

AUTISM



DEFINITION:

Autistic disorder is defined as a presence of marked abnormal and impaired development in social interaction, communication and a markedly restricted repertoire of activity and interests. The autistic disorder must manifest itself before age 3. An autistic disorder adversely affects a student's performance. The term does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the student has a serious emotional disturbance.

DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISTIC DISORDER:

- A total of six (or more) items (1), (2), and (3), with at least two from (1) and one each from (2) and (3):
 1. Qualitative impairment in social interaction, as manifested by at least two of the following:
 - a. Marked impairment in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures and gestures to regulate social interaction
 - b. Failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level
 - c. A lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests or achievements with other people
 - d. Lack of social or emotional reciprocity
 2. Qualitative impairments in communication manifested by at least one of the following:
 - a. Delay in, or total lack of, the development of spoken language (not accompanied by an attempt to use alternative modes of communication)
 - b. In students with adequate speech, marked impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others
 - c. Repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language
 - d. Lack of varied, spontaneous make-believe play appropriate to developmental level

3. Restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests and activities, as manifested by at least one of the following:
 - a. Preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal in intensity or focus
 - b. Strict adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals
 - c. Stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (i.e., hand slapping/flapping or twisting or complex whole body movements)
 - d. Persistent preoccupation with parts of objects

Delays or abnormal functioning in at least one of the following areas, with onset prior to age 3 years: (a) social interaction, (b) language as used in social communication, or (c) symbolic or imaginative play. The disturbance sometimes includes students also with diseases in the same spectrum such as: Rett's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND TEACHING TIPS:

- Monitor closely for safety - some students have no fears.
- Utilize Premack principle (pairing something liked with something disliked).
- Use teaching stations or a similar teaching technique that changes activities regularly.
- Teach to the preferred modality.
- Eliminate unnecessary external stimuli.
- Limit the amount of relevant stimuli presented at one time.
- Limit the use of prompts if appropriate for the student.
- Teach in a game-like environment to facilitate generalization.
- Improve motor skill acquisition by using reinforcement, task analysis, and physical prompting.
- Utilize sensory stimulation to increase attention span and decrease self-stimulation.
- Use vigorous aerobic exercise to reduce self-stimulatory and off task behaviors.
- Create a highly-structured environment.
- Use transitions that depict activities between each activity.
- Use the same organization and equipment each day.
- Redirect inappropriate behavior.
- Perform demonstrations several times and use verbal cues to direct attention.
- Encourage speech and speech sounds - use sign language and gestures, and picture communications as needed.

Information on this sheet contains only suggested guidelines. Each student must be considered individually, and in many cases, a physician's written consent should be obtained.