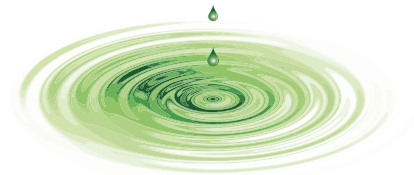
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A Brief History of Autism:

What is it and where does it come from?

The exact cause of autism is unknown, although it is clear that there is a genetic link (i.e. it 'runs in families'). There are also thought to be environmental factors; many experts believe there is a wide range of elements that could lead to the development of autism.

- More boys than girls are diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder, the ratio is almost 5:1.
- It is, however, very important to realise that each child with ASD has their own distinct personality, strengths and needs, just like anyone else.

Dyad of impairments:

Autism is now considered to have two areas of difficulty, for diagnostic purposes:

- Social communication and interaction
- Rigidity of thought

Both at varying levels in individuals affected by the condition.

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