

Information on Autism Spectrum Disorders for Professionals:

Signs and Symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs):

ASDs usually begin before the age of three and last throughout a person's life, although symptoms may improve over time. Some children with an ASD show hints of future problems within the first few months of life. In others, symptoms might not show up until 24 months or later. Some children with an ASD seem to develop normally until around 18 to 24 months and then they stop gaining new skills, or they lose the skills they once had.

A person with an ASD might:

- Not respond to their name by 12 months
- Not point at objects to show interest by 14 months
- Not play "pretend" games by 18 months
- Avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- Have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings
- Have delayed speech and language skills
- Repeat words or phrases over and over
- Give unrelated answers to questions
- Get upset by minor changes
- Have obsessive interests
- Flap their hands, rock their body, or spin in circles
- Have unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look, or feel

Diagnosis:

Diagnosing ASDs can be difficult since there is no medical test, like a blood test, to diagnose the disorders. Doctors look at the child's behaviour and development to make a diagnosis.

ASDs can sometimes be detected by 18 months or younger. By age 2, a diagnosis by an experienced professional (paediatrician or psychiatrist) can be considered reliable.

Treatment:

There is currently no cure for ASDs. However, research shows that early intervention treatment services can greatly improve a child's development. Early intervention services help children from birth to 3 years old learn important skills. Services can include therapy to help the child talk, walk, and interact with others. Therefore, it is important to talk to the child's parents and encourage have child referred to a specialist by the family doctor as soon as possible if you suspect that a child has an ASD or other developmental problem.

Causes and Risk Factors:

It is not clear what causes ASDs. However, there are likely many causes for multiple types of ASDs. There may be many different factors that make a child more likely to have an ASD, including environmental, biological, and genetic factors.

This is a select list of useful books and resources on autism for people working in education settings:

Recommended Readings:

Early Intervention Games: Fun, Joyful Ways to Develop Social and Motor Skills in Children with Autism Spectrum or Sensory Processing Disorders by Barbara Sher, Jossey-Bass; c2009
ISBN: 0470391266

The Social Skills Picture Book Teaching play, emotion, and communication to Children with Autism by Jed Baker, Future Horizons Inc; c2001 ISBN: 1885477910

The complete guide to Asperger syndrome by Tony Attwood London: Jessica Kingsley. ISBN: 9781843104957.

Useful Websites:

<http://autismcanada.org/aboutautism/diagnoses.html>

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/autism.pdf>

<http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/En/ResourceCentres/AutismSpectrumDisorder/Pages/default.aspx>

<http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/autism/index.htm>

<http://www.autism.com/index.asp>

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/educator.html>