

## WHAT IS AUTISM?

- Autism is a treatable neurological spectrum disorder which affects 1 in 166 children, youth, and adults in BC today. Studies show that 48% of those who receive early intensive science based intervention for autism may recover and become indistinguishable from their peers. The remaining 52% of those treated significantly improve their condition and functioning level.
- Autism is a spectrum disorder, which is four times more common in boys than in girls, and usually appears during the first three years of life.
- Autism spectrum disorder is a neurological condition affecting brain development and includes abnormal responses to sensory input, affecting any one or a combination of sight, hearing, touch, balance, smell, taste, and reaction to pain.
- Speech and language may be absent or delayed and cognitive abilities may be affected causing the person with autism spectrum disorder to relate in abnormal ways to people, objects, and events.
- Intensive early intervention for young children with autism spectrum disorder has been demonstrated to be effective in helping them learn to communicate appropriately and to be included meaningfully in daily living.
- School age children and their parents benefit from behavioral and skills support services including community supports, and with this help as children, an increasing number of adults with autism spectrum disorder may be able to live independently.

## HOW IS AUTISM DIAGNOSED?

Please know that you are the greatest advocate your child will ever have – early diagnosis followed by effective intensive intervention is critical to your child's outcome!

The medical diagnostic tests for autism include the DSM-IV and the CHAT screening tool.

For children over 6:

The Government standards and funding guidelines indicate that a SINGLE qualified specialist needs to complete the form. The choice of professionals (known for short as QS, "Qualified Specialist"), must be

one of the following disciplines:

1. pediatrician (or pediatric neurologist – a pediatrician who has specialized study in neurology, not an adult neurologist)
2. registered psychologist
3. psychiatrist

The QS is the only professional required to make the diagnosis. He or she might require consultation with other disciplines as required but this is not a requirement.

For preschoolers:

The qualified specialist must have consulted with each of the following:

1. a registered psychologist; and
2. a pediatrician; and possibly
3. a speech pathologist

(Psychologists and pediatricians will have dual roles: performing their unique specialized exams plus formulating the diagnosis.)

Accepted diagnostic tests must be:

- ADI-R and CARS in combination; OR
- ADOS and CARS combination

The QS must consult these other professionals; it is not a requirement that they each provide a diagnosis of Autism. Rather each must offer an opinion around their specialty of service. For example all the pediatrician might have to do is rule out other health issues. They don't have to offer an opinion on Autism. The professionals do not have to agree. The QS is responsible for weighing the evidence of the other consultants and using professional judgment to make a diagnosis.

Occupational therapy is not required for diagnosis and may not be substituted for speech Pathology. Family doctors can not make a diagnosis, although typically they (or a pediatrician) are responsible for initiating the referral.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTISM

People with autism will have some of the characteristics from each of the categories below.

### 1. Communication Impairment

- Speech is absent or delayed; poor use & understanding of gestures; difficulty with abstract concepts; may say "you" instead of "I" – *reverse pronouns*

- Language is unusual and repetitive; focus on one topic – *perseveration*; repetition of what others say – *echolalia*; made up words
- Conversations are difficult for them to initiate and/or sustain
- Make-believe play is absent or limited

### 2. Delays in Social Interaction

- Social cues such as eye contact, facial expressions, body language and gestures are difficult for them to use and understand
- Relationships with peers don't develop or maintain; may appear to prefer to be alone
- Sharing enjoyment or interests with others by showing or pointing out things is absent or delayed
- Appreciation of other's point of view may be absent

### 3. Atypical Behaviors

- One or just a few interests or activities may be repeated over and over; may do activity repetitively or may talk about one topic in a *preoccupied way*
- Routines or rituals may be rigidly followed: changes in routines or surroundings may cause distress
- Flapping hands, rocking, spinning, and other body movements may be repeated – *stereotypic or self stimulatory behavior*
- Attachment or preoccupation with objects or parts of objects

### 4. Early Onset – By age 3

### 5. Related Characteristics

- Certain sights, tastes, smells, touch, or sounds may cause an exaggerated reaction: upset by certain sounds, foods, or being touched; fascinated with lights
- May appear to be deaf when spoken to, yet hear some sounds at other times
- Injuries, extreme cold or heat may cause little or no reaction
- Temper tantrums may occur without warning
- May eat only a few foods
- May sleep very little
- Dangerous situations may not cause fear
- Self injurious behaviors may be present

**AUTISM SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**  
SUITE 303 – 3701 EAST HASTINGS STREET  
BURNABY, BC V5C 2H6

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City / Prov.: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

**MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES**

- \$5.00 (Adult Client)
- \$5.00 (Student/Low Income)
- \$25.00 (Family)
- \$25.00 (Professional)
- \$100.00 (Corporation / Associate)
- \$500.00 (Life)
- Donation (Optional)

**FOR OFFICE USE:**

Date Received: \_\_\_\_\_

Card & Receipt Issued: \_\_\_\_\_

Q & A: \_\_\_\_\_

**Autism Society of British Columbia is:**

- a non-profit, charitable organization
- a provincial resource
- a member of The Autism Society of Canada

**Our Mission is:**

To promote understanding, acceptance, and full community inclusion for people with autism in British Columbia while providing support for the realization of the rights and informed choices of individuals with autism and their families.

We support families by providing:

- Parent Support Groups
- Parent Support Network
- Support and Referral
- Summer Reimbursement Program
- On-Line Newsletter
- Resource Library
- Information
- Training Videos
- Workshops and Seminars
- Offices in Nanaimo, Prince George & Burnaby
- Online Information and Support

**Autism Society of BC**

#303 – 3701 E. Hastings St.  
Burnaby, BC V5C 2H6  
Tel: (604) 434-0880 Fax: (604) 434-0801  
Toll Free: 1 -888-437-0880  
Website: <http://www.autismbc.ca>

BN Charities No. 107810046RR0001

Autism Society of BC is funded by

- Membership
- Donors like you!

---

# What is Autism?

---



---

## A Simple Guide:

What is it?

How is it diagnosed?

And what to look for.