

as bus or train routes or timetables, or dinosaurs. They may become distressed and strongly resist attempts to change this behaviour. People with autism appear to cope best when their environment is predictable. In day to day activities, many children with autism impose non-functional routines upon themselves and their families e.g. wanting to keep to the same route when going to the shops or eating dinner from the same plate. They may strongly resist attempts to change their routines. Some individuals with autism engage in obvious repetitive motor movements, such as rocking or flapping their hands.

Sensory Difficulties

Varying types of sensory impairments are often seen in individuals with autism, and as a result they may have difficulty understanding their environment and what is going on around them. Over reacting to sensory input, for example sound and tactile stimuli, may cause them to become overwhelmed, resulting in anxiety or panic. Alternatively, some people with autism may under-react to sensory input, tolerating unusually high levels of sensory stimulation, for example pain and temperature.

Adults with autism

Children with autism grow up to be adults with autism, although behaviour and skills may change over time. Independent living is achievable for some individuals with autism. However, many require support and advocacy throughout adult life.

Autism SA Services

- Diagnosis
- Training & Consultancy
- Early Development
- School Support
- Day Options
- Employment Services
- Family Services
- Community Participation
- Respite Services
- Information Services

*For details refer to our
Outline of Services
brochure or website
www.autismsa.org.au*



I wish you knew...

About autism



Info Line: 1300 288 476

Email: admin@autismsa.org.au

Website: www.autismsa.org.au

**Autism Association of South Australia Inc.
trading as 'Autism SA'**

What is autism

Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder. It was first described as a distinct condition by Leo Kanner in the early 1940s. It is one of the Autism Spectrum Disorders, which also includes Asperger syndrome. These disorders are characterised by difficulties in communication, social behaviour, and repetitive or restricted interests and activities. Autism is usually present at birth with characteristics becoming evident within the first three years. Parents are often aware of the early signs in their child's lack of communication, delayed play skills and limited response to other people. While approximately seventy-five percent of people with autism also have an intellectual disability, autism also occurs in people with average and above average IQs.

What is the cause of autism?

Currently there is no known cause of autism. However, research indicates that genetic, biochemical, neurological, viral or problems during pregnancy and birth may be implicated in its development.

How common is autism?

Recent research (Fombonne & Chakarati, 2005) suggests that the best estimate for the prevalence of all Autism Spectrum Disorders is 6 per 1000 people. For autism alone, the research data tends to indicate that at least one in one thousand people have autism (Gillberg & Wing, 1999).

In Australia, one in 160 people have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (Wray 2007) making it one of the most common disabilities. It is more common than Cerebral Palsy, Cystic Fibrosis, Down syndrome, vision impairment and hearing loss.

Can autism be cured?

At present there is no cure for autism. However, early diagnosis followed by a structured program that addresses each individual's needs will assist those with the disorder to lead a meaningful and productive life.

Effects on the family

The knowledge that their child has autism can have a significant effect on families. The upbringing of a child with autism places enormous pressure and strain on parents, brothers and sisters. Social activities and everyday outings can become extremely difficult.

Social Behaviour

Individuals with autism have impairments in their social development and social understanding, and find relating

to people extremely difficult. They will often avoid basic interactions such as eye contact, and are frequently described as being in a world of their own. Social interactions are usually limited due to an inability to grasp the complex rules of everyday social behaviour. They often have difficulty understanding and responding to other people's thoughts and emotions, and can be described as having limited empathy and sympathy.

Communication

The communication impairment in autism is very complex, and affects the whole communication system. This includes understanding and use of speech and non verbal methods of communication such as eye contact and gesture. Most people with autism have a language disorder and do not communicate easily. Some do not speak at all and others simply echo back what is said to them. Those who do have speech often use their language in an odd or repetitive manner. They have little desire to use their language to socially interact with others or have a conversation, but may ask the same question repeatedly or go on and on about the same thing.

Repetitive and restricted interests and other activities

Children with autism usually display limited play skills, and spend much of their time in repetitive activities with which they are often said to be 'obsessed'. Examples of activities are playing with the same toy in the same manner, watching the same video repeatedly, flicking string, or lining up/spinning objects. In higher functioning people this behaviour is reflected in the tendency to amass facts about topics such