
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism Spectrum Disorder is characterised by persistent difficulties in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, including difficulties in social reciprocity, non-verbal communicative behaviours used for social interaction, and skills in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships. In addition to the social communication difficulties, restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities are also present. Given the possible variation symptoms and behaviour over time (i.e., difference in presentation over child's development/behaviour may be masked/compensated for by a change in the way in which a family copes with various behaviours), the diagnostic criteria may be met based upon historical information, although the current presentation must cause significant impairment.

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder:

- May experience difficulty in social-emotional reciprocity, such as their ability to engage with others meaningfully and share thoughts and feelings.
- May experience difficulty in social communicative behaviours used to communicate, such as atypical use of eye contact, gestures, facial expressions or speech intonation.
- Difficulties or deficits in initiating social interactions, including developing, maintaining and understanding relationships. This may include a reduced social interest (i.e., not interested in peers and/or preference for solitary play).
- May exhibit stereotyped or repetitive behaviours, which may include simple motor stereotypes, repetitive use of objects and repetitive speech.
- May demonstrate an excessive adherence to routine/s and restricted patterns of behaviour.
- May have a highly restricted and fixated interest (abnormal in intensity and focus, preoccupying the child for a lot of their time).
- May exhibit a hypo- or hyper- sensitivity to sensory stimuli (extreme responses to specific sensory input).

Booking an assessment to determine whether your child has ASD:

A diagnosis of ASD is made on the basis of clinical assessment. Clinicians will utilise careful observation of behaviour supported by a range of screening and diagnostic tools to determine whether a child's difficulties are related to ASD, or are better described by another condition.

Assessment will typically include the following steps:

- Collation of a developmental history, including interviews with both the individual and their family (depending on the age of the individual) and a review of the available case history information to date, including information from previous assessments (particularly medical history).
- Screening and formal assessment of differential diagnoses and comorbid conditions, including the review of previous assessments of developmental abilities, strengths and needs
- Standardised semi-structured play/interaction assessment, which may additionally include observation of the parent/child interaction (for children)
- Psychometric assessment of intellectual functioning (if not recently conducted), or informal assessment if a formal assessment is not possible.
- Standardised assessment of adaptive functioning (daily functioning/functional impairment assessment)

-
- Observation of the individual in the home, educational or broader social setting (if required to make diagnosis), for the detailed analysis of the presenting behavioural concerns.
 - Interviewing and input from other service providers (e.g., teachers/childcare staff)
 - Formal assessment from other allied health providers as required (e.g., speech pathology for speech and language assessment, occupational therapist for functional assessment).
 - Seeking out alternative explanations for the individual's presenting behaviours and concerns, including, but not restricted to, alternative medical and developmental diagnoses.

There are various psychiatric, developmental and medical disorders with symptoms similar to those of ASD. Such conditions should be considered when assessing for ASD, as they can co-exist with (i.e., comorbid conditions), and exist independently of ASD (i.e., differential diagnoses). Careful consideration of differential and comorbid conditions is required at all stages of assessment and treatment of individuals with ASD.

Where can I find more information? (Click for each link)

- [ASPECT Autism Spectrum Australia](#)
- [Autism Awareness Australia](#)
- [Autism Community Network](#) (Central Coast)
- [Autism CRC Knowledge Centre](#)
- [Autism Launchpad](#)
- [Autism Science Foundation](#)

Autism CRC Practice Guide: A National Guideline for Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder in Australia (Click [here](#) for link)



A National Guideline for the
Assessment and Diagnosis of
Autism Spectrum Disorders
in Australia

Full National Guideline

Prof Andrew Whitehouse, Dr Kiah Evans, Prof Vasamma Eapen
and A/Prof John Wray

