

## AUTISM INFORMATION GUIDE

### PART 1

## UNDERSTANDING AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

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**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>

## California Autism Statistics

- Between 1998 and 2002, there was a 634% increase in people with classical autism being served by the California Department of Developmental Services.
- The increase in California of other ASD's, such as Asperger's Disorder or PDD-NOS has shown an even more dramatic increase of 3,081% from 1984 to 2002.
- In December of 1998, the total number of persons with autism in California's Developmental Services System was 10,360. By December of 2002, the number of person's with autism in California had reached 20,377.
- In 2001, the US Department of Education reported a 558% increase in the number of students with autism attending schools in California.
- When looking for what may be causing the increase in autism in California, Robert Byrd of UC Davis/MIND Institute reported that it could not be attributed to expanding the definition of autism or a change in the diagnostic criteria; the design of better diagnostic tools; or by families of children with autism migrating to California to access services.

## Early Intervention

Early Intervention is the key to enabling children with autism to achieve their fullest potential. Intervention during the time that the brain displays the most plasticity affords the opportunity to "rewire" the brain often resulting in the children being able to make significant gains in many areas.

- As more and more children are being diagnosed at younger ages, there is a greater demand for intensive early intervention services, particularly for those children who receive the diagnosis under the age of three.
- Research has shown that some very young children with autism, who receive intensive early intervention, may require significantly less intervention when they are school-aged. Thus, early diagnosis and intervention can make the most critical difference in a child's long-term prognosis.

## Diagnosis

- Autism is diagnosed by neurologists, psychiatrists, developmental pediatricians, psychologists or other mental health professionals.
- The diagnosis is made based on the child's developmental history and clinical assessment.
- There is no single assessment to determine if a child has any form of autism, the most reliable diagnostic tool is the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS).

## About The Help Group

Founded in 1975, The Help Group is the largest, most innovative and comprehensive nonprofit organization of its kind serving children with special needs related to autism, Asperger's disorder, learning disabilities, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, mental retardation, abuse and emotional problems. Its six specialized day schools offer pre-K through high school programs for more than 1,100 students on a daily basis. Its wide range of mental health and therapy services, child abuse, foster family and residential programs extend the organization's reach to more than 5,000 children and their families each year. The Help Group's state-of-the-art schools and programs are operated by its more than 700 employees on four major campuses in the Los Angeles area. The Group is inspired by its belief that dignity, hope, opportunity and love are the birthrights of all children.

For more information about the work of The Help Group, please call 818-779-5212 or visit [www.thehelpgroup.org](http://www.thehelpgroup.org).