



## **Autism**

### **November 28, 2008**

**Autism** is a complex **developmental disability** that typically appears during the first three years of life. Both children and adults with autism typically show **difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and leisure or play activities**. One should keep in mind however, that autism is a spectrum disorder and it affects individuals differently and in varying degrees.

People with autism **process and respond to information in unique ways** and may also exhibit some of the following traits:

- Insistence on sameness; resistance to change
- Difficulty in expressing needs, using gestures or pointing instead of words
- Repeating words or phrases in place of normal, responsive language
- Laughing (and/or crying) or showing distress for reasons not apparent to others
- Little or no eye contact
- Unresponsive to normal teaching methods
- Obsessive attachment to objects
- Apparent over-sensitivity or under-sensitivity to pain and/or physical contact
- No real fears of danger
- Non responsive to verbal cues; acts as if deaf, although hearing tests are normal

For people with autism, **sensory integration problems are common**, which may throw their senses off or cause them be over or under active. Soft fur may be experienced as painful or the smell of a peach may make the child gag. Some children with autism are **particularly sensitive to sound**, finding even the most ordinary daily noises painful.

Autism is the most common of the Pervasive Developmental Disorders, **affecting an estimated 1 in 150 births** (Centers for Disease Control Prevention, 2007). Autism knows no racial, ethnic, social, family income, lifestyle, or educational boundaries. The overall incidence of autism is **four times more prevalent in boys** than in girls.

**Expert in Autism?** DSES is always looking for volunteers to help teach or give presentations!!

#### **Resources and Additional Information**

Autism Society of America; [autism-society.org](http://autism-society.org)

Autism Speaks; [autismspeaks.org](http://autismspeaks.org)