



# What is Autism?

*for children ages 10-16*



Riley Hospital *for* Children  
Christian Sarkine Autism Treatment Center  
A Clarian Health Partner



Autism is a brain disorder, which means that the brain of someone with autism works differently than yours or mine. We do not know what causes autism. There is no cure for autism, but there are treatments that can help. You can not catch autism—it is not contagious. People with autism are not sick. They simply think and behave differently than your or I.

Sometimes people with autism behave in ways that may make you uncomfortable or upset. Some of these things might be repeating words or phrases again and again, acting like they can't hear you, or repeating physical movements over and over. They may also become upset with even small changes in settings and routines.

People with autism have strengths and weaknesses just like you. They are good at understanding information presented in pictures, focusing on one thing at a time, learning routines, and interacting with people they know well. People with autism also experience many challenges, like difficulty understanding words or learning by listening to someone talk, learning a new way to do something, meeting and talking with new people, and switching from one activity to another.

People with autism process and respond to information in many different ways. Some people with autism experience different sensations than your or I because of how his/her brain processes sensory information. Sensory information includes sights, sounds, tastes, touch, smells, pain, and heat or cold. People with autism can be very sensitive or very insensitive to these types of sensations, which can make the world confusing or scary. Various sounds, smells, and lights can cause someone with autism to become very upset. It is important to remember someone with autism can not help feeling this way.

Some people with autism can not speak, but you can communicate with them in other ways. You can use pictures, write notes, or even use sign language. Some people with autism who do talk still may have difficulty in carrying on conversations or using words to ask for things that they need or want.

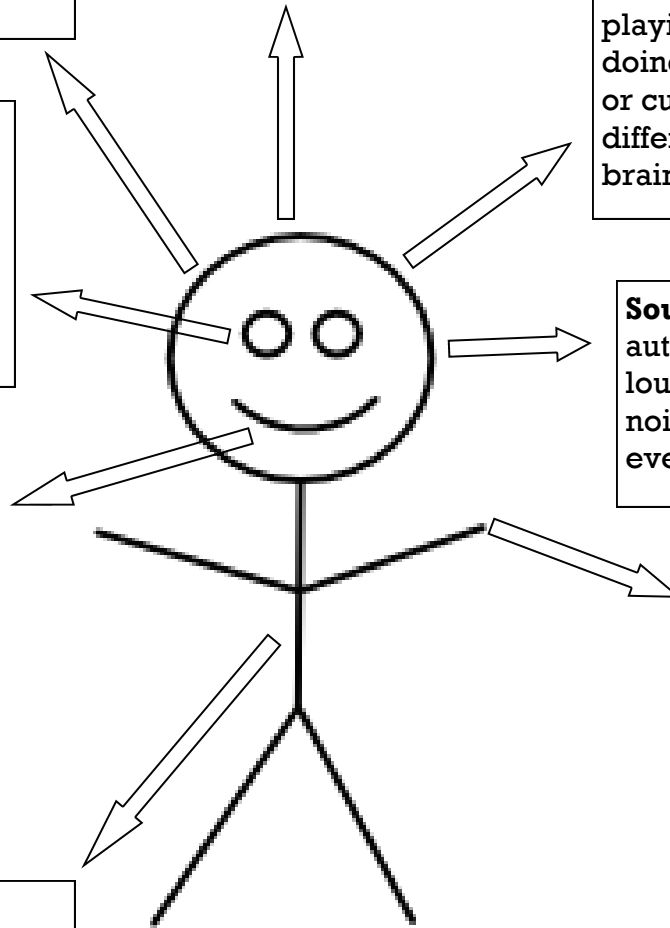
Most important is every person with autism is an individual! They are unique, just like you and me. No two people are ever the same. No two people with autism have exactly the same strengths or challenges.

**Pictures & Words:** people with autism are often better at processing and learning from pictures than listening to someone speak; when you talk to someone with autism, be sure to speak slowly and clearly; if needed, write things down

**Clumsiness:** some people with autism can be clumsy or uncoordinated when playing sports, games, or doing things like drawing or cutting; this is due to differences in the way the brain monitors the body

**Sounds:** some people with autism are very sensitive to loud, sudden, or sharp noises; some are sensitive to even regular daily noises

**Skin & touching:** some people with autism are very sensitive to touch, different textures, and pressure



**New people & things:** because the brain of a person with autism processes information differently, a person may feel overwhelmed and frightened by new places or people

**Eyes & Sight:** bright lights, colors, or a chaotic setting can cause a person with autism to feel overwhelmed; if things are clearly labeled, organized, and uncluttered, they know what to expect

**Talking:** some people with autism can not speak; they can communicate using pictures, writing notes, or sign language

**Stomach:** some people with autism are unable to eat certain foods or types of foods due to allergies and tastes or textures that they can not process