



Autism Spectrum Disorder



What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder believed to be caused by both biological and environmental factors. This condition affects the development of executive functioning, sensory processing, and social behavior according to popular social norms, which means that it can present differently across different regions and cultures. The label "autism spectrum disorder" (ASD) reflects that autism exists on a non-linear spectrum where different people might experience varying combinations of symptoms, as well as experience varying levels of difficulty in everyday functioning.

What Should I Keep in Mind?

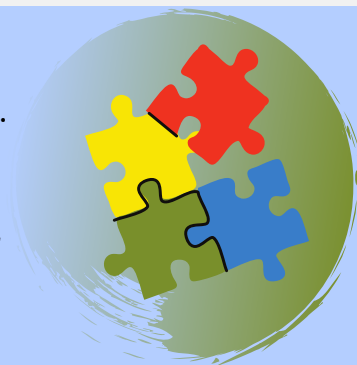
- ASD is usually first diagnosed in childhood, but adults can also be diagnosed with ASD.
- While men are diagnosed more often than women, women are more likely to have their diagnosis missed, so keep in mind that a lack of diagnosis does **not** mean a lack of the condition.
- ASD is a *spectrum disorder*, meaning that the disorder is non-linear. Different autistic people have different ways of experiencing the world around them.
- ASD is not an intellectual disability. It says nothing about a person's intelligence.
- ASD is a *different* way of interacting with the world. For example, people with ASD might be more visually motivated, making them more likely to succeed at vision-oriented tasks.
- Some people with ASD might experience challenges with certain behaviors, like making eye contact. It is important not to make assumptions about a person's competence, or to stereotype.

What are some signs and symptoms of ASD?

- Difficulty making eye contact
- Needing extra time to respond to their name being called
- Difficulty with conversation
- Repeatedly focusing on their favorite subject regardless of audience
- Facial expressions and non-verbal body language do not always match what they are saying
- Unexpected tone of voice (ex: sing-song while sad)
- Difficulty understanding other points of view
- Repetitive voluntary or involuntary movements. (ex: Stimming, flapping hands, rocking body)
- Sensory seeking or sensory aversion (Hypo/Hypersensitivity)
- Hyperactivity
- Repetitive behaviors or sounds (ex: repeating certain phrases; vocalizing)
- Prolonged, intense interest in certain subjects/topics
- Maintaining routine reduces stress.
- Might have a more restrictive diet or difficulty sleeping.
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Shutdowns (withdrawing from the world around them, not just stressful activities)

How Can You Make a More Inclusive Classroom?

- Ask the student directly. ASD is a spectrum and every student has different needs.
- Add Accessibility Services section to the syllabus and encourage students to reach out for support.
- Consider having a class schedule; ie: a time for review, a time for breaks, a time for lectures, etc.
- Consider adding visual cues to lectures. Use icons and symbols and consider implement other forms of class materials, such as podcasts, videos, or slideshows.
- Be mindful of sensory stimulus in the classroom, such as turning off fluorescent lights.
- Consider having alternatives to group work, but if group work is present, be sure to create the groups mindfully.
- Provide extra time to allow for responses.
- Prepare ahead of time for possible changes to class schedule, and clearly communicate any changes that you have control over.



Examples of Accommodations for Students with ASD

- Alternative forms of:
 - Group work
 - Textbooks
 - Assessment
 - Participation
 - Presentation
- Audio recording device
- Educational attendant
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Distraction-reduced and low lighting environment
- Frequent breaks
- Writing tests/exams with AS
- Scribe/reader
- Computer (for note-taking and tests/exams)
- Provision of course notes

*All accommodations are based on individual needs and recommendations.

For more information:

- National Institute of Mental Health. (2018). Autism Spectrum Disorders. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd/index.shtml>
- Psychological Association. (2020). "Psychology Works" Fact Sheet: Autism Spectrum Disorder. Retrieved from https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Publications/FactSheets/FS_AutismSpectrumDisorder_EN_2019.pdf