

**OREGON STATEWIDE CONSULTATIVE AND RESOURCE SERVICES FOR ASD**

**FACT SHEET: AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS**

An Autism Spectrum Disorder is a life-long disability generally evident before age three. It is a neurologically based disorder that affects the way a child communicates, interacts with other people, and perceives and interacts with the world. It impacts the way a child processes, organizes, and integrates information.

**What are the Early Warning Signs of an Autism Spectrum Disorder?**

Early Warning Signs: Brock 2006

* No big smiles or other joyful expressions by 6 months
* No back-and-forth sharing of sounds, smiles, or facial expressions by 9 months
* No back and forth gestures, such as pointing, showing, reaching, or waving bye-bye by 12 months
* No babbling at 12 months
* No single words at 16 months
* Any loss of any language or social skill at any age
* No 2-word spontaneous (non-echolalic) phrases by 24 months
* Failure to attend to human voice by 24 months
* Failure to look at face and eyes of others by 24 months
* Failure to orient to name by 24 months
* Failure to demonstrate interest in other children by 24 months
* Failure to imitate by 24 months

**What is Oregon’s Educational Definition of an Autism Spectrum Disorder?**

Autism Spectrum Disorder means a developmental disability affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Other characteristics that may be associated with ASD are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experience. Essential features are typically but not necessarily manifested before age three.

Communication differences and repetitive behaviors may also be found in other disorders. It is the differences in social functioning and understanding that often separate ASD from other diagnostics categories and disability areas.

**What Characteristics are Associated with an Autism Spectrum Disorder?**

A child with autism spectrum disorder may show characteristics in a wide variety of combinations ranging from mild to severe. It is the combination or pattern of behavior and the intensity and the persistence of the behavior that goes beyond normal development that are associated with ASD. The characteristics are present regardless of the child’s level of functioning. Evidence of some of the listed characteristics in each of the following four areas must be present:

1. Impairment in social interaction, marked impairment in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interaction
   * + Failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level
     + A lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people (e.g., by a lack of showing, bringing, or pointing out objects of interest)
     + Lack of social or emotional reciprocity
     + Delay or abnormal functioning in symbolic or imaginative play
2. Impairments in communication as exhibited by one or more of the following:
   * + Delay in, or total lack of, the development of spoken language (not accompanied by an attempt to compensate through alternative modes of communication such as gesture or mime)
     + In individuals with adequate speech, marked impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others
     + Stereotyped and repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language
     + Lack of varied, spontaneous make-believe play or social imitative play appropriate to developmental level
3. Restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities, as exhibited by one or more of the following:
   * + Encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus
     + Apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals
     + Stereotyped and repetitive motor manners (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)
     + Persistent preoccupation with parts of objects
4. Associated sensory characteristics (not necessary for medical diagnosis but required for educational eligibility):
   * Hypersensitivity (over) – responds in an unusual manner to sounds, taste, pain, light, color, touch, temperature, smells
   * Hyposensitivity (under) – responds in an unusual manner to sounds, taste, pain, light, color, touch, temperature, smells
   * Seeks activities that provide touch, pressure, movement
   * Avoids activities that provide touch, pressure, movement

**What Causes Autism Spectrum Disorders?**

The actual causes of ASD are still unknown. However, researchers do know that ASD is a brain disorder, usually present from birth, which affects the way the brain processes information related to language, social, or the senses. Autism is not a form of mental illness. It is not caused by parenting style or environmental influences in the child’s life. Difficult behaviors in children with ASD are often due to frustration or misunderstanding caused by sensory, social and/or communication problems. Children with ASD are not purposely behaving badly but often may act out as a result of their confusion.

**Is There a Difference Between a Medical Diagnosis and Educational Eligibility in Oregon**?

There currently is no medical test to determine ASD. A medical diagnosis is based on criteria listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association. School districts in Oregon are required to use educational criteria listed in the Oregon Administrative Rules, to determine a child’s eligibility for special education services. Both a medical diagnosis and an educational eligibility are determined by the presence of specific behavioral characteristics associated with ASD.

Educational eligibility must determine that a child exhibits characteristics of an ASD, demonstrates that the characteristics of ASD impact the learning of the child in the education setting, and the child needs specially designed instruction. Educational eligibility is made by a team of professionals, including the parent. A medical or health assessment statement is required as part of the educational eligibility process. The purpose of the statement is to assist the team in determining if there are any physical or sensory factors that may affect the child’s performance in addition to /or rather than the ASD.

A medical diagnosis (e.g. completed by a medical provider, clinical psychologist) determines that the child exhibits the characteristics associated with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. A medical diagnosis is not required to determine educational eligibility for ASD. A medical diagnosis may provide significant information about the characteristics the child demonstrates. A medical provider may participate as part of the educational team, determining educational eligibility.

**What Can You Expect as Part of Your Child’s Educational Evaluation?**

Educational eligibility, as a student with an Autism spectrum Disorder, is identified by behavior characteristics associated with ASD. The evaluation includes:

* A Profile of the child’s development
* Behavioral observations, over different days, in different settings
* Direct interactions with the child
* Assessment of communication
* Medical/Health assessment
* Other educational/development assessments
* Completion of an autism rating scale

**What Can Families Do If They Have Concerns about Their Child’s Development?**

In Oregon, for children from birth through age five, parents should contact their local Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education Program. For a school age child, parents should contact their local school district and/or the Regional Program serving students with an ASD.

**Where Can I Obtain Additional Information on Autism Spectrum Disorders?**

There are a variety of approaches, strategies, and interventions determined to be helpful in addressing the individual needs of children with ASD. The resources listed below are provided as a place to begin obtaining information. It is not an endorsement of any program, service, or professional.

**Oregon Department of Education Northwest Regional Education Service District**

**Regional Programs ASD services**

255 Capitol Street NE 5825 NE Ray Cir.

Salem, OR 97310-0203 Hillsboro, OR 97124

http:// [www.ode.state.or.us](http://www.ode.state.or.us) www.nwresd.org

**Statewide Consultative and Resource Services for ASD**

**Autism Spectrum Disorder Statewide Library**

<http://library.nwtoolbox.org/common/welcome.jsp?site=403&context=nwresd>

Resources are available for checkout:

Contact Emma Stotler

503-614-1750

NWRESD Library/Equipment Center

5825 NE Ray Circle

Hillsboro, OR 97124

**National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**  
Science Writing, Press, and Dissemination Branch  
6001 Executive Boulevard, Room 8184, MSC 9663  
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663  
1-866-615-6464 (toll-free)  
1-866-415-8051 (TTY toll-free)

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/autism/complete-publication.shtml>

**The Autism Society of America (ASA) National Autism Center**

7910 Woodmont AVE, Suite 300 41 Pacella Park Drive

Bethesda, MD 20814-3067 Randolf, MA 02368

<http://www.autism-society.org> 877-313-3833

http://www.nationalautismcenter.org/

**Organization for Autism Research (OAR)**

2000 North 14th Street, Suite 480

Arlington, VA 22201

703.243.9710

<http://www.researchautism.org>