

# What is autism?

## There is no one presentation of autism...

Autism is a neurological, developmental difference that changes the way the person relates to the environment and people around them.

Put simply, autism changes the way a person's brain, which changes the way that person sees, experiences, and understands the world.

The way a person experiences the world is not wrong or less, just different.

## Terminology

You may hear people say they have autism, are autistic or that they are on the spectrum. All of these terms mean the same as the clinical term: Autism Spectrum Disorder. Which of these terms you use to refer to your child's diagnosis is your child and your choice.

The word spectrum is used to indicate that there is not one way that autism can be experienced. This means that while people on the spectrum share common characteristics, no two people with autism have the same experience of being autistic.

## Common strengths and challenges

Some of the common strengths identified in people on the autism spectrum are:

- noticing details in their world that others often miss
- being logical and factual thinkers
- enjoying and following routines and structure
- seeing things from a different perspective.

There are also challenges that people on the autism spectrum can face, these can include:

- difficulties in communicating their needs and wants to others
- social interaction and interpreting other people's behaviour
- processing sensory information, or
- learning academic and functional skills.

## What are the characteristics of autism?

Age, gender and cognitive ability can have an impact on how the signs or characteristics of autism present in different people.

For more information on visuals please visit <https://thespectrum.org.au/autism/>

## Social communication and social interaction

Differences or challenges relating to language and social communication and social interaction are part of autism.

If your child is on the spectrum they may:

- find using and understanding verbal language and non-verbal language difficult
- have trouble socialising, including making and keeping friends, and
- find it confusing to understand what others like, don't like and need.

## Repetitive or restricted behaviour, interests or activities

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities are a part of autism.

If your child is on the autism spectrum they may:

- enjoy routine and predictability
- focus on a specific area of interest, or follow a particular passion
- make repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
- Like things being the same and following routine, or
- Be perceived as over or under reactive to sensory information – sight, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and movement.

## Everyday impact of autism on a person

The spectrum can vary a lot, from people who have significant difficulties with learning and have limited speech, to those who have developed a range of functional skills to support their everyday life.

How, when and how well people on the spectrum learn, will vary from individual to individual. You may even notice that skills and abilities can change from day to day or week to week. But all individuals on the spectrum are able to learn.