

FACTSHEET

This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

ASD is a developmental disorder. Autism affects the way children communicate and interact with other people. Children with autism often have;

- repetitive behaviours (eg: rocking or hand flapping)
- restricted interests (eg: being obsessed with one thing)
- sensory differences (eg: highly affected by sounds or smells).

Some children with AUTISM have:

- intellectual disabilities ([see factsheet](#))
- learning difficulties, or
- above average cognitive skills.

The word 'spectrum' is used because children with autism share some difficulties. However, autism affects each child in different ways. Some children with autism can care for their everyday activities, while others will need ongoing help.

About 1 in 100 children have autism. Recent research suggests that it may be as many as 1 in 65 children. Boys are about four times more likely to have autism than girls.

What causes autism spectrum disorders?

No one cause of autism has been found. Recent studies suggest that some children with autism have differences in their genes. We still have much to learn.

Autism spectrum:

- is not caused by how children are brought up or parented
- is not the 'fault' of the child with the condition
- is not caused by vaccines and food allergies

Autism is usually present from birth but it may be some time before the signs are recognisable. This is often around the age of 2 years, when children are learning to speak. About 30% of children with autism show signs of loss of language at around this age.

What treatments are there?

To help a child with autism it is important to make a diagnosis as early as possible. There is no known 'cure'. What we do know is that early intervention (speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education and behavioural support) makes a difference. Early intervention can help develop a child's skills, reduce behaviour problems and help each child develop as much independence as possible. Being involved as a parent in the early intervention therapy can help you understand and support your child's development and skills.

Who should I contact for more information?

You know your child better than anyone else. If you have any concern about your child's development or behaviour, it's a good idea to have your child seen early.

Your child's personal health record (the Blue Book) has some useful checklists for development at different ages. Use this as a guide and if you have any concerns you can talk to your early childhood nurse or your family doctor (GP).

Your GP can refer you to a Paediatrician or a specialist diagnostic and assessment service.

There are also organisations that support families affected by autism. Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) has a helpful website www.autismspectrum.org.au

Other services that can be helpful include:

- Autism Advisor Program (NSW): 1300 978 611, website www.autismspectrum.org.au/aap
- Raising Children Network, The Australian parenting website: www.raisingchildren.net.au
- The Positive Partnerships website: www.positivepartnerships.com.au
- Carer's NSW - phone: 9280 4744 www.carersnsw.org.au
- Parent line NSW - phone: 1300 130 052, week days 9am – 9pm, weekends 4pm – 9pm. service run by qualified counsellors for parents of children between 0-18 years. Provides advice or information about appropriate referral services.
- National Disability Insurance Scheme – phone: 1800 800 110, www.ndis.gov.au

Remember:

- Autism affects about 1 in every 100 children.
- Children with autism may have difficulties interacting and communicating with others, and with their play or behaviour.
- The earlier a child is diagnosed with autism, and support is started, the better the outcome for the child.
- See your doctor or early childhood nurse if you have concerns.
- Children with autism are all different, with different strengths and difficulties.
- Support is available.