



## Recognising Autism

The signs of autism in a child more severely affected by autism will be clear to health professionals: for a child less impacted it will be less obvious.

### Under two years:

- Inactive: limp or floppy; infrequent crying
- Irritable: inconsolable; soothed only by motion
- Limp or rigid when held
- Limited functional communication
- Limited understanding and/ or use of specific gesture
- Limited social response: no smile or gaze
- Limited engagement or awareness of others
- Unusual under - or over - sensitivity to environmental stimuli.

### Two years and over:

- Little consistency in use of functional communication
- Significant distress over minor changes in placement of items
- Significant time and effort spent in achieving sensory feedback (e.g. spinning)
- Significant time spent in repetitive movements of self or objects
- Any regression or loss of language skills
- High pain tolerance
- Engages others only to meet a particular need
- Intense difficulty in understanding social interaction (e.g. Safety rules)
- Focused and repetitive interests limit creative play
- Their most developed way of processing information is visual.

(Adapted from 'Autism Spectrum Disorder Screening' diagram: [www.handsinautism.org](http://www.handsinautism.org))

The following are signs that a child or young person may be affected by Autism but they do not represent criteria for a diagnosis. If they are apparent then it would be advisable to consult a professional for assessment.

### Social Understanding

It may be that a child may find it difficult to know how to join in with other children, or how to start up a conversation.

They will have difficulties understanding facial expressions and body language, and often misunderstand other people's intentions.

They may be aloof and appear to shun interaction with others, and show little response to physical affection.

Eye contact can be very uncomfortable for someone on the autistic spectrum.

People with Autism Spectrum disorders don't have an intuitive understanding of social rules, and often have difficulty with turn-taking, sharing and playing games with others.

**[www.advancedsolutions.co.uk](http://www.advancedsolutions.co.uk)**

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### Difficulties around Communication

Some children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions describe words as 'like steam' – evaporating before they can be fully understood. They feel that the processing of language can feel very slow and frustrating for them.

This is why sometimes a child might simply repeat what you say back to you – this seems to give you the instant response you are looking for, and is the easiest language for the child to get hold of.

They may also use unusual methods to communicate, such as physically taking you to the object they want, or behaving in an unusual way.

### Inflexibility of Thought

This was once thought to be 'lack of imagination' but it better described as rigid thought processes. For example it may be that they take statements very literally, and don't understand metaphors or sarcasm.

Inflexibility of thought is also demonstrated by an unusual level of distress at a sudden change (for example, of activity or TV programme). They often engage in repetitive activities such as watching the same thing on TV over and over again.

They may appear very stubborn and difficult and can seem to be very opinionated. Another common characteristic is the need to follow the same route to and from everyday places.

They also often have difficulty in playing imaginatively with others.

Often children and young people with Autism can have areas of intense special interest (previously called obsessions). These can remain the same over years, or can change more frequently. Common areas are trains or other transport (especially Thomas the Tank Engine!), history, space, dinosaurs or Star Wars but there is no real limit to the subjects of these interests.

They may have repetitive behaviour patterns which could be the result of sensory processing difficulties (see below) or a way to regulate their world to make it easier to understand.

### Sensory Perceptions

Individuals with autistic spectrum disorders may show unusual responses to sensory experiences, they may under react or over react to sensory stimuli.

This can include one or more of the senses.

- **Vision** - the child may find bright lights, sunlight, bright colours painful to look at. Alternatively they may be under-responsive to light and seek these out for stimulation.
- **Smell** - they may find certain smells overpowering and distressing; such as perfume, foods, etc. They may also be under-sensitive to smells.
- **Touch** - sensitivity to touch. They may find hair washing, brushing, etc. unbearable, and react strongly to light touch. If they are under-sensitive they may seek activities like tickling, touching objects, and messy play.
- **Taste** - includes the flavour and texture of food, and can include under- or over-sensitivity to salt, bitterness, sweetness etc. They may need to smell or touch their food before they will eat it.

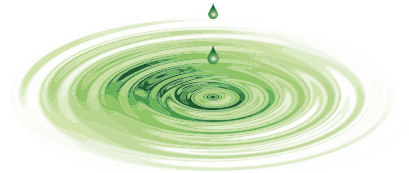
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# INFORMATION AND RESOURCES



**ADDvanced Solutions**  
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- **Hearing** - People with ASD can be very distressed by loud and sudden noises. They also often struggle in noisy, crowded places as they can find it hard to process sound and pick out what is important in these circumstances. They can also be under-responsive to sound and are sometimes mistakenly thought to be deaf.
- **Vestibular (sense of balance)** - they may seek out vestibular input, by spinning, rocking and swinging. Alternatively if they are over-sensitive they will avoid heights, stairs, escalators etc.
- **Proprioception (sense of position)** - they may seek out input via jumping, running and crashing into other children; also squeezing into spaces or enjoying rough play.
- **Interoception (sense of internal organs)** - may lead to difficulties with toilet training, and also an altered sense of whether they are hungry or feeling unwell. Also difficulties in this area can result in individuals having a very high pain threshold; they don't display any signs of distress in response to levels of pain that other people would find unbearable. This can leave them vulnerable to having serious injuries untreated.

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