



About Autism

Diagnosis

There is no specific diagnostic test for Autism Spectrum Disorder. The best way to get a diagnosis is via a multi disciplinary assessment. For children, this involves having your child tested by a number of professionals, who will provide you with the information you need to make decisions about program and treatment approaches. For adults, either a psychologist or psychiatrist experienced with Autism Spectrum Disorders can make a diagnosis.

The age of diagnosis these days ranges from approximately 18 months through to adulthood, depending on circumstances. A diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder will only be made if the 'autistic like' pattern of behaviour is apparent before the age of three years. Sometimes a provisional diagnosis is made if the child is very young, and a reassessment at a later date is recommended.

Treatment

Discovering that your child has an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can be an overwhelming experience. For some, the diagnosis may come as a complete surprise; others may have had suspicions and tried for months or years to get an accurate diagnosis. In either case, a diagnosis brings a multitude of questions about how to proceed. A generation ago, many people with autism were placed in institutions. Professionals were less educated about autism than they are today and specific services and supports were largely non-existent. Today the picture is much clearer. With appropriate services and supports, training, and information, children and adults on the autism spectrum will grow, learn and flourish, even if at a different developmental rate than others.

While there is no known cure for autism, there are treatment and education approaches that may reduce some of the challenges associated with the condition. Intervention may help to lessen disruptive behaviours, and education can teach self-help skills that allow for greater independence. But just as there is no one symptom or behavior that identifies individuals with ASD, there is no single treatment that will be effective for all people on the spectrum. Individuals can learn to function within the confines of ASD and use the positive aspects of their condition to their benefit, but treatment must begin as early as possible and be tailored to the person's unique strengths, weaknesses and needs.