

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Sabine Falls, Ph.D.
Clinical Psychologist
ACCESS Group, Inc.

www.AccessGroupInc.org

Pervasive Developmental Disorders

- Autism
- Asperger's Disorder
- Rett's Disorder
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder-NOS

Characteristics

- Significant impairment in several areas of development
 - Social interaction and relationships
 - Communication
 - Restricted, repetitive and stereotyped interests and behaviors

Characteristics

- There is a big variation among children with Autism
 - Severity
 - Cognitive skills
 - Adaptive skills
 - Verbal abilities
 - Other skills

Characteristics

- Autism is evident in the first years of life
- Diagnostic age
 - Under the age of three
 - Usually not under the age of two

Autism Diagnostics

- About 75% of children later diagnosed with Autism have symptoms in the first year
- About 25% have symptoms appear in second year of life
- Some children regress in their development in the second year

Early Intervention

- Crucial for good prognosis
- Don't take "Wait and See" tactic
- Begin treatment as soon as possible, don't wait on formal diagnosis of Autism
 - Speech therapy
 - Occupational or physical therapy
 - Behavior therapy

Diagnostic Criteria

To diagnose Autism there **must** be impairments in **three** areas:

1. Social Interaction
2. Communication
3. Patterns of behavior

Symptoms must be evident in children before the age of three.

Impairments in Social Interaction

- Nonverbal behaviors
- Peer relationships
- Seeking interaction with others
- Social or emotional reciprocity

Impairments in Communication

- Development of spoken language
- Initiate or sustain conversation
- Repetitive use or language or idiosyncratic language
- Lack of age appropriate play

Repetitive and Stereotyped Patterns of Behavior

- Preoccupation with special areas of interest
- Inflexible dependency to specific rituals or routines
- Repetitive motor movements
- Preoccupation with parts of objects

Etiology

- No specific causes that are known
- Not caused by "bad parenting"
- Runs in families
- Probably genetic

Incidence - 1 in 150

Prognosis

- Lifelong disorder
- Prognosis is best when:
 - Early and intensive interventions
 - Actively involved care givers
 - When children have functional language by 5 or 6
 - Higher cognitive level

Early Warning Signs

- If a child does not meet the following developmental milestones, a referral should be made for a comprehensive developmental evaluation
- It may or may not be Autism
- Could also be indicative of different developmental disorders

By 4 months a child should:

- Turn toward sounds
- Smile back when being smiled at
- Show interest in people's faces

By 6 months a child should:

- Smile often when playing with caregiver
- Coo or babble when happy
- Cry when unhappy

By 9 months a child should:

- Share smiles, sounds or other facial expressions back with caregiver
- Turn head when name is called
- Enjoy social play (peek-a-boo)

By 12 months a child should:

- Use simple gesture (bye-bye)
- Make sounds to represent something (ma, da, ba)
- Imitate actions (clapping hands)
- Respond to "no"

By 18 months a child should:

- Engage in simple pretend play (talk on a toy phone)
- Point to objects of interest (book, dog, etc.) and may say "look"
- Use several words **unprompted** (5 to 10 words)

By 24 months a child should:

- Use and understand 50 words
- Use two to four word phrases
- Become interested in other children
- Point to pictures or objects when named

By 36 months a child should:

- Use 4 - 5 word sentences
- Imitate adults and playmates
- Play make believe with dolls or toy animals
- Answer what, where and who questions

By 48 months a child should:

- Cooperate with other children
- Follow 3 step commands
- Talk about past experiences, feelings and interests

Treatment

- Evidence based early intervention
 - Speech therapy that teaches a functional communication system
 - Behavior modification (ABA, behavior shaping) that has to be extensive and intensive
- Finding the right educational or treatment setting
- Medical treatment to address the accompanying problems
 - Anxiety
 - Anger
 - Depression
 - Attention

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Sabine Falls, Ph.D.
Clinical Psychologist
ACCESS Group, Inc.

www.AccessGroupInc.org