



About Autism

Living with autism

The demands of raising a child with autism are great, and families frequently experience high levels of stress. Recognizing and preparing yourself for the challenges that are in store will make a tremendous difference to all involved, including the parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family, and friends.

The uniqueness of each individual with autism makes the experience of raising a child with autism different for each family. But there are some consistent themes or issues that most families will want to be aware to be able to provide the best support to the individual and to family members.

What causes autism?

There is no known single cause for autism, but it is generally accepted that it is caused by abnormalities in brain structure or function. Brain scans show differences in the shape and structure of the brain in autistic versus non-autistic children. Researchers are investigating a number of theories, including the link between heredity, genetics and medical problems. In many families, there appears to be a pattern of autism or related disabilities, further supporting a genetic basis to the disorder.

While no one gene has been identified as causing autism, researchers are searching for irregular segments of genetic code that autistic children may have inherited. It also appears that some children are born with a susceptibility to autism, but researchers have not yet identified a single “trigger” that causes autism to develop.

Other researchers are investigating the possibility that under certain conditions, a cluster of unstable genes may interfere with brain development resulting in autism. Still other researchers are investigating problems during pregnancy or delivery as well as environmental factors such as viral infections, metabolic imbalances, and exposure to environmental chemicals.

Whatever the cause, it is clear that those with autism and PDD are born with the disorder or born with the potential to develop it. Autism is not a mental illness. Furthermore, no known psychological factors in a person’s development have been shown to cause autism.