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Learning the ABCs of Autism

Autism knows no racial, ethnic, social boundaries, family income, lifestyle, or educational levels. It can affect any family and any child. It's a complex developmental disability that usually appears during the first three years of life. It affects the normal functioning of the brain, impacting development in social interaction and communication skills.

Someone with autism may show some of the following traits:

- Insistence on sameness and a resistance to change
- Difficulty in expressing needs, using gestures or pointing instead of words
- Repeating words or phrases in place of normal, responsive language
- Laughing and/or crying for no apparent reason
- Preference to being alone
- Tantrums
- Difficulty in mixing with others
- Not wanting to cuddle or be cuddled
- Little or no eye contact
- Unresponsive to normal teaching methods
- Sustained odd play
- Spinning objects
- Obsessive attachment to objects
- Apparent over-sensitivity or under-sensitivity to pain
- No real fears of danger
- Noticeable physical over-activity or extreme under-activity
- Non responsive to verbal cues.

The demands of raising a child with



autism are great, and families frequently experience high levels of stress. Recognizing and preparing yourself for the challenges that are in store will make a tremendous difference to all involved, including the parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family, and friends.

While there's no cure for autism, there are treatment and education approaches that may reduce some of the challenges associated with the disability. Intervention may help to lessen disruptive behaviors, and education can teach self-help skills that allow for greater independence. But just as there is no one symptom or behavior that identifies autistic children, there is no single treatment. Children can learn to function within the confines of their disability, but treatment must be tailored to a child's individual behaviors and needs.

Source: Autism Society of American. For more information and helpful tips on autism, visit www.autism-society.org.

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