

Autism

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**Family &
Community Services**
Ageing, Disability & Home Care

A look at

Part 1.

- What is Autism
- Prevalence
- The MIS Word
- Autism as a spectrum disorder
- Triad of symptoms - autism
- Autism related impairments
- Communication impairments
- Restricted interests, routines and rituals
- Characteristics that predispose to challenging behavior

Part 2.

- Sensory issues

Part 3.

- Interventions and good practice

Part 1: Autism

The narrowing of relationships to people and to the outside world, a narrowing so extreme that it seemed to exclude everything except the persons own self...

(Frith, '89)

Autism

Autism spectrum disorders are lifelong developmental disabilities characterised by marked difficulties in social interaction, impaired communication, restricted and repetitive interests and behaviours and sensory sensitivities.

Prevalence

- About 1 in 100 children, almost 230 000 Australians have an ASD.
- It is more prevalent in boys than girls.
- The effects of an ASD can often be minimised by early diagnosis.
- Many children and adults with an ASD show marked improvements.



The MIS word

To varying degrees, individuals with ASD...

MIS perceive the world about them

MIS respond to those perceptions

Then their behaviour is **MIS** interpreted by us and others

Autism as a spectrum disorder

Many view ASD as a sliding scale of impairments in behaviour, communication, sensory and social interaction & cognitive functioning.

