

What is Autism?

Autism is a spectrum condition which means that while all people with a diagnosis share certain difficulties, they can present in a variety of ways and to varying extents.

Autism results from biological or neurological differences in the brain. While the cause of autism is unknown, research suggests there may be a genetic basis in many instances, although not all.

People on the autism spectrum may experience challenges in socialising and communicating with others. This may include interacting with others by starting conversations, maintaining back-and-forth conversations and sharing enjoyment and interests with others. They may experience challenges in understanding or using body language, such as facial expressions, eye contact and gestures.

They may find it challenging to make friends or maintain friendships. For example, they may not find it easy to adjust their behaviour to suit different social settings.

Young children may experience challenges in engaging in pretend play with their peers. They may struggle with change and prefer their routines and environments to stay the same. They also over-react or under-react to sounds, sights, touch, tastes or smells and may be fascinated by particular sensory experiences (eg watching a spinning object or touching or smelling objects).

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While everyone can and will exhibit some of these characteristics at some point or another, it is the pattern of behaviours, their intensity, and the fact that they persist beyond the typical age that leads to a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.

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