



Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) can include Autism, Aspergers Syndrome, Retts Disorder and Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). Children are usually diagnosed with these disorders because they have difficulties in three key areas: **Social interaction, communication and imagination**. Many children with ASDs also have **learning difficulties, sensory sensitivities and digestive tract issues**.

Social interaction

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders can have difficulty:

- Seeing things from other people's perspectives
- Learning the "unwritten rules" of how we interact with each other
- Predicting how their actions might effect other people
- Sharing, taking turns, waiting

Sensory Sensitivities

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders can:

- Be over-sensitive to touch, certain textures, tastes, odours, colours or sounds. This might mean that they cannot eat or wear certain things without a sensation like pain.
- Be under-sensitive to touch, textures, tastes, odours, colours or sounds.

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders are not "dumb", "selfish", "naughty" or "undisciplined." Autism Spectrum Disorders are neurological disorders. This means that they interfere with the way the brain processes information from the outside world. The vast majority of parents are working very hard to help their children understand and follow the unwritten rules that help us behave in ways our society expects.

Communication

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders can have difficulty:

- Understanding the "unwritten rules" of communication
- Making small talk, or using language to interact with other people instead of just for asking for things they want or need, or telling others about their own interests.
- Taking turns, waiting until someone is finished before they speak, staying on topic (especially if it is not their favourite topic).

Social Imagination

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders can have difficulty:

- Pretend play: they tend to imitate or repeat actions or enjoy things like puzzles or construction.
- Being interested in a wide range of things. They can become experts in there area of interest because they become very focused on it.
- Coping with change.

Meltdowns: Perhaps one of the most difficult things for "outsiders" to understand is when a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder has a meltdown. This might involve a child/youth/adult screaming, yelling, crying, falling to the ground, rolling, kicking, flapping their hands, sucking their thumb and/or freezing. In fact, it looks like a "tantrum."

A meltdown can be caused by many things, but most often by change and sensory overload. Unfortunately, this often happens to be when a child taken to new, noisy and/or busy places. And the meltdown may go on until the child adjusts to what is causing them distress, or until they are removed from the environment that is causing them anxiety or pain.

Is the child just being naughty? Would you call a child "naughty" if they were screaming in pain? Would you think of a child as "misbehaving" if they were pushing, flapping, kicking due to fear and anxiety?

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders have skills, interests and the need to belong – just like any other child. They are loved and love others. However, the therapies and educational programs that will help them belong often place great strain on families' financial resources. Their difficulty understanding and coping with our world can also put great strain on families' emotional resources. Find out how you can help by visiting:

<http://www.learn2bebuddies.com.au/pages/autismawareness.html>