

# Autism Spectrum Disorder

By Melanie Perreault

## ETIOLOGY (Autism Speaks, 2021; CDC, 2020; Mayo Clinic, 1998-2021)

- Developmental disability influenced by genetic and environmental factors that impacts how individuals perceive and interact with others
- Severity and symptoms range across a spectrum; includes previously diagnosed conditions, such as Asperger syndrome
- Occurs in individuals of all races and ethnicities; four times more common in males than females
- Diagnosis is based on assessments of a child's behavior and development

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS (CDC, 2020; Mayo Clinic, 1998-2021)

Individuals with ASD have a range of social, emotional, communication, and behavioral problems. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- lack of eye contact
- repetition of words or phrases
- difficulty expressing emotions
- repetitive actions
- trouble relating to others
- avoids physical contact
- prefers to be alone
- delayed speech
- difficulty initiating and maintaining conversation
- speaks with unusual intonation
- difficulty interpreting nonverbal cues
- displays inappropriate behavior in social situations
- doesn't point at objects or look at objects someone points at

## INFORMATION SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO VISUAL IMPAIRMENT (Butchart et al., 2017)

- Higher rates of strabismus and congenital blindness in individuals with ASD than general population
- Individuals with ASD and visual impairments have some similar problems with social interaction and communication as well as exhibit stereotyped and repetitive behavior

## SPECIFIC MODIFICATIONS FOR UNIVERSALLY DESIGNED LESSONS

(Winnick & Porretta, 2017)

- Although individual activities (e.g., swimming, running) have the most potential for success for children with ASD, students should be exposed to a variety of activities, including team sports



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- Consider choosing activities that have family or community interest to increase opportunities for social integration
- Establish daily routines and schedules that can help to increase predictability, reduce sensory stimulation, and lessen the need for verbal instructions
- Decrease sensory overload during class by providing clear and simple explanations of activity parameters (e.g., location, equipment, boundaries)
- Eliminate unnecessary equipment or distractions within the learning environment
- Aid the transition of students back to the classroom with simple cues or forewarning
- Identify and mitigate antecedents to inappropriate behavior rather than using punishment
- Use natural cues from the environment during instruction while minimizing verbal cues
- Use physical guidance when students have difficulty understanding task requirements
- Use the correction procedure rule during instruction - when students make a mistake, have them perform that last action they performed correctly before helping them correct their mistake
- Use action words and verbalize the actions of students during instruction to promote language development
- Utilize reward structures (e.g., token economy, Premack Principle) to aid in behavior management

## SPECIFIC RESOURCES

Autism Speaks: [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

Autism Society: [autismsociety.org](http://autismsociety.org)

## CITATION REFERENCES

Autism Speaks. (2021). What is autism? Retrieved from  
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism>

Butchart, M., Long, J. J., Brown, M., McMillan, A., Bain, J., & Karatzias, T. (2017). Autism and visual impairment: A review of the literature. *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 4(2), 118-131. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40489-016-0101-1>

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Houston-Wilson, C. (2022). Autism spectrum and social communication disorders. In J.P. Winnick & D.L. Porretta (Eds.) *Adapted physical education and sport* (7th ed.) (pp. 197-214). Human Kinetics.

Mayo Clinic. (1998-2021). Autism spectrum disorder. Retrieved from  
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