Autism (AU)

Autism is defined as a disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interactions, generally evident before age three, which adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with Autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change to daily routines and unusual responses to sensory experiences.

Characteristics

Social Challenges: Typically developing infants are social in nature. They gaze at faces, turn towards voices, grasp a finder and even smile by 2 to 3 months of age. By contrast, most children who develop autism have difficulty engaging in the give-and-take of everyday human interactions. By 8 to 10 months of age, many infants who go on to develop autism are showing some symptoms such as failure to respond to their names, reduced interest in people and delayed babbling. By toddlerhood, many children with autism have difficulty planning social games, don’t imitate the actions of others and prefer to play alone. They may fail to seek comfort or respond to parents displays of anger or affection in typical ways.

Communication Difficulties: Children with autism tend to be delayed in babbling and speaking and learning to use gestures. Some infants who later develop autism coo and babble in the first few months of life before losing these communicative behaviors. Others experience significant language delays and don’t begin to speak until much later.

Repetitive Behaviors: Unusual repetitive behaviors and/or a tendency to engage in a restricted range of activities is 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.

Tips for Parents

• Learn about autism spectrum disorders—especially the specific disorder of your child. The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child.
• Be mindful to interact with and teach your child in ways that are most likely to get a positive response. Learn what is likely to trigger a melt-down for your child, so you can try to minimize them. Remember, the earliest years are the toughest, but it does get better!
• If you weren’t born loving highly structured, consistent schedules and routines, ask for help from other parents and professionals on how to make it second nature for you. Behavior, communication, and social skills can all be areas of concern for a child with autism and experience tells us that maintaining a solid, loving, and structured approach in caring for your child, can help greatly.
• Learn about assistive technology (AT) that can help your child. This may include a simple picture communication board to help your child express needs and desires, or may be as sophisticated as an augmentative communication device.
• Be patient and stay optimistic. Your child, like every child, has a whole lifetime to learn and grow.
Resources

Autism Society of America  http://www.autism-society.org/

Autism Speaks  http://www.autismspeaks.org/


National Autism Center  http://www.jationalautismcenter.org/index.php

Interactive Autism Network  http://www.ianproject.org/