
Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders

Pervasive Developmental Disorders

There are five disorders under the umbrella of Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD), a category of developmental disabilities that result from a disorder in the development of the brain. The five disorders are: Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, PDD-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Rett's Disorder. These disorders are commonly referred to as autism.

Culture of Autism

Social

Behaviors

- May prefer solitary activities – may have anxiety in group settings.
- Difficulty understanding feelings of others/reciprocity.

Strengths

- Often works well independently.
- Is usually nonjudgmental of others.

Communication

Behaviors

- May have differences in receptive and expressive communication styles.
- May have difficulty processing auditory language.

Strengths

- Responds well to visual communication/is likely to be a visual learner.
- Generally communicates more around motivators.

Repetitive Patterns

Behaviors

- May have strong attachments to objects or interests.
- May be resistant to change.

Strengths

- Can be consistent, predictable, and dependable as a worker when patterns/routines are respected.
- Can have predictable patterns of preferred activities and routines.

Sensory

Behaviors

- Can be hyper- or hypo-sensitive to internal and external sensory stimuli (olfactory, auditory, tactile, gustatory, visual).
- May engage in self-stimulating behaviors: rocking, pounding ears.

Strengths

- Can display acute awareness.
- May respond to sensory-based supports.

Cognitive

Behaviors

- Is sometimes easily distractible.
- May have generalization issues (a skill learned in one setting may not transfer to other settings, people, or materials).

Strengths

- Can have strong skills in systemizing and exactness.
- May respond well to systems which build meaning.