

HOW IS AUTISM DIAGNOSED?

Autism is usually recognized in the first three years of life. Pediatricians, Child psychiatrists and psychologists with experience on autism can diagnose children with autism. However, as autism is a relatively rare but complex condition, it is advisable that a team of professionals perform the diagnosis.

The team should include at least:

- a developmental pediatrician
- a psychologist or psychiatrist
- a speech pathologist

IS HELP AVAILABLE?

Yes! Many resources are available for families of children with autism:

Ministry of Social Services

The Ministry of Social Services offers a package of behavioural and family support services for children with autism. For more information on programs and services in your area, call your local M.S.S. office for Services to People with Mental Handicaps. The number is listed in the Provincial Government Blue Pages of the telephone directory, under Ministry of Social Services.

Autism Society of British Columbia is:

- a non-profit, charitable organization
- A provincial resource of the Ministry of Social Services
- A chapter of Autism Society Canada

Our Mission is:

To promote understanding, acceptance and full community inclusion for people with autism in British Columbia while providing support for the realization of the rights and informed choices of individuals with autism and their families.

Our Mandate is:

To support families by providing:

- Parent Training
- Parent Support Groups
- Parent Support Network
- Crisis Support and Referral
- Lifestyle Services Planning
- Integrated Summer Programs
- Volunteer Buddy Program
- Newsletter
- Resource Library
- Information
- Training Videos

FOR HELP CALL:

Autism Society of British Columbia

(formerly Pacific Association for Autistic Citizens)

1584 Rand Avenue

Vancouver, B.C. V6P 3G2

Telephone: (604) 261-8888

Fax: (604) 261-7898

*Please make note of our new name,
address and phone number.*

Autism is...



- stand-offish manner



- inappropriate laughing or giggling



- echolalic



- no fear of real dangers



- apparent insensitivity to pain



- crying tantrums extreme distress for no discernible reason



- adverse to cuddling



- sustained odd play



- difficulty in mixing with other children



- acts as deaf



- unusual eye contact



- uneven gross/fine motor skills



- spins objects



- inappropriate attachments to objects



- resists normal teaching methods



- resists change in routine



- marked physical overactivity or extreme passivity



- indicates needs by gesture

**A part of our world –
Not a world apart.**

*This brochure was produced with funding from the
Ministry of Social Services.*

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a lifelong disability of the central nervous system that affects social development, language development and is characterized by specific behaviours.

- In the first two years of life, the symptoms are often masked by developmental milestones.
- Symptoms vary from person to person and there is a wide spectrum of severity from mild to very severe.
- It occurs in approximately 15 out of every 10,000 births.
- Autism affects four times more males than females.

WHAT CAUSES AUTISM?

At present, the cause of autism is still unknown. Some research suggests a physical problem affecting areas of the brain that process language and information coming in from the senses. Other research implies an imbalance of certain chemicals in the brain. Genetic factors and viral infections may sometimes be involved. Autism may indeed result from a combination of several causes.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTISM?

Although symptoms have been identified as characteristic of people with autism, not all people display all symptoms. Individuals display different combinations of these symptoms.

1. Severe Delays in Social Development

- Unresponsive to people
- Unresponsive to physical contact
- Little or no appropriate play with toys
- Little or no eye contact
- Prefers to be alone
- Inappropriate laughter and screaming
- Strong, inappropriate attachment to objects

2. Severe Communication Impairment

- Poor understanding of gestures
- Difficulties with abstract concepts
- Lacks comprehension of content and timing of conversation
- Focuses on one topic: *perseveration*
- Echoes what is said: *echolalia*
- Reverses pronouns

3. Atypical Behaviours

- Strong resistance to change in routine
- Self-stimulatory behaviour (rocking, hand flicking, spinning)
- Hyper or hypo sensitivity to sight, taste, smell, touch and hearing
- Unresponsive to words or sounds
- Distressed by certain sounds/noises
- Insensitive to pain
- Unresponsive to cold or heat
- Temper tantrums
- Self-injurious behaviour

4. Early Onset

- Autism occurs in infancy/childhood

5. Learning Deficits

- Difficulty relating learned skills from one environment to another (generalizing)
- Uneven learning patterns (poor skills in some areas, but exceptional abilities in others)

IS THERE A CURE?

Although there is no known cure at this time, worldwide research indicates the best treatment is early, intense intervention. A strong focus on increasing communication skills and promoting integrated education, gives people with autism an opportunity to grow to their fullest potential and be valued members of society.