



# AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

## What is ASD?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is part of the neurodevelopmental disorders described in the DSM-V (1). Autism spectrum disorder is usually present in early childhood, but may appear more evident by the time school starts. The disorder manifests itself differently from one person to another.

Autism spectrum disorder is characterized by significant challenges in two areas:

- ▶ **communication and social interactions;**
- ▶ **restricted or repetitive behaviours, activities and interests.**



(1) American Psychiatric Association. (2013): *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.).

## Communication and social interactions



There are persistent and marked difficulties related to an absence or a lack of social reciprocity. Between paying no attention to the other and not knowing how to start an interaction, several manifestations are possible.

Difficulties are also present in non-verbal communication. For example, it is often complex for an autistic person to understand what is implied in the intonation used by his interlocutor, or, by his facial expressions.

Also, the implicit rules of social interactions are not acquired instinctively. This makes it difficult for autistic people to interact in different social contexts.

Fédération Québécoise de l'Autisme - [www.autisme.qc.ca](http://www.autisme.qc.ca)





## Specific behaviours, activities and interests



In some autistic people, we find that their interests may be limited, but very developed. Repetitive activities or behaviors are often noticed such as strange manipulation of objects (aligning or spinning them), unusual body movements (flapping, twisting or pacing), etc.

Changes in day to day life or environment can lead to significant distress accompanied by often sudden and disproportionate emotional reactions. Repetitive activities have a reassuring effect due to their familiarity.

## 3 levels of severity



In autism spectrum disorder, symptoms represent a continuum that ranges from mild to severe. The degree of severity informs the person's need for support and has three levels :

1. Requires support,
2. Requires significant support,
3. Requires very significant support

Symptoms must be present since early childhood. They limit and alter day-to-day functioning. Some autistic people are fully functional and the impact of the disorder does not affect them as much as others.

Équipe Santé Mentale Jeunesse  
Youth Mental Health Team  
CIUSSS-ODIM



### IMPORTANT

The clinical picture can vary greatly from person to person. Each has a unique combination of signs and symptoms.

The degree of impairment is also different depending on age, cognitive and behavioural characteristics and the presence of associated conditions.

Autistic people are such a heterogeneous group that it is often said that there are as many forms of autism as there are autistic people.

## RESOURCES



- **Info-Sociale** (8-1-1)
- **West Island Association for the Intellectually Disabled**  
514-694-7090 / [www.wiaih.qc.ca](http://www.wiaih.qc.ca)
- **Montreal West Readaptation Center**  
514 363-3025 / [www.crom.ca](http://www.crom.ca)
- **Association for Parents of Asperger Children**  
[www.aspergerapea.org](http://www.aspergerapea.org)
- **Montreal Autism**  
514-524-6114 / [www.autisme.qc.ca](http://www.autisme.qc.ca)



### **Getting the best for your child with autism**

By : BRYNA SIEGEL, PHD (2008)

### **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for adult asperger syndrome**

By : Valerie L. Gaus (2007)

### **The complete guide to Asperger's syndrome**

By : Tony Attwood (2007)

### **Understanding autism for dummies**

By : Stephen M. Shore, Linda G. Rastelli (2006)

