

# Autism Spectrum Disorder

**An Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong disorder that affects a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. ASD includes Autism, Asperger Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified and other disorders. Each child and adult with an ASD is unique and has their own strengths, gifts and support needs.**

## What are the features associated with Autism?

ASD is distinguished by severe impairments in communication and social interactions, a restricted range of interests and activities and stereotyped behaviours. The symptoms of autism may be present from birth, but they may not be noticed until a child is two or three, when language normally develops.

These neurological characteristics are common to all ASD's but symptoms can vary widely among individuals depending on their developmental level and may change over time. Features frequently seen include self-injurious behaviour, aggression, hyperactivity and short attention span. People often experience sensory processing difficulties and anxiety. They may have unusual responses to sensory stimulation, such as high tolerance for pain, over or under-reaction to sounds, oversensitivity to being touched, or a fascination of lights and shiny objects. There may be an unemotional or an inappropriate reaction to the surrounding circumstance.

Other features associated with the disorder may include difficulties in eating, sleeping or toileting, unusual fears, learning problems, repetitive behaviours, self injury and peculiar response to sensory input. Approximately 75% to 95% of people with autism have a cognitive impairment.

## Prevalence

The incidence of an Autism Spectrum Disorder is now being documented at less than 1 in 100 of the population and is four times more common in boys than it is in girls. It occurs in all races, social and economic conditions globally. There are several theories, but no conclusive answer as to the cause(s).

## The Autism Spectrum Asperger Syndrome

People diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome usually demonstrate normal language and cognitive development (onset of speech may be slightly delayed). Social impairments are evident but more subtle than those displayed by people with autism. Many individuals with Asperger Syndrome have a superior ability to focus on a favourite activity or area of interest for hours, have extensive knowledge of a specific interest and may therefore achieve major accomplishments.

### 🌀 Childhood Disintegrative Disorder

Childhood disintegrative disorder is a condition in which children develop normally until age 3 or 4, but then demonstrate a severe loss of social, communication and other skills. It is far less common than autism. Autism typically occurs at an earlier age than childhood disintegrative disorder.

### 🌀 Rett Syndrome

Rett Syndrome is a neurological condition that has been reported almost solely in girls. The onset and severity of different symptoms may vary. The child is generally apparently healthy at birth, and shows relatively normal development until 6-18 months of life, when there is a slowing down or loss of skills. A period of regression then follows in which communications skills are lost along with the loss of the purposeful use of hands and a slowing of the normal rate of head growth. Stereotypical hand movements and gait disturbances are noted, as well, a possibility of curvature of the spine and seizures.

### 🌀 P.D.D.

Pervasive Developmental Disorders are characterized by severe and pervasive impairments in several areas of development: reciprocal social interaction skills, communication skills or the presence of stereotyped behaviour, interests and activities. Although the complex of symptoms is comparable to that of autism, there are fewer symptoms displayed and the severity of their expression is milder.

### 🌀 P.D.D. N.O.S.

The category of Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified is used when the child exhibits impairment in the development of social interaction, or verbal and non-verbal communication or when stereotyped behaviour or activities are present but the criteria for any specific pervasive developmental disorder is not met.

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# Frequently Asked Questions

## Q. What causes Autism?

A. A single specific cause of Autism is not known. Biological or neurological differences in the brain are linked to Autism. Neurofibromatosis, Tuberous Sclerosis and Fragile X Syndrome are medical conditions placing children at risk for developing Autism. One thing that we do know is that autism is NOT caused by deficient parenting, which was put forth as a theory when first recognized as a distinct disability.

## Q. Are there disorders that can mimic Autism?

A. Several disorders look similar to Autism:

- ☞ Deafness in children
- ☞ Children with Developmental Language Disorder or Semantic-Pragmatic Disorder
- ☞ Landau-Kleffner Syndrome, or Acquired Aphasia with Epilepsy

## Q. At what age can ASD be diagnosed?

A. Diagnosis often occurs between the ages of 18 to 30 months when parents notice an absence or a delay in speech development and a lack of normal interest in others or a regression of early speech and sociability.

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## Q. How is the diagnosis of ASD made?

A. Diagnosis is based on the child's developmental history in areas such as speech, communication, social and play interaction provided by those who know the child well. A multi-disciplinary team which may include the family doctor, psychologist, speech and language pathologist and an audiologist will provide further assessment. A diagnosis requires impairments in all of the following areas of development: Communication, social interaction, restricted repertoire of activities and interests. Other features associated include: difficulties in eating, sleeping or toileting, unusual fears, learning problems, repetitive behaviours, self injury and peculiar response to sensory input.

## Q. Where can I get a diagnosis?

A. Speak to your family doctor, who can refer you to a local specialist or clinic.

## Q. Should my non-speaking child with Autism use some other form of communication?

A. Between 40% and 50% of children with Autism do not use functional language, so alternative forms of communication give the child a means to communicate. These include sign language, pictures, communication boards, written words and devices programmed to emit recorded speech when activated. Current technological advances, using devices such as iPods with appropriate apps downloaded and with training, have been used with great success.

## Q. How do you treat Autism?

A. There is, at present, no cure for Autism. Although many kinds of intervention have been suggested, the best ones incorporate early and intensive treatment, build a relationship with the child, help parents relate to the child, use behavioural methods and utilize speech and language therapy.

## Q. What about medication for Autism?

A. Medication cannot cure Autism, and no one medication is recommended for individuals with Autism. However, medications can help with specific target symptoms associated with Autism, such as aggression towards self or others.

