

Early signs and symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Babies (6 months to one year) may include:

- > Smiling rarely in social situations
- > Unexpected reactions to new faces
- > Little or no eye contact
- > Doesn't respond to their name
- > Doesn't turn their head to locate sound or react to loud sounds
- > Overreacts to sounds
- > Displays a lack of social 'anticipation'. For example, baby doesn't reach out their arms to be picked up, or doesn't seem to understand the game of 'Peek-a-Boo'
- > Doesn't use 'chatter' or 'babble'
- > Doesn't use gestures such as pointing or waving in context
- > Dislikes being cuddled or touched
- > Displays repetitive and unusual body movements

Toddlers up to 24 months may include:

- > Does not speak
- > Only walks on their toes
- > Unable to follow simple verbal instructions
- > Doesn't imitate actions
- > Has an intense interest in certain object and gets 'stuck' on them, such as constantly flicking a light switch
- > May be very interested in 'unusual' objects, such as metal objects
- > Engages in repetitive activities, such as lining up objects

Children up to 36 months may include:

- > Has limited speech
- > Has difficulty understanding simple verbal instructions
- > Has little interest in 'pretend' or 'imaginative' play
- > Shows little interest in other children
- > Likes to follow routine and gets easily upset by change
- > Is extremely sensitive to sensory experiences, such as sight, sound, smell and taste
- > Is under-sensitive to sensory experiences such as hot and cold, touch and pain

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Primary School Age Social Communication Signs

Children on the spectrum will often communicate differently in social situations. These differences may be verbal or non-verbal. For example, your child may:

- Have issues with conversation. They may dominate the conversation or have trouble 'taking it in turns' when talking.
- They may find it difficult to talk about subjects other than those they are interested in.
- Find it hard to read non-verbal social cues, such as body language or tone of voice.
- Have trouble negotiating the unwritten rules of friendship.
- Want to dominate play and have trouble letting others have a go.
- Prefer to hang around with children much younger than themselves, or prefer spending time with adults.
- Be rigid in following rules – both in the classroom and the playground.
- Be confused during conversations. For example, they might take things literally or not comprehend language.
- Have trouble making and using eye contact.
- Use speech in unusual ways. For example, they may speak in a monotone, with an accent, or in a very proper and formal way, or not at all.
- Find it hard to follow anything but a very simple set of instructions with one or two steps.
- Show a limited range facial expressions, mismatched facial expressions, or express few emotions.
- Prefer solo play, rather than joining in with others.
- Have few or no real friends.
- Find the concept of 'personal space' difficult and get physically very close to others.

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Primary School Age Behavioural Signs

Children on the spectrum will often display unique behaviours.

These may include:

- An obsession with unusual hobbies or objects. For example, they may obsessively memorise basketball results, but have no interest in the game itself; or keep mental lists of car registration plates. Or they might collect chewing gum wrappers or want to carry a certain toy around everywhere with them, even as they get older.
- Repetitive behaviour, such as lining up or arranging toys in a certain way.
- Loving routine and getting easily upset when plans change suddenly and routines are not followed.
- Being very sensitive to sensory experiences. For example, they may refuse to wear anything 'scratchy,' hate loud noises or only want to eat foods with a certain texture. Sometimes the child will react violently if they experience sensory 'overload'.
- Being under-responsive to sensory experiences. For example, keeping a jumper on when it's very hot, or not reacting or noticing when pain is experienced, such as a cut.
- Unusual body movements. This could include repeated rocking, hand flapping or hand clapping.
- Unusual noises. Your child might repeatedly squeal, grunt or clear their throat.
- Feeling anxious or upset if they experience a new social situation.
- Unique sleeping patterns. For example, waking up repeatedly at a certain time each night, or staying awake long after they have gone to bed.
- Regularly resisting or refusing to go to school if they feel overwhelmed or upset.

You may recognise many of the traits listed above in your child, or just a few.

Source: www.thespectrum.org.au

For more information contact DPV Health. Call: 1300 234 244