

# Autism Spectrum Disorders: Overview



[www.HANDSinAutism.org](http://www.HANDSinAutism.org)

## Definitions

*DSM-IV-TR: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—Fourth Edition—Text Revision:* A manual published in 2000 that outlines the specific characteristics required for the classification of all psychiatric disorders.

*PDD: Pervasive Developmental Disorder:* The clinical or medical term for a constellation of 5 diagnoses listed in the DSM-IV-TR with core difficulties in social communication.

*ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorders:* An increasingly used term for three most common PDD diagnoses (Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified [PDD-NOS]).

## Facts

There are five disorder categories under the label Pervasive Developmental Disorders:

- Autistic Disorder;\*
- Asperger's Disorder ;\*
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS);\*
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder;
- Rett's Disorder.

\* Characteristic symptoms present prior to the age of three.

***Individuals with Autistic Disorder exhibit challenges and meet criteria in 3 main areas:***

- Social Interaction - e.g., limited eye contact and gestures, difficulty making friends, difficulty understanding common social rules
- Communication - e.g., delay in or lack of spoken language, unusual use of language (e.g., not conversant), limited or no creative play

- Repetitive/Restricted Interests - e.g., excessive interest in unusual objects, limited use of objects and interests or intense interest in limited topic areas; repetitive motor mannerisms; excessive need for routine

***Individuals with Asperger's Disorder exhibit challenges and meet criteria in 2 main areas:***

- Social Interaction
- Repetitive/Restricted Interests

Additionally, individuals have no significant delay in language or cognitive skills though they often have unusual and pressured language and have difficulty maintaining conversations outside of their area of interest

***Individuals with PDD-NOS exhibit challenges across all three areas above.***

***Individuals with Rett's Disorder develop appropriately for the first 5 months and then experience:***

- Loss of hand skills and development of classic repetitive hand movements (i.e., hand wringing)
- Loss of social interaction at onset of disorder
- Communication difficulties (both with expression and understanding of language)

***Individuals with Childhood Disintegrative Disorder develop appropriately for at least 2 years and then experience:***

- Loss of skills in at least two of the following areas: communication, social adaptive skills, bowel and bladder control, play skills, and motor skills.
- Abnormalities in at least 2 of the following 3 areas:
  - » Social Interaction
  - » Communication
  - » Repetitive/Restricted Interests



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The HANDS (Helping Answer Needs by Developing Specialists) in Autism Program and Resource Center is affiliated with the Christian Sarkine Autism Treatment Center at Riley at IU Health and the IU School of Medicine. This Center is currently supported in part from grants from IU Health as well as from the Indiana Department of Education. The IDOE funding is to support the HANDS in Autism as one of six Indiana Resource Network resource and training centers designed to provide coordinated technical assistance to schools and communities across the state. Supported also by a number of charitable and philanthropic donations, the HANDS program offers a variety of live and online training opportunities free to educational and medical professionals, service providers, and parents.

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### **Diagnosing PDD/ASD:**

Done by one of several types of professionals

- Clinical Psychologists
- Psychiatrists
- Neurologists
- Developmental Pediatricians

A variety of methods are used:

- Behavioral observations
- Standardized testing
- Clinical impressions focused on DSM-IV-TR criteria
- Historical records and reports
- Clinical Interview

### **Recommended Actions**

When working with individuals with PDDs, try to capitalize on their strengths:

- Present information visually, whenever possible
- Establish consistent routines to help individuals know what to expect
- Break complex routines into a series of simple steps when teaching these routines.

### **References**

- American Psychiatric Association (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (4th ed. – text revision): DSM-IV-TR*. Washington, DC: Author.

### **Additional Related Resources**

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

**Autism Society of Indiana:** [www.autismsocietyofindiana.org](http://www.autismsocietyofindiana.org)

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

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism)

**Christian Sarkine Autism Treatment Center:** [www.psychiatry.medicine.iu.edu/autism](http://www.psychiatry.medicine.iu.edu/autism)

**HANDS in Autism Program & Resource Center:** [www.HANDSinAutism.org](http://www.HANDSinAutism.org)

**Indiana Resource Center for Autism:** [www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca](http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca)

**National Institute of Mental Health:** [www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/autism.cfm](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/autism.cfm)

[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/a-parents-guide-to-autism-spectrum-disorder/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/a-parents-guide-to-autism-spectrum-disorder/index.shtml)

### **Check out other materials by HANDS in Autism Program & Resource Center**

**Next Steps Manual for Parents and Caregivers**

**Toolkit for Medical Professionals**

**eLearning modules** for caregivers and professionals

**Life with ASD** - growing library of templates for teaching functional skills and independence to individuals with an ASD

**How-Templates** - a growing library of DIY visual strategies and supports for working with individuals with an ASD

**Kid's Corner** - a growing library of non-academic activities with templates

**Academia** - a growing library of academic activities, and more!

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