

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a life-long disability that becomes evident sometime during the first three years of a child's life. Autism is a neurologically based disorder; it affects the way a child communicates, interacts with other people and perceives and reacts to the world.

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Patterns of behavior that are characteristic of autism include impairment of reciprocal social interactions, impaired communication skills, repetitive behaviors and a restricted range of interests. Not all children with autism behave in the same way. Each child might display a different combination of behaviors ranging from mild to severe. This is what is meant by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Five sub-categories of ASD have been defined: Autistic Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD), Asperger's Syndrome (AS), Rett's Syndrome, and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder.

Characteristics of Autism

A child with autism may exhibit one or more of the following characteristics:

- ◆ various levels of delayed communication including impaired language acquisition and comprehension as well as other related difficulties
- ◆ difficulties or differences in understanding social situations and/or relationships
- ◆ responses to sensory information that are unusual, inconsistent, repetitive or unconventional
- ◆ stereotypic or repetitive patterns of behavior; persistent preoccupation with or attachment to objects
- ◆ difficulties in adjusting to change in routines, environments, activities and/or schedules
- ◆ difficulties in abstract thinking involving awareness, judgment and generalization

- ◆ uneven developmental patterns in the acquisition of motor, sensory, social, play or learning skills

What Causes Autism?

The actual causes of autism are still unknown. However, researchers do know that autism is a brain disorder, usually present from birth, which affects the way the brain processes information related to language or the senses. Autism is not a form of mental illness. It is not caused by parenting style or by any other psychological influences in the child's life. Difficult behaviors in children with autism are often due to frustration or misunderstanding caused by sensory, social and/or communication problems. Children with autism are not choosing to behave badly.

What is the Federal Definition of Autism?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines autism as "a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication, and social interactions; [the disorder] is evident 18 months to age 3, [and] adversely affects a child's educational performance."

What is Colorado's Eligibility Criteria?

School districts in Colorado may use the IDEA educational criteria to determine a child's eligibility for special education services. The disability "autism" is a subcategory of physical disability in Colorado and should be indicated as such on the IEP. Therefore, a child identified with any of the five subcategories of ASD would be eligible under state regulations. While

the school district should inform the parents of their choice to seek a medical evaluation, it is not required for determining educational eligibility for special education services.

What Can Families Do If They Have Concerns?

Parents who have concerns about their child's development should contact their local school district. For children birth through five, parents should request an evaluation by contacting their school district's Child Find Coordinator; for evaluation of a school age child, begin by contacting your school's principal.

What are Strategies that are Successful in Providing Instruction for Children with Autism?

The Colorado Department of Education encourages collaborative partnerships with families and professionals in order to meet the wide range of skills and needs of children with autism. CDE does not endorse one specific program or methodology. In order to meet these needs, customized, research-based strategies should be identified and implemented when designing services for each child.

Information/Resources/Websites

Colorado Department of Education,
Special Education Services Unit
201 E. Colfax #300
Denver, CO 80203
303-866-6694
[http:// www.cde.state.co.us/index](http://www.cde.state.co.us/index)

Autism Society of America, Colorado Chapter
5031 W. Quarles Dr.
Littleton, CO 80128
303-978-1440
www.autismcolorado.org/asacchome.htm

Autism Society of the Pikes Peak Region
918 Crown Ridge Dr.
Colorado Springs, CO 80904
719-630-7072

The Autism Society of America (ASA)
7910 Woodmont Ave, Suite 300
Bethesda, Maryland 20814
1-800-3AUTISM
<http://www.autism-society.org>

Autism Research Institute
4182 Adams Avenue
San Diego, CA 92116
619-563-6840
<http://www.autism.com>

CSAAC (Community Services for Autistic Adults and Children)
751 Twinbrook Pkwy
Rockville, Maryland 20851
301-762-1650
<http://www.csaac.org>

Resources for Books and Literature

Autism Resource Network
5123 Westmill Road
Minnetonka, MN 55345
(612) 988-0088
(612) 988-0099 Fax
http://www.fwt4c.com/htm/autism_resource_network.htm

Autism Society of North Carolina
505 Oberlin Road, suite 230
Raleigh, NC 27605-1345
(919) 743-0024
(919) 743-0208 Fax
<http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/>
(Click on Bookstore)