

# UNDERSTANDING AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

陪我講 SHALL WE TALK



## What is autism spectrum disorder (ASD)?

- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by varying degrees of impairment and developmental delay in social communication, emotional, behavioural and cognitive functioning.
- Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means that people can experience a wide range of symptoms and the severity of the disorder varies among different people.
- The symptoms of ASD usually appear in infancy but they may not be noticeable until the age of 2 to 3.

## What are the symptoms of ASD?

- The marked features of ASD are persistent difficulties in social communication and social interactions as well as restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour or interests.

Common symptoms include:

### 1 Difficulties in social communication and social interactions



#### (i) Difficulties in social-emotional reciprocity

- Difficult to initiate or respond to social interactions
- Difficult to engage in back-and-forth conversations, e.g. one-sided conversations, inability to stay on topic
- Lack of social or emotional exchanges like pointing, smiling or showing things to share interests or enjoyment with others
- Weak in empathy and difficult to understand others' thoughts and feelings

### (ii) Difficulties in non-verbal communication

- Reduced eye contact, which may seem rude, uninterested or inattentive
- Atypical speech prosody, e.g. robot-like monotone
- Weak in recognising, interpreting and using facial expressions, gestures and body language in communication



### (iii) Difficulties in developing and maintaining relationships

- Difficult to make and keep friends
- Uninterested in other children or people and prefer to play or be alone
- Weak in interpreting non-literal languages, e.g. jokes, irony, idioms
- Difficult to adjust behaviours to fit in different social contexts, e.g. laugh on a sad occasion



### 2 Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour or interests

#### (i) Stereotyped or repetitive movements or speech

- Stereotyped body movements, e.g. flapping hands, rocking the body, self-spinning
- Restricted and ritualised behaviours, e.g. lining up toys or objects in a specific order, asking the same question repetitively and requiring the same answer
- Unusual speech patterns, e.g. repeating certain words or phrases out of social context



#### (ii) Insistence on sameness

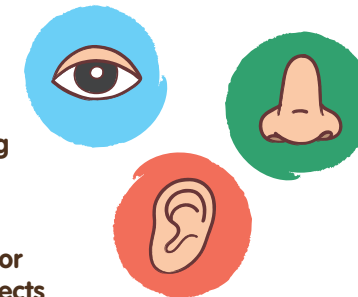
- Excessive adherence to certain rules
- Extremely distressed by minor changes in daily life, e.g. trying new food, changing in the route to school, routine or environment

### (iii) Fixated interests

- Having a narrow range of interests or remarkably intense focus on certain topics, e.g. memorising calendar or bus routes
- Unusual preoccupation with certain parts of objects, like the wheels of a toy car or the hair of a doll

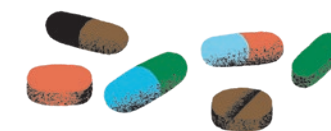
### (iv) Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input

- Under- or over-reactivity to sensory stimuli, e.g. adverse response to specific sounds or when being touched, apparent indifference to pain, heat or coldness
- Unusual sensory interests, e.g. excessive smelling or touching of certain objects, gazing at spinning objects



If you are concerned that your child may have ASD, please consult your doctor as soon as possible. Early intervention can improve the child's daily functioning and quality of life.

## How to treat ASD?



### A Medication

Some medications can help with certain symptoms associated with ASD, e.g. irritability or inattention.



### B Psychological and other treatments

Common components of intervention include:

- Develop social and communication skills
- Educate self-regulation skills on emotion
- Strengthen speech and language skills
- Reduce behaviours that interfere with daily functioning and quality of life
- Diversify or build up strengths
- Educate parent on management skills

## If you are taking care of a child with ASD, you may help him by:



Providing consistent routine



Preparing the child for possible changes in routine



Keeping regular and positive parent-child communication



Working closely with health care providers and school personnel

For more information:



Consult your doctor



Call the following hotlines:  
18111 Mental Health Support Hotline  
18111  
Hospital Authority Mental Health Direct  
2466 7350



Visit  
shallwetalk.hk



Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder

精神健康諮詢委員會  
Advisory Committee on Mental Health



Revised in 2024