

# Autismus

Sylwia Wójcik

# Autism - what does it mean

Autism is not a disease but a development disorder, which means that the entire development path of an autistic person is different from the standard one. In other words, autism means that the brain works in a non-standard way.

We understand autism as a spectrum. This means that autism is slightly different for each person. People diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders have very different severity of behaviors and traits resulting from autism.



# Autism - how common it occurs

Autism is diagnosed in about 1 in 100 children in Europe. It occurs in boys 4 times more often than in girls.

In recent years, autism researchers have suggested that girls 'symptoms are slightly different than boys' symptoms. As a result, girls on the autism spectrum may not receive a diagnosis or receive it late.



# Symptoms of autism

Autism is diagnosed on the basis of behaviors and features occurring in 3 areas (the so-called autism triad):

- 1.Social interactions
- 2.Communication
- 3.Repetitive, stereotypical behavior



# Social interactions

People with autism have difficulty understanding other people's behavior and often find it difficult to understand how other people feel and what they mean. The challenge for them is making friends and getting along in everyday situations. People on the autism spectrum may have difficulty understanding gestures and reading facial expressions.

## **Symptoms of autism in terms of social interactions include:**


- \*the child does not point a finger to show that he is interested in something,
- \*the child does not look at objects indicated by the parent,
- \*little interest in people or lack of awareness of their presence,
- \*difficulties in initiating contact, engaging in group games, making friends,
- \*no role-playing and no pretending in play (so-called "make-up" play),
- \*no imitation,
- \*difficulty understanding or talking about feelings,
- \*no sharing of achievements or interests, e.g. toys, drawings.



# Communication

Some people with autism do not speak but use other forms of communication, e.g. pointing to pictures in books for communication or writing. People who are fluent in speech express themselves in a way that may appear unusual or stiff. Occasionally, people on the autism spectrum will repeat the same words or phrases (called echolalia).

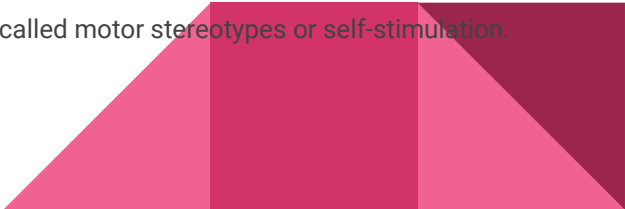
## **The symptoms of autism in terms of communication include:**

- \*delayed speech development
  - \*avoiding eye contact
  - \*the facial expressions are not adapted to what is being said
  - \*difficulties with reading facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures of the interlocutor
  - \*an unusual tone of voice or an unusual rhythm of speech, e.g. pronouncing each sentence like a question
  - \*repeating words or sentences, the so-called echolalia, e.g. in response to a question, repeats it, rather than answering a question
  - \*the statements may seem inadequate to the situation
  - \*difficulty communicating needs or desires
  - \*taking statements too literally - not understanding the sense of humor, irony, metaphors
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# Stiffened behavior

People with autism often have a strong attachment to patterns or routines, e.g. always walking the same way, putting toys on a shelf, always in the same order. They do not like changes and unexpected events can be very stressful for them. They are also often very strongly involved in the interest in one or more topics, e.g. buses, cars of a certain brand, number.

## **Symptoms of autism in terms of rigid behavior include:**

- \*attachment to routine, e.g. the child insists on walking exactly the same way to school or eating on the same plate,
  - \*difficulties with adapting to changes in the plan or in the environment, e.g. rearranging furniture, changing the time of departure to school,
  - \*unusual attachment to toys or objects, such as keys, light switches, threads,
  - \*interest in a narrow field of knowledge, e.g. tram timetables, dinosaurs, numbers, vacuum cleaners of a specific brand,
  - \*spending a lot of time arranging toys in a specific way, observing moving objects (e.g. a fan, washing machine), focusing on a specific part of an object (e.g. a car wheel),
  - \*repeated repetition of movements, i.e. flapping hands at eye level, twirling around your own axis - the so-called motor stereotypes or self-stimulation.
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# Early diagnosis and early intervention

Symptoms of autism may be visible as early as 2 years of age. If you are a toddler's parent and you are concerned about his development, it is not worth postponing consultation with a specialist. The symptoms of autism are especially visible in social behavior and communication.

