

# Signs of autism in adults & adolescents



## What is autism?

Autism is a condition that affects how a person thinks, feels, interacts with others, and experiences their environment. It is estimated that 1 in 70 people are on the autism spectrum. Autism is a lifelong disability that starts when a person is born and stays with them into old age. Every Autistic person is different to every other. This is why autism is described as a 'spectrum'. Aspect describes autism as a different brilliant®.

## Autism in Adolescents & Adults

Traditionally, autism was typically identified mostly in children. However, we now have a better understanding of autism and the way that it presents in people of all ages. This has led to better recognition of autism in adolescents and adults. At Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) our objective is to assist individuals of all ages access an appropriate assessment and supports to allow them to realise their unique potential.

## Indicators

Autism can be diagnosed at any age. Although considered to be a life-long developmental condition, for some people their autism will not become apparent until they are an adolescent or adult. Autistic individuals will show some of the following signs. No single indicator means that a person necessarily has autism, as it is more about pattern of indicators and the way that a person has experienced different characteristics over time. Usually, an individual will show several indicators from the following categories.

### Social Skills & Communication

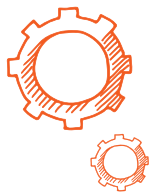
- Finding it hard to understand what other people are thinking or feeling
- Finding it hard to make friends or having a preference to be alone
- Difficulty knowing what to say in conversation or how to engage in "chit chat"
- Finding it hard to communicate with other people
- Feeling that you do not fit in with other people (e.g. friends, groups, co-workers)
- Finding it hard to know what other people are thinking or feeling without being told directly
- Not understanding social "rules" (e.g. not talking over other people, giving people personal space)
- Use language in a repetitive way
- A tendency to take things literally
- Avoiding eye contact
- Show a limited range of facial expressions and/or find it hard to "read" other people's facial expressions

### Behaviour & Interests

- Loving routine and becoming upset when plans change suddenly or routines are not followed
- Becoming irritated if things are moved or rearranged by others
- Having a series of repetitive rituals
- Having a strong interest in certain subjects and activities
- Having different sensory experiences (e.g. sensitivity to some noises, not liking the feeling of certain textures or fabrics, only eating food with a certain texture, seeking out certain sounds or textures)
- Displaying repetitive behaviours (e.g. doing the same things over and over)



Together we can create  
a world where no-one  
on the autism spectrum  
is left behind.



While Autistic people may need support to learn new skills and reach their unique potential, autism is a part of the person, and can be associated with areas of incredible strength and different ways of viewing the world.

## Differences in Women and Men

Autism can look different in women and men. Historically, less has been known about autism in women and this has meant that autism in women may be overlooked.

Women on the autism spectrum may be more likely to camouflage or mask their autism. For instance, they may force themselves to make eye contact or mimic the social behaviour of others. As the awareness of autism in women increases, it is better able to be recognised and diagnosed.



## Next Steps

If you think that someone you know may be Autistic, the first step is for them to speak to a GP or another health professional for a referral to a specialist for diagnosis.

Accessing a diagnosis can help to get any additional support that they might need. It can also help to provide self-understanding and assist others around them to be more understanding.

Read about the Aspect approach to a diagnosis here:  
[autismspectrum.org.au/how-can-we-help/getting-a-diagnosis](https://autismspectrum.org.au/how-can-we-help/getting-a-diagnosis)

Identify Signs



Speak to GP



Referral to Specialist



Diagnosis

A different brilliant®

understanding, engaging & celebrating  
the strengths, interests & aspirations  
of people on the autism spectrum.

