

Another common difficulty is the inability to understand body language, tone of voice and expressions that aren't meant to be taken literally. For example, even an adult with autism might interpret a sarcastic "Oh, that's just great!" as meaning it really is great.

Conversely, individuals affected by autism may not exhibit typical body language. Facial expressions, movements and gestures may not match what they are saying. Their tone of voice may fail to reflect their feelings. Some use a high-pitched sing-song or a flat, robot-like voice. This can make it difficult for others to know what they want and need. This failed communication, in turn, can lead to frustration and inappropriate behavior (such as screaming or grabbing) on the part of the person with autism. Fortunately, there are proven methods for helping children and adults with autism learn better ways to express their needs. As the person with autism learns to communicate what he or she wants, challenging behaviors often subside.

Children with autism often have difficulty letting others know what they want or need until they are taught how to communicate through speech, gestures or other means.

Repetitive behaviors

Unusual repetitive behaviors and/or a tendency to engage in a restricted range of activities are another core symptom of autism. Common repetitive behaviors include hand-flapping, rocking, jumping and twirling, arranging and rearranging objects and repeating sounds, words or phrases. Sometimes the repetitive behavior is self-stimulating, such as wiggling fingers in front of the eyes.

The tendency to engage in a restricted range of activities can be seen in the way that many children with autism play with toys. Some spend hours lining up toys in a specific way instead of using them for pretend play. Similarly, some adults are preoccupied with having household or other objects in a fixed order or place. It can prove extremely upsetting if

someone or something disrupts the order. Along these lines, many children and adults with autism need and demand extreme consistency in their environment and daily routine. Slight changes can be extremely stressful and lead to outbursts.

Repetitive behaviors can take the form of intense preoccupations or obsessions. These extreme interests can prove all the more unusual for their content (e.g. fans, vacuum cleaners or toilets) or depth of knowledge (e.g. knowing and repeating astonishingly detailed information about Thomas the Tank Engine or astronomy). Older children and adults with autism may develop tremendous interest in numbers, symbols, dates or science topics.

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