AUTISM

What every Parents Need to Know



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What is Autism

Autism is a general term used to describe a group of complex neuro-developmental disorders also known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD) or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by challenges related to:

- Communication
- Social Interaction
- Restrictive or repetitive behaviors and interests
- People with autism may also experience other difficulties including medical issues, differences in coordination and muscle tone, sleep disturbances, altered eating habits, anxiety or disordered sensory perceptions.



What Causes Autism?

Not long ago, the answer to this question would have been "we have no idea." Research is now delivering the answers. We now know that there is no one cause of autism just as there is no one type of autism. Over the last five years, scientists have identified a number of rare gene changes, or mutations, associated with autism. A small number of these are sufficient to cause autism by them. Most cases of autism, however, appear to be caused by a combination of autism risk genes and environmental factors influencing early brain development. Although autism appears to have its roots in very early brain development, the most obvious signs and symptoms tend to emerge between two and three years of age. Often parents are the first to notice that their child is showing unusual behaviors such as failing to make eye contact, not responding to his or her name or playing with toys in unusual, repetitive ways. Sometimes an autism spectrum disorder is diagnosed later in life, often in relation to learning, social or emotional difficulties.

What's Different About People with Autism?

- Things that may make a person with autism different can also be seen as exceptional abilities. It is important to think of him or her as intelligent, even if language or behavioral difficulties do not reveal this in the way you expect. Characteristics of someone with autism can be seen as both challenges and strengths. For example, a child who seems inflexible or rigid may also be the one who is the best at following the rules of your program. People with autism may display some or all of these characteristics: Difficulty understanding language, gestures and/or social cues
- Limited or no speech
- When there is speech, it can be repetitive or relate primarily to one particular topic • Limited or no eye contact
- Difficulty participating in back-and-forth conversations or interactions
- Social awkwardness
- Intense interest in unusual topics or objects

What's Different About People with Autism?

- Repetitive behaviors, such as pacing or lining things up, spinning, hand flapping or rocking
- · Sensitivity to light, sound, smell, taste or touch
- Abnormal fears and/or lack of appropriate fear for real dangers
- Difficulty managing transitions, changes in routine, stress and frustration
- Strong visual skills
- Good rote learning and long-term memory skills (math facts, sports statistics, etc.)
- Adherence to the rules
- Honesty
- Intense concentration or focus, especially on a favorite activity
- Ability to understand and retain concrete concepts and patterns
- Strong interest and/or ability in mathematics, technology, music and art

Tips for Communication with People with Autism



Tips for Communication with People with Autism

- Speak calmly.
 - Use direct, concrete phrases.
 - Instructions should contain no more than two steps.
 - Allow extra time for the person to respond.
 - Avoid using phrases that have more than one meaning, like "cut it out."
 - Avoid touching. If necessary, gesture or gently guide the person.

Tips to Support Children with AUTISM



Tips to Support Children with Autism in Youth Programs:

Be Welcoming and Supportive

- Meet the child where he is and learn from him.
 - Respect him as an individual.
 - Do not talk about him in his presence as if he isn't there.
 - Set clear expectations and boundaries.
 - Be consistent.
 - Develop and implement structure.
 - Practice and provide repetition to help with understanding and to build skills.
 - Expect growth. Keep your standards high.



Tips to Support Children with Autism in Youth Programs:

Develop Strategies to Compensate for Challenges

- Offer preferred seating or placement and allow for additional response time.
 - Provide organizational supports like written schedules, lists, visual cues, and specific verbal directions.
 - Be aware of a child's sensory needs. Avoid or prepare for triggers like fire alarms.
 - Give breaks for self-regulation.
 - With small steps and supports, allow the participant to exhibit success.
 - Reward what you want to see with positive reinforcement

Tips to Support Children with Autism in Youth Programs:

Educate and Communicate

- Educate other youth participants about autism.
 - Promote acceptance and understanding among peers and staff.
 - Support social development with role-playing, modeling, and rewards. Make sure to include typical peers.
 - Communicate with family members and caregivers.
 - Ask questions and share what works. Problems solve what isn't working.
 - Always keep learning and be creative.



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