

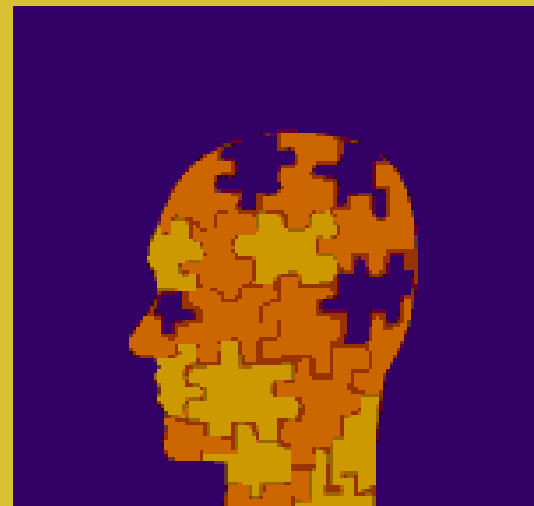
Autism

An overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder



What is Autism?

- Autism is a developmental disorder.
- It is usually diagnosed during the first 3 years of life.
- It typically affects the brain in four major areas of functioning:
 - Language
 - Social skills
 - Sensory systems
 - Behavior





What is Autism?

- Autism is called a “Spectrum Disorder” because it affects each person differently and to varying degrees.
- Autism is one of 5 disorders that fall under the umbrella of Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD).
 - Autism
 - Asperger’s Syndrome
 - Childhood Disintegrative Disease (CDD)
 - Rhetts Disorder
 - PDD – Not otherwise specified (PDD – NOS)



What Causes Autism?

- Researchers and doctors have been trying to determine what causes Autism ever since its discovery beginning in the early 20th century.
- They believe there is a link between genetics and Autism, although they have not identified a specific gene that causes Autism.
 - It is believed that an individual with Autism is either born with the disorder or the potential to develop it
- Those who are susceptible to Autism have been identified, but researchers and doctors are unsure as to what triggers it to develop.
- A possible connection between Autism and vaccines is being debated.

What Causes Autism?

- Most recently, Autism has been a topic discussed among presidential candidates, as even they realize more funding is needed for continued research.



Is Autism Common?

- Autism is the most common of the PDD disorders.
- It affects an estimated 1 in 110 births and 1 in every 70 boys.
- Autism is growing at a rate of 10-17% per year.
- In 10 years there will be over 4 million Americans affected by Autism.



Who is Affected?



- Anyone can be affected by Autism.
- It has no racial, ethnic or social boundaries.
- Income, lifestyle and even education levels have no affect on whether a child develops Autism.
- It is, however, **4 times** more prevalent in boys than girls.



Common Autism Myths

- Individuals with Autism do not like eye contact.
- Autism is a mental disorder.
- Autism is caused by bad parenting.
- Individuals with Autism do not know how to show affection.
- **THESE ARE ALL FALSE!**

What are Sensory Stimuli?

- Sensory Stimuli are the things in the environment which we see, hear, smell, feel and taste.



What Effect Does Sensory Stimuli Have?

- Individuals who are not affected by Autism are able to filter out unimportant or unnecessary stimuli and concentrate on one main focal point.
- For those who are affected by Autism this “filtering out” process may be difficult.
 - Sounds may seem louder, lights brighter or smells stronger.
 - There may be an over reaction to sensory stimuli or no reaction at all.





What Effect Does Sensory Stimuli Have?

- It is important to be aware of the environment and the elements that may cause sensory issues.
- A person with sensory issues may have techniques and tools to assist them in regulating sensory input.
- Examples of sensory stimuli that may be overwhelming:
 - Room temperature, clothing tags, scratchy socks, sirens passing by, florescent lights, loud voices, bright sun and smells.



Sensory Overload

- **“Sensory Overload” words by Joel Smith, an adult with Autism.**

When I enter a busy scene - especially if multiple senses are present or there is a lot of loud noise, flashing lights, and people bumping into me, I will experience this sensory overload. Simply put, my brain is trying to analyze everything that is going on, without bothering to pick out the truly important details (like the person right in front of me who is trying to talk to me). As a result of this, I will often want to retreat or go back to somewhere quiet and peaceful again. I'll never understand how non-autistics can enjoy loud parties, dances, or meetings.

The only way I can explain this to a non-autistic is to have them go into a room, turn on a stereo (loud!), TV (also loud), open up the blinds, turn on a strobe light, and then try to talk on the telephone. Many autistics live like this all the time (so, please, cut us some slack when we ask you to repeat yourself for the 5th time in a loud room!).

Copyright © 2001-2007 by Joel Smith - All Rights Reserved



How does Autism Affect Social Skills?

- Social skills are often difficult for individuals with Autism.
- An individual with Autism may seem bossy, rude or inappropriate when they are really just trying to connect with those around them.
- It may be difficult for those with Autism to read non-verbal cues, such as body language, tone of voice or facial expressions.
- An individual with Autism may also have a hard time understanding and respecting personal space.



How Does Autism Affect Communication?

- Communication is often an area of difficulty with individuals with Autism.
- Some individuals with Autism are not able to speak, but they can still communicate their needs by pointing, gesturing, expressions, nodding, communication boards and communication devices.
- However, there are many individuals with Autism who are able to talk and express themselves verbally.



Tips for Communicating with Individuals with Autism

- **Be Encouraging**
 - Encourage verbal communication by speaking to them, waiting for a response and assisting with the response.
 - Ask questions and show interest in conversation.
 - Use choices to encourage verbal response.
- **Be Consistent**
 - Consistently look for a verbal response.
 - Take the individual's speech as true and accurate.
- **Be Clear**
 - Give concise, clear directions.
 - Avoid using too much language; keep it simple.



Common Behavioral Traits of Individuals with Autism

- Insistence on sameness and resistance to change.
- Difficulty in expressing needs, using gestures or pointing instead of words.
- Repeating words or phrases in place of normal, responsive language.
- Laughing (or crying) for no apparent reason showing distress for reasons not apparent to others.
- Preference to being alone; aloof manner.
- Tantrums.
- Difficulty mixing with others
- Not wanting to cuddle or be cuddled.
- Little or no eye contact.



Tips for Working with Individuals with Autism

- Use simple language and directions.
- Provide time to prepare for and notice before transitions occur.
- Encourage communication through whatever means possible.
- Use areas of interest to encourage participation.
- Be aware of over-stimulation such as lights or sounds.
- It is important to facilitate socialization by finding common ground, modeling and providing direct practice in social situations.



The
Arc

Oneida-Lewis Chapter, NYSARC

If you have any further questions or would like more information on a topic, please contact a member of our Children's Services Department at 315.272.1606