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## SERVICES FOR ASD IN YORK REGION

This is not an exhaustive list of services for all ASDs. Services available to individuals with Asperger Syndrome or PDD – NOS are identified where possible. Please be aware that not all ASD needs are presently met by the non-profit sector.

### **Autism Society Ontario - York Region Chapter**

Information, education, advocacy, self-help group with linkages to agencies for families living with ASDs. Eight-week summer camp for school-aged children and youth living with ASD

[www.autismontario.com/York](http://www.autismontario.com/York), Richmond Hill – (905) 780-1590

[www.durham@autismontario.com](mailto:www.durham@autismontario.com) Whitby - 905-432-5092

Toronto – 416-246-9592

### **Children's Treatment Network of Simcoe York- 1-877-719-4795**

Helps coordinate care for children and youth with multiple disabilities. Provides services in the areas of Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, Augmentative Communication and Developmental Assessment.

[www.ctn-simcoeyork.ca](http://www.ctn-simcoeyork.ca)

York Region Local – 905-773-4779

Simcoe County Local – 705-719-4795

### **Christian Horizons, Huntsville - (705) 789-1725**

Residential accommodation for individuals with developmental disabilities/autism

[www.christian-horizons.org](http://www.christian-horizons.org)

### **Geneva Centre for Autism, Toronto – (416) 322-7877**

Respite, social skills group, early intervention, parent education and support, behaviour and communication consultation, school-to-work supports for individuals, families and professionals who love or work with someone with ASD

[www.autism.net](http://www.autism.net)

### **Giant Steps, Toronto, Vaughan – (905) 881-3104**

Integrated program of academics and therapies to provide coping strategies for elementary school children with ASD to assimilate into their home school program

[www.giantstepstoronto.ca](http://www.giantstepstoronto.ca)

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**☞ Kerry's Place Autism Services – Central East Region, Aurora – (905) 713-6808**

Supports for children, adolescents and adults with autism to address social, educational, vocational and developmental needs. Parent/mediator training, program planning and case management for children/adolescents with autism who live at home. Specialized residential services and community outreach program for adolescents and adults

[www.kerrysplace.org](http://www.kerrysplace.org)

**☞ Kinark Child and Family Services – 1-888-454-6275**

Kinark's Central East Autism Program provides Intensive Behaviour Intervention to families who qualify under the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' Autism Intervention Program Guidelines

[www.kinark.on.ca](http://www.kinark.on.ca)

**☞ Reena, Thornhill – (905) 889-6484**

Provides family support, day and evening programs, residential services and respite to individuals with a developmental disability, including ASD, within the framework of the Jewish culture

[www.reena.org](http://www.reena.org)

**☞ Shining Through Centre for Children with Autism, Woodbridge – (905) 851-7955**

One-to-one Intensive Behavioural Intervention for children with ASD

[www.shiningthrough.ca](http://www.shiningthrough.ca)

**☞ Under the Banyan Tree Centre for the Developmentally Disabled, Markham – (905) 947-0036**

Services include therapy group for children less than six years of age with ASD

[www.underthebanyantree.ca](http://www.underthebanyantree.ca)

**York Support Services Network, Newmarket – 1-866-257-9776**

Service coordination, time limited support to address urgent needs and case management for individuals with mental illness or developmental disabilities, including ASD

[www.yssn.ca](http://www.yssn.ca)

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## FEE-FOR-SERVICES FOR ASD IN YORK REGION

The service plan of some individuals with ASD needs that cannot be addressed by the non-profit sector can be augmented by the purchase of specialized services. These are some of the providers who charge a fee for provision of at least some of their services for ASDs. Some of these organizations also provide services for people with needs outside of ASD.

### 🌀 **Bartimaeus Inc. – York / Durham Region - 905-213-7944**

**Simcoe County – 705-431-2999**

Home/Community Care Support complements existing services being provided to individuals and their families. Family respite and child/youth support to families also provided

[www.bartimaeus.com](http://www.bartimaeus.com)

### 🌀 **Camp Green Acres, Markham – (905) 887-1400**

Offers specialty day camp programs

[www.campgreenacres.com](http://www.campgreenacres.com)

### 🌀 **Camp Winston, Richmond Hill – (416) 487-6229**

A residential recreational summer program for campers with ASD or other needs. Behaviour management, skills workshops and weekend retreats also provided.

[www.campwinston.com](http://www.campwinston.com)

### 🌀 **Kerry's Place Autism Services, Aurora – 905-841-6611, Durham – 905-579-2720**

Provides community outreach, overnight and day programs, respite, residential planning, life skills training, recreational skill development and social, vocational and crisis supports for people with ASD

[www.kerrysplace.com](http://www.kerrysplace.com)

### 🌀 **Leaps & Bounds, Richmond Hill – (905) 508-6543**

Programs target behavioural management, sensory processing techniques, auditory and visual skills, life skills, training, play skills, language and social communication, pre-academic and academic instruction, and gross and fine motor skills for people with ASD and other needs

[www.leapsandboundsservices.com](http://www.leapsandboundsservices.com)

### **Sports & Recreation Club through Giant Steps, Vaughan – (905) 881-3104**

Provides sports and recreational skills programs for children 4-14 years of age with ASD

[www.giantstepstoronto.ca](http://www.giantstepstoronto.ca)

*Disclaimer: Although every reasonable effort is made to present current and accurate information, being listed does not indicate that the service is recommended or endorsed by York Support Services Network (YSSN) or the Developmental Services Ontario Central East Region (DSO CER). As this information is created and maintained by a variety of sources both internal and external, we would like to recommend that you contact the organizations directly, as information can change periodically without notice.*

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