

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

- Neurologic disorder that can affect multiple areas of development
- The cause is **unknown**. Research suggests that it is likely due to a combination of genetic and environmental factors.
- Children and adults with ASD display decreased connectivity between different regions of the brain.

Important: ✨

Autism is very complex and every child with this diagnosis is unique with their own individual strengths and challenges. The onset and severity of symptoms are varied. Treatment is not a "one size fits all." Many children with ASD have the ability to make functional gains through therapeutic intervention with the ultimate goal of positively impacting the child's quality of life.

Signs and Symptoms:

There are a broad range of signs and symptoms related to ASD. All children with ASD demonstrate some combination of challenges with **social interaction**, **communication**, and **repetitive or restrictive behaviors**. While not all-encompassing, a few examples are displayed below:

Communication

- Delays in language development
- Decreased ability to maintain conversation
- Decreased motivation to communicate

Behaviors

- Preoccupation with patterns
- Rigidity in daily routines
- Repetitive behavior (spinning, flapping hands, body rocking)
- Over or under-responsive to environment



Social Interaction

- Limited use and interpretation of facial expressions and gestures
- Challenges with peer relationships
- Prefers to play alone
- Lack of interest

ASD in Everyday Life

Children with ASD will display challenges within their school, home, and social environment.

Amongst many things, children with ASD may have a difficult time transitioning between tasks in a classroom, engaging in peer appropriate play on the playground, regulating their emotions in response to stress or change of routine, communicating their everyday needs, or adapting to new environments.

What Can Occupational Therapists Do?

OTs can equip children with autism and their families with the tools needed to conquer their daily challenges so they can participate in the occupations that bring them meaning and joy!

Examples of how OT can help:

- Screen and assess for areas of potential self care, sensory, motor, and social challenges
- Provide supports such as visual schedules or social stories
- Emotional regulation strategies for challenging behavior
- Collaborate with families and teachers to incorporate strategies to support success in daily routines.
- Sensory diets
- Sensory strategies for feeding
- Setting contextual goals of structure and routine across environments
- Encourage social engagement and communication strategies
- Advocate for socially inclusive environments

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