

Parent Newsletter Insert - for an electronic copy, please see our website: www.autism.org.au

Understanding Autism

Saturday 2nd of April is World Autism Awareness Day. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to reflect on what we know about Autism, to learn new information and to be able to embrace differences.

Approximately 1 in every 160 children is diagnosed with ASD Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is very likely that you know someone in your school, family or community who has ASD.

Autism Spectrum Disorder, the early signs

ASD is a complex, life-long developmental disability which is neurobiological in origin. Approximately one in every 160 children in Australia is diagnosed with an ASD. The signs of ASD may be evident by the age 2 or may only become apparent when the child starts school.

One of the first signs, which can alert a parent to the fact that their child is not developing in a typical way, is the manner in which their young child responds to them. Their child may not learn to speak or have very limited speech. Their child may also have great difficulty in comprehending the speech of others.

Some children with ASD can develop good spoken language. However, their language is very concrete and literal; it lacks a social quality and is not used in a conversational manner. Parents may notice that their young toddler with ASD does not seem interested in playing with other children. They may also notice that their child is not playing with toys in an imaginative way. Instead, their child may spend time placing toys in neat lines; or engaging in the same sequence of play activity over and over again. **ASD presents differently for each child.**

Common Features of ASD

Social Communication and Interaction

The child may:

- Use few or no words, repeat patterns of words or may have well developed speech, but only talk about a limited range of interests
- Not respond to their name or simple instructions
- Not copy other's actions
- Have very limited attention span, except for activities that include their interests e.g. trains
- Not engage with peers
- Not engage in pretend play
- Make limited eye contact

Restricted and Repetitive Behaviours and Sensory Processing Differences

The child may:

- Use repetitive speech
- Insist on routines staying the same
- Have a narrow range of interests
- Repeat and action over and over
- Get 'stuck' on an activity so that it is difficult to move them on
- Line up or stack objects and may become upset if the order changes
- Be over or under sensitive to touch, sounds, sights, tastes, textures, movement, smells

This list does not constitute a diagnosis of ASD. Many young children may show some of these signs at different ages. However, if the child's development is affected, it may indicate the need to consult a paediatrician.

Continued ...



Understanding Autism cont.

Strengths of ASD

Children with ASD enjoy routines and predictability. They have great attention to detail. Although social situations are difficult, children with ASD form strong bonds with people who they are close to. Children with Autism are like all children and have many strengths and areas that need further development and support.

Positive Outcomes

Children do not grow out of ASD. However, with appropriate intervention they can be assisted to gain many of the skills we take for granted—skills such as learning to play, communicating and responding to others in a social way.

Children with ASD benefit enormously from programs which provide them with a means to communicate and to develop the skills they need to participate in everyday life. With appropriate education, and the support of dedicated people, the child with ASD can go on to lead a fulfilled life, engaging in social activities and vocational pursuits in later life.

Outlined below are some ideas that all parents can do during Autism Week to EMBRACE DIFFERENCE!

Talk about Differences: We all have areas of strength and areas that we are not so good at. This is a great time to talk to your child about their strengths and areas that they are not so good at and need more support. This can then lead onto a conversation about children with ASD. For example, Children with ASD love learning but sometimes need help to make friends. Children with ASD are really good at numbers but may need more support writing stories etc.

Teach your child: Teach your child skills to be able to support children with ASD in the classroom. Simple strategies, such as asking the child to play, sharing their interest in an activity, following their lead, can really help the student with ASD to participate in social experiences.

Talk to Parents: If you are aware there is a student with ASD in your child's classroom, talk to the child's parents, don't be shy. Parents of children with ASD may feel isolated from the school community, so reach out and make them feel included.

Ask how you can help: Talk to your school about how you can help to better support children with ASD in your school community. Working together to increase awareness as a school community will lead to better outcomes for the student with ASD.

Read about ASD: Even if you don't know someone with ASD, spend some time reading about ASD. Positive Partnerships have fantastic, easy to read information on www.positivepartnerships.com.au.

Alternately, attend a free workshop on Explaining Autism, run at the Floreat Forum by the Autism Association on Wednesday 1st April. Register at www.autism.org.au or email paula.vella@autism.org.au.

Contact an Autism Advisor: If you are concerned that your child may have an Autism Spectrum Disorder, talk to an Autism Advisor at the Autism Association on 9489 8900. Regional callers 1800 636 427.

Participate: Participate in events across Autism Awareness Week. Log onto www.autism.org.au for more information.