## **Behavior before the age of 3 that may indicate an autism spectrum include:**

\*6 month - the child does not smile at people in the environment, does not show any other joyful expression

\*9 months - the child does not reciprocate smiles or facial expressions, does not respond to sounds made by the parent

\*12 months - no babbling, no reaction to the name

\*14 months - no finger pointing and no other gestures used for communication, e.g. papa gesture

\*16 months - no words or only a few words used

\*18 months - no make-believe play (e.g., feeding a doll)

\*24 months - the child does not use sentences consisting of 2 words in a meaningful way (sentences should be spoken spontaneously, not only repeated)

Recognizing autism early is very important because it is then that you can start with early development support. The right way of talking to the child and having fun, and the proper organization of the environment help the child learn, communicate and establish relationships.



# The causes of autism

The causes of autism are not fully understood. To our knowledge, there is no single cause, such as a gene, that causes autism. The causes of autism are complex, meaning that the onset of autism is influenced by various factors that act to varying degrees and in various combinations.

Genetics is of great importance in the occurrence of autism. There are genes and mutations (i.e., gene changes) that are associated with an increased incidence of autism. The occurrence of autism is also influenced by some environmental factors, such as higher age of parents, viral infections during pregnancy, prematurity, multiple pregnancies.



# Psychological mechanisms

For years scientists have been trying to discover the explanation of the symptoms of autism, e.g. a thinking pattern that allows to answer the question: why do people on the autism spectrum behave this way?

One of the theories is about disorders in the so-called theory of mind. He claims that people on the autism spectrum have difficulty intuitively understanding other people's thoughts, intentions, and feelings.

Other theories say that people on the autism spectrum have a different way of processing information that reaches their brains, e.g. disturbances in central coherence. Proponents of this theory believe that autistic people tend to focus on details and not see the full context of a situation.

Ostatnio pojawia się coraz więcej dowodów na tzw. teorię braku łączności. Być może różne rejony w mózgach osób w spektrum autyzmu komunikują się ze sobą w mniejszym stopniu niż u osób, które rozwijają się typowo.

Do tej pory nie ma jednej, prostej odpowiedzi na to, co stoi za spektrum autyzmu. Kolejne badania wskazują na to, że autyzm jest bardzo złożony.



# Types of Autism


The most common autism diagnoses are: autism, atypical autism and Asperger's Syndrome.

If you get lost in the various words used to describe autism, see [Autism and Related Developmental Disorders](#)



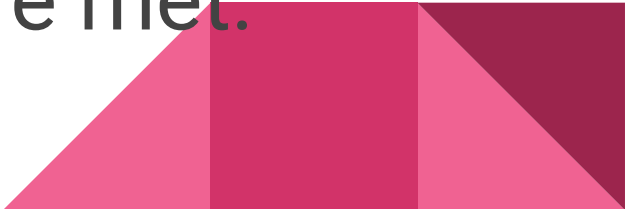
# Childhood autism

The diagnosis of autism is given to people who show symptoms in all 3 spheres characteristic of the autism spectrum (autism triad: relationships with people, communication and behavior flexibility). Symptoms appeared before the age of 3. Usually, the diagnosis of autism is made in early childhood. Childhood autism, sometimes also called early childhood autism or Kanner's autism, and most often simply autism.



## **Atypical autism**

Atypical autism differs from childhood autism in the later onset of symptoms (after age 3) or in fewer symptoms - when there are many symptoms of autism, but not all diagnostic criteria for autism are met.



# Autism therapy

Ways to support development and educational strategies are always selected individually for a specific child. Parents, after consulting specialists, choose methods of supporting development (therapy). It is good to find an experienced and trusted specialist who will coordinate your child's therapy, set goals, check progress and look after the whole family.

You can look for help in psychological and pedagogical counseling centers (especially those specialized in autism), associations, foundations and private diagnostic and therapeutic centers.

Children on the autism spectrum learn in therapeutic classes (with a few peers with autism), in integration classes or in regular mass classes. The support system for people on the autism spectrum has improved over the years, but there is still much to be done.

Specialists may be involved in working with a child: a special educator (MA in pedagogy with a specialization in education and support for people with disabilities / developmental disorders), psychologist, psychiatrist (doctor), speech therapist and therapists specialized in a specific method. It is usually easier to obtain specialist support in large cities.

