

## WHAT IS AUTISM AND AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)?

### *What Is Autism? What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?*

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors. With the May 2013 publication of the DSM-5 diagnostic manual, all autism disorders were merged into one umbrella diagnosis of ASD. Previously, they were recognized as distinct subtypes, including autistic disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger syndrome.

ASD can be associated with intellectual disability, difficulties in motor coordination and attention and physical health issues such as sleep and gastrointestinal disturbances. Some persons with ASD excel in visual skills, music, math and art. Autism appears to have its roots in very early brain development. However, the most obvious signs of autism and symptoms of autism tend to emerge between 2 and 3 years of age.

Each individual with autism is unique. Many of those on the autism spectrum have exceptional abilities in visual skills, music and academic skills. About 40 percent have average to above average intellectual abilities. Indeed, many persons on the spectrum take deserved pride in their distinctive abilities and “atypical” ways of viewing the world. Others with autism have significant disability and are unable to live independently. About 25 percent of individuals with ASD are nonverbal but can learn to communicate using other means.

The above information is taken directly from an article on the Autism Speaks website. Click [here](#) to see this article in its entirety. For more information on diagnosis, symptomology and treatment, please see <https://www.autismspeaks.org/>