

Autism is the most common disorder in a group of conditions called autism spectrum disorders. Other disorders in the autism spectrum are Asperger syndrome, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder. The condition autism is characterized by impaired social interaction, difficulties with verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive or very limited activities and interests.

Experts estimate that out of every 1,000 children three to six will have autism, and males are four times likely to get the disorder than females are. But when females do get the disorder they tend to have more severe symptoms. Let's say that 4 million children are born in the United States every year, did you know that about 24,000 of those children will eventually be diagnosed with autism.

Many children with the condition can function at a fairly high level with their speech and intelligence. But others are not so lucky, some develop serious cognitive impairments and language delays, and some never speak. Individuals with autism may seem to be in their own world, or locked into repetitive behaviors. An infant that has the condition may avoid eye contact, possibly seem deaf, or unexpectedly stop developing language. In some cases children will act unaware of their surroundings or sometimes they may physically attack others around them without any warning or reason. Physically, a child with the condition may rock or flap their hands, may seem unaware of bruises or burns, and some even mutilate themselves.

The cause of autism is unknown. But scientists and experts feel that genetics and environment have a part in the disorder. There are theories that vaccines may be a cause of autism but none of them have been proven. Along with the idea that bad parenting has to do with the reason of autism, once again has never been proven. Families that have had an autistic child have a chance of having another one by 5%, or one in 20. This chance is greater than the general population of those who do not have an autistic child in their family.

Some see autism as a bad thing but others may say different. At the age of six a boy names Leon was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome in September of 2005. At the age of two Leon could read a book fluently. He went from books to the Yellow Pages to the phone book. But his favorite thing to read about is football and sport trivia books. His mom states, "He spends hours poring over the pages. You can ask him any question about football scores and he has the answer in his head-he has the most amazing memory." Leon told his mom that when he reaches 16 years old he is going to play on the Manchester United football team. No one can doubt this little boy. Never over look those with autism, because they accomplish more than you would ever think would be possible.

Along with Leon other high functional autistic individuals speak out about the condition they have. They say that when people talk about curing autism it hurts them. Autism is not something they have, it's something they are. Autism is in everything say do, say, or think. It is in their every emotion. If you were able to remove autism from a person you would get a different person. When people say they want to cure autism the autistic community feels they are saying they want a person who is more 'normal'. They understand that these people are trying to help but they don't want a cure they like how they are and want to stay that way.

## Glossary

Autism- A pervasive developmental disorder of children, characterized by impaired communication, excessive rigidity, and emotional detachment

Asperger Syndrome- A condition marked by impaired social interactions and limited repetitive patterns of behavior

Rett Syndrome- A disorder of the nervous system that leads to regression in development, especially in the areas of expressive language and hand use

Childhood Disintegrative Disorder- A condition occurring in 3- and 4-year-olds who have developed normally to age 2

Cognitive- Of or relating to the mental processes of perception, memory, judgment, and reasoning, as contrasted with emotional and volitional processes

NIH- National Institutes of Health

NIDCD- National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders

NICHHD- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development