

Where to Get Help

If your child has not yet seen a doctor and you suspect that he is showing signs of autism, you may raise your concerns with your child's school counsellors. School counsellors are connected to our community mental health service, **REACH** (Response, Early intervention, Assessment in Community mental Health), which can provide further advice and assistance.

If your child is seeking help at our clinic, please raise your concerns with your child's doctor, nurse, or allied health professional.



Department of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

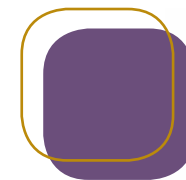
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AUTISM



WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a condition related to brain development and describes a set of symptoms involving difficulties communicating, socialising with others appropriately and engaging in developmentally appropriate behaviours.



Autism is usually diagnosed during early childhood. A child or adolescent with autism typically struggles with social interaction and communication in some or all of the following ways:

- has difficulty starting or responding to social conversation
- lacks initiative to approach or share enjoyment with others
- has difficulty understanding emotions
- often misinterprets social cues
- may be slow in speech development
- may have speech impediments, e.g. echoed or repetitive speech patterns, difficulties using pronouns
- has difficulty using and interpreting non-verbal communication, e.g. gestures, facial expressions and body language

In addition, children or adolescents with autism often have rigid preferences and restricted interests, including:

- complex routines with objects or toys
- inflexibility about these routines, e.g. becoming upset with changes in the routine
- unusually strong attachment to certain objects
- intense liking or dislike of certain textures (e.g. sand, furry surfaces, glue), sounds (e.g. road-drilling, motorised sounds) or visual stimuli (e.g. shiny objects, bright lights)
- intense interest in topics (e.g. maps, dinosaurs, transportation systems and routes) that may exceed the amount of general knowledge typical for someone that age

What causes Autism?

Several factors are thought to contribute to autism, including deficits in brain function, and family and genetic factors. A family history of autism increases the likelihood of your child having symptoms of autism.



MANAGEMENT OF AUTISM

Treatment of children or adolescents with autism involves a combination of methods and ways:

PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPIES AND EDUCATION.

Therapies such as behaviour management and social skills training help the child or adolescent cope better in social situations. Education placement is an important consideration, as certain schools and centres are better equipped and more integrated for the support and management of children or adolescents with autism. Those receiving mainstream schooling may require varying degrees of additional support.

SPECIFIC THERAPIES.

Some children or adolescents with autism might require speech and language therapy, occupational therapy or sensory integration therapy to help them cope with the demands of the environment. The intensity and need for these therapies vary from person to person.

FAMILY SUPPORT. Having a child with autism can be challenging. Family members or support groups can provide emotional help, as well as new information, skills or practical strategies in managing autism.

USE OF MEDICATION.

Medication may be prescribed to help manage other difficulties such as aggression, irritability, tics, anxiety or hyperactivity. Talk to your child's doctor if you have any queries or concerns about medication. Medication should be used in conjunction with and not in place of behaviour management techniques.

You can also help your child by being patient, understanding and supportive. Be encouraging and empathise with his or her challenges. Celebrate all small successes and be positive.

