

## AUTISM INFORMATION GUIDE

### PART II

## COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

### Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) refers to three diagnostic categories

- Autism
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)
- Asperger's Disorder

### Children with ASD share the following challenges

- Difficulty communicating with others
- Difficulty socializing & making friends
- Behaviors that are rigid, repetitive and/or unusual

### Common Characteristics of ASD

The following is a list of some of the features that may be present in children with ASD. Please note that no child will have all of the following symptoms. Each child is unique in the number and degree of characteristics that they display:

<b>Social Deficits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Little or no interest in social interaction</li> <li>▪ Has the desire to make friends, but does not know how</li> <li>▪ Can play with others for very short periods of time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prefers adults or much younger children</li> <li>▪ Immature, poor or no play skills</li> <li>▪ Poor understanding of their own or other's emotions</li> </ul>
<b>Odd Voice Patterns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Speaks in a monotone voice</li> <li>▪ Sounds like they are singing rather than talking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Speaks too loud, too quiet, too fast, too slow</li> <li>▪ Tone of voice does not always reflect emotion</li> </ul>
<b>Poor Non-Verbal Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Does not use eye contact to initiate, maintain or terminate social interactions</li> <li>▪ Does not look at what other's are looking at to share their interests</li> <li>▪ Does not use pointing to show interest in objects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Limited use and understanding of facial expressions</li> <li>▪ Lack of/or exaggerated use of gestures</li> </ul>
<b>Language Difficulties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ May have no formal means of communicating</li> <li>▪ Perseverative speech (says the same thing over and over again inappropriately)</li> <li>▪ Uses pedantic language, such as overly formal speech so they sound like a "Little Professor"</li> <li>▪ Repetitive question-asking</li> <li>▪ Dominates conversations / talks at you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unique or immature sense of humor (may not laugh at what other children do, or may find things funny that other's do not)</li> <li>▪ Concrete understanding of language; very literal thinking. May not understand statements such as, "I'm going to fix dinner" because dinner isn't "fixed" it is made or prepared.</li> </ul>

<b>Sensory Dysfunctions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Over-responsiveness to lights, sounds &amp; touch</li> <li>▪ Under-responsiveness to pain &amp; temperature</li> <li>▪ Excessive need for routine</li> <li>▪ Intense interest in a narrow range of topics</li> <li>▪ Inflexible / rigid in following rules</li> <li>▪ Needs order and routine</li> <li>▪ Can be perfectionistic</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of Theory of Mind</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cannot “think about thinking” or “mind-read”</li> <li>▪ Cannot take another’s perspective</li> <li>▪ Does not understand that other people have different thoughts, desires and experiences.</li> <li>▪ Does not understand that other people have unique feelings</li> <li>▪ Cannot figure out how other people may feel or react in a situation. The child may assume that because he like planets, everyone likes planets and therefore will talk about planets to any one, any time, anywhere</li> </ul>
<b>Executive Functioning Deficit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Difficulty with problem solving or planning how to achieve a tasks or goal.</li> <li>▪ This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Poor hypothesis testing (can’t think of different solutions to solve a problem)</li> <li>– Poor planning skills (time management)</li> <li>– Poor organizational skills (getting materials ready to go home)</li> </ul> </li> <li>– Inability to self-monitor (being aware of own states, such as inattention, and knowing how to change them)</li> <li>– Inability to inhibit a thought (says whatever is on his/her mind)</li> <li>– Difficulty with behavioral flexibility (rigid behaviors that are difficult to change)</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of Central Coherence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inability to see “the whole picture” or get the gist of something. This difficulty leads to:</li> <li>▪ A need for sameness or routine</li> <li>▪ Difficulty being able to learn from models (observational learning)</li> </ul>
<b>Motor Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Repetitive motor movements</li> <li>▪ Clumsiness</li> <li>▪ Poor fine motor skills, such as writing</li> </ul>

### Comparing Autism to Asperger’s Disorder

#### AUTISM

- Symptoms evident by at least 30 months of age
- Show restricted social interest/ initiative
- Delayed/deviant language development
- IQ tests often show higher non-verbal than verbal skills
- Good gross motor skills

#### ASPERGER’S DISORDER

- Symptoms often not identified until 5 years of age or later
- Displays social desire, but often unsuccessful in social interactions
- Language development is advanced, but communication is often unusual in tone, content and presentation
- IQ test tend to show higher verbal than non-verbal skills
- Poor gross motor skills