

Patient Screening & Assessment (PSA): Autism Resources

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD): What can I expect?

Deficits: Social skills

Children with ASD usually present with significant social challenges including, but not limited to:

- ✚ Difficulty with eye contact
- ✚ Difficulty developing friendships with same age peers and interacting socially with unfamiliar people
- ✚ Trouble responding to or recognizing social cues such as facial expressions, voice volume, physical proximity, or invisible social expectations (e.g., being respectful of others feelings, speaking quietly in a waiting room, etc.)
- ✚ Challenges with joining in activities or routines with others

Deficits: Communication Skills

Most children with ASD present with communication challenges in early childhood and some experience these challenges throughout the lifespan including, but not limited to:

- ✚ Delayed speech (e.g., four years old functioning at level of 18 month old)
- ✚ Odd and repetitive speech patterns (e.g., script phrases from television programs, repeating phrases they have heard in context to meet their needs)
- ✚ Limited nonverbal communication, including limited use of gestures, voice inflection, eye contact and other forms of nonverbal communication
- ✚ Difficulty reading facial expressions, responding to changes in vocal tone and/or struggle with processing language in general (e.g., no reaction when parent raises voice or appears upset, delayed response to verbal language)

In contrast, some children with ASD have exceptional oral language skills. In these cases, proceed with caution as they may have more difficulty understanding spoken language than using it.

When communicating with children with ASD:

- ✚ Simplify your language & break it into small parts
- ✚ Show them what you tell them with pictures or actions
 - This strategy is recommended to set expectations that are clear and developmentally appropriate and can be useful with ALL young children!

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Deficits: Repetitive/Stereotypical Behaviors

Stereotypic and repetitive behavior refers to atypical repetitive or restricted interests, movements and play that can interfere with social communication and impact the child's ability to attend and participate in social situations or follow simple instructions.

Not every child with ASD engages in repetitive behaviors but many have difficulty with changes in routines and unfamiliar situations. This can have a direct impact on the hospital visit experience as their expectations may not align with what needs to happen in this unfamiliar setting and this disruption to their world can trigger behavior difficulties.

Stereotypic and repetitive behaviors may include sensory issues, repetitive speech, play and behavior as well as restricted interests:

- ✚ Sensory Issues:
 - Looking at items/objects from different angles
 - Peering out of the side of the eyes
 - Walking on tip toes or "toe walking"
- ✚ Repetitive speech:
 - Repeating phrases or words over and over
 - Quoting from television or media
 - Repeating what others' say (this is referred to as echolalia)
- ✚ Repetitive behavior:
 - Flapping hands or arms including full body movements or jerking motions
- ✚ Repetitive play:
 - Repeating the same action with a toy over and over and not using it the way it was intended to be used (e.g., lining up toy cars in a row instead of driving with them)
 - Repetitive movement with objects (e.g. rolling wheels near eyes repetitively)
- ✚ Restricted Interests:
 - Heightened interest in parts of objects (e.g. opening and closing doors repetitively due to interest in hinges)