



## About Autism

### Detailed Overview

As the term suggests, there is no one diagnosis or label. Rather there are several labels that place people at different points on the spectrum. At one end of the spectrum diagnostic labels such as “Asperger Syndrome”, “High Functioning Autism” and “PDD-NOS” are used. At the other end of the spectrum you will find labels such as “Autism”, “Classic Autism” and “Kanner Autism”.

What are the common everyday diagnostic terms or labels?

- Autism
- High Functioning Autism
- Aspergers
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder – not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)

#### 1. AUTISM

In Autism the impairments in the social and communication areas are severe and sustained and clearly present before the age of three years. The person is often anxious, has poor attention and motivation, responds unusually to many different stimuli and is observed as being ‘different’ from others. Speech is delayed, or largely absent. A strong reliance on routine is apparent, and the person can have a range of ritualistic behaviours such as toe walking, hand flapping and finger gazing. Many with autism may also be intellectually disabled. Sometimes, clinicians will refer to Classic Autism or Kanner Autism. This is because they believe the child or adult fits the early descriptions of Autism published by Dr Leo Kanner in the 1940’s.

#### 2. HIGH FUNCTIONING AUTISM

High Functioning Autism is a loosely used term (not defined in the diagnostic criteria) to describe a child or adult who meets the criteria for a diagnosis of Autism, but is not as severely affected as the more classically autistic person.

#### 3. ASPERGER’S SYNDROME

In Asperger Syndrome there are severe and sustained social impairments, but impairments are not as severe in the language and communication area. Speech usually develops within the normal age range, but the ability to communicate effectively (known as language pragmatics) is impaired. The impairments seem more subtle in the very young child, and become more apparent as the child reaches pre school and school age. The Asperger person is usually in the normal intelligence range.

#### 4. PDD – NOS

Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) is the diagnosis given for those who present with some of the characteristics of either Autism or Asperger Syndrome, but not severe enough for a diagnosis of either of these conditions. In the ICD 10 and previous editions of the DSM this diagnosis was referred to as Atypical Autism.

#### What are the international classification guides?

There are two international classification guides used to determine the diagnostic criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorders.

— *DSM IV - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fourth Edition, 1994, published by the American Psychiatric Association*

— *ICD 10 - International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems Tenth Edition, 1992, published by the World Health Organisation.*