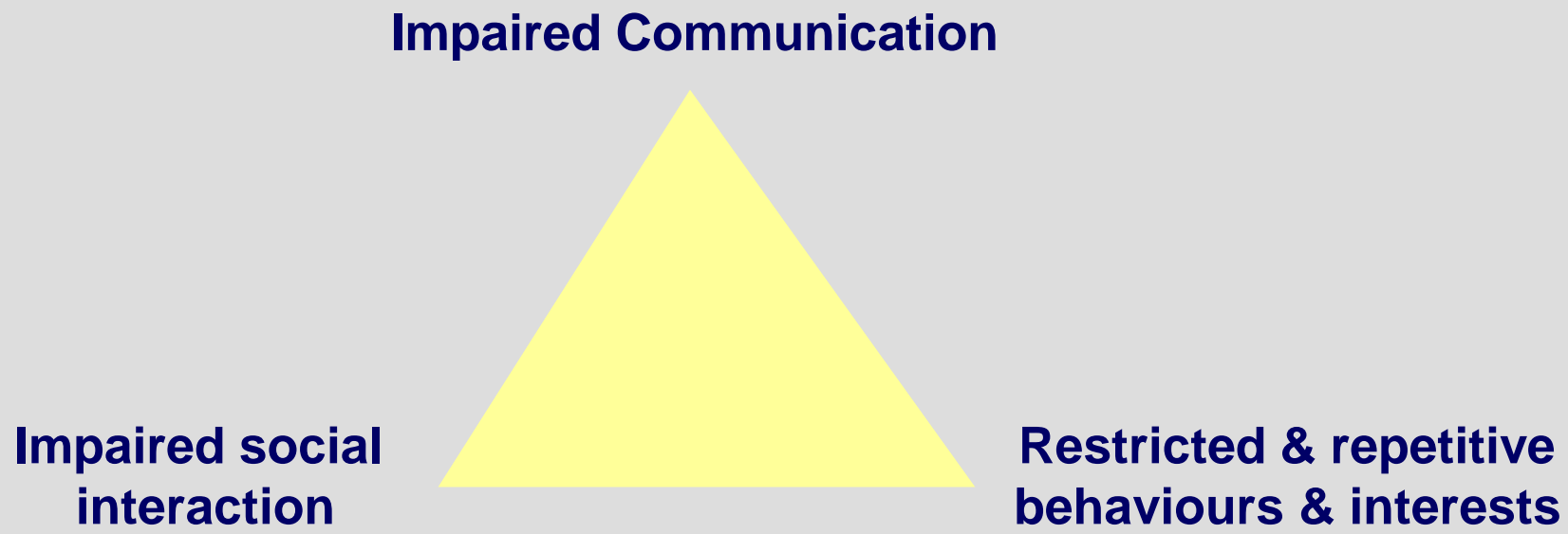


**Lives in our world
but in his own way**

**Lives in his
world**



Autism - triad of Impairments



Autism related impairment



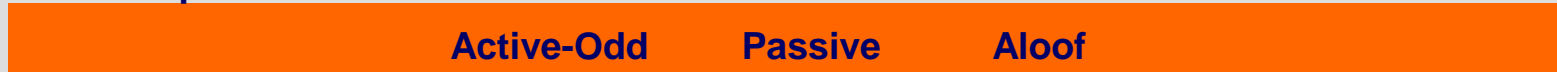
Cognitive ability



Repetitive Behaviours



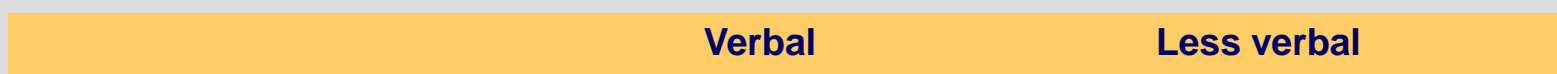
Social Impairment



Motor Skills



Communication



Sensory



Communication impairments

- Expressive language often delayed
- Poor use of & understanding of nonverbal communication
- Poor understanding of why we communicate (other than “I want”)
- Less babble “chat” with others
- Use of other’s hand as a tool, or an extension of their own

Pragmatic difficulties

- Initiating and sustaining conversations
- Joining a conversation, changing topics
- Following another’s change of topic
- Interprets other’s comments literally

Communication impairments

- Unusual or invented words or phrases
- Repetitive phrases and questions
- Unusual intonation, volume, rhythm, rate
- Receptive language difficulties

Other

- Often need prompting
- Undirected, or directed to objects not to people
- Poor modulation in social situation
- Difficulties combining eye gaze, expressions & gestures

Social – relationship with peers

- Less awareness of other children
 - Walks through/over other children and their activities
 - Upset if others intrude in their play or space
 - Less to-and-fro play with adults
 - Poor cooperative play, sharing and turn-taking skills.
 - Poor awareness of own emotions
 - Happiness & excitement not directed to people
 - Rarely points to objects
 - Poor joint attention
-
- Sensory rather than social motivation

Restricted interests, routines & rituals

- Hobbies with unusual intensity or focus
- Preoccupations seem odd to others
- Likes things to happen in a predictable way
- Resists changes in routine or environment
- Needs prior warning of change
- Difficulty transitioning between activities

Examples

- Becoming upset if parents drive to a usual destination in a unexpected direction or route
- Needs preparation for change in routine or special events
- Will eat sandwiches at school but not at home

Characteristics that predispose to CB

- Limited attention span
- Inability to block distractions
- Poor frustration tolerance
- Poor organisational skills
- Few coping skills for stress
- Communication difficulties
- Low motivation to please others
- Poor understanding of cause-effect

Part 2: Sensory processing - definition

Sensory processing is the ability to organise and interpret information we receive through the senses from our own bodies & the environment. This enables us to produce an appropriate response for particular situations, the task & environment

A sensory processing approach is taken to

- Help the nervous system to get ready to respond to and interpret experience meaningfully
- Enhance the ability of the person with disordered sensory processing to respond more adaptively

Arousal

- Arousal Is our level of alertness
- Our ability to maintain an appropriate state of arousal for the task and environment comes from our ability to balance sensory input which we receive
- We are all required to regulate our states of arousal to suit the environment and task

Modulation

- The brain's volume control
- Is the ability of the central nervous system (CNS) to regulate, organise & prioritise incoming sensory information.

Difficulties in modulation:

- Difficulty knowing what to pay attention and what to block out
- Mismatch of response to stimuli
- Inconsistency in behaviours i.e. fluctuation
- Increased cognitive effort to sensory processing & therefore reducing the cognitive processes free for other aspects of the task