

Psychologists, scientists, and doctors feel a deep sense of urgency to find answers to these provoking questions that plague our time. This passion is ever increased through the continued deepening understanding of individuals with ASD who are often endearing, talented, intriguing and may see the world in a new way; offering us a window into the brain and to the breadth of human experience. (Kroncke, Willard, & Huckabee, 2016, p. 3)

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a complex, neurodevelopmental condition that affects human behaviors including social-emotional interaction, social communication, the ability to communicate thoughts and feelings, self-regulation, understanding other perspectives, lack of social reciprocity and the ability to make relationships.

Some key factors of ASD:

- 1 in 54 children are diagnosed with Autism.
- Autism is the fastest growing neuro developmental condition. The diagnosis rate for ASD is rising by 10-17% each year.
- Males are 4 times more likely than females to be diagnosed with Autism. However, this statistic is changing as new information regarding different characteristics that are seen in female patients.
- Often, female clinical presentations present differently than males.
- The learning and cognitive abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to significantly impacted.

Autism Spectrum Disorder can present itself at about 24 months of age. However, signs of ASD can be identified in children under 12 months of age. Critical development is delayed in children with ASD. In children between the ages of 18 months and 3 years, signs of ASD can manifest as the lower likelihood to look at others, show objects to others, point to objects, answer to their name, and follow attention. It is important to understand that these are merely signs, or red flags, and not diagnostic features. Early intervention and evaluation of development is crucial for optimal outcomes. At NRS|LS a preponderance of autism testing is designed to differentiate very mild conditions. What was once Asperger's Syndrome is now considered High Functioning Autism Spectrum. Diagnostic accuracy is key; however, proper treatment is just as important.

While there is treatment for ASD, there is no cure. However, there are an abundance of examples where individuals diagnosed with ASD no longer meet the criteria to be diagnosed later in life. In fact, 3-25% of people with ASD will experience an improvement in symptoms. Another perspective to take into account when discussing autism is the neurodiversity and strength-based models. From this viewpoint, ASD is a "different way of thinking, worthy of celebration in its own right, not a malady to be cured" (Solomon, 2012). Only symptoms that are deemed problematic, or interfere with daily living, should be targeted in treatment. Children and adults with autism spectrum disorder will have symptoms, but also individuality and uniqueness that deserve to be valued and respected.

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