

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain. It is characterised by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviours. The extent to which ASD impacts a person's behaviour, intelligence and ability varies from person to person.

Research shows that a range of genetic and environmental factors contribute to a child's risk of ASD. It is not due to poor parenting. ASD is more commonly diagnosed amongst boys than girls, although some research shows that girls with ASD may be under-diagnosed. This may be because they are better at hiding their symptoms and better at imitating social behaviours to fit in. Girls may also have more internalised symptoms such as anxiety and depression, whereas boys may have more externalised symptoms such as aggression and misbehaviour.

Children with ASD can learn, however, their sensory, communication and behaviour difficulties can affect their learning. Some children with ASD may not speak, but are still able to learn and understand the world around them. They will benefit from patience, empathy and support in learning. Practicing social skills such as following rules will help. People with ASD have strengths. They have attention to detail, are logical decision makers,

and are loyal, honest and intelligent.

There is no evidence to support a link between vaccines and ASD.

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder will show some of these signs:

- Significant delay in achieving developmental milestones in the early years, such as talking and toileting
- Failure to make eye contact
- Not responding to his or her name
- Playing in unusual, repetitive and limited ways
- Difficulty understanding how others feel
- Difficulty making new friends, taking turns, interacting with others or playing within a group
- Strongly sticks to routines and may react negatively if required to do something outside of the routine
- Very high or very low reaction to sensory stimulation such as sounds, touch and movement
- Increased self-stimulating behaviours, called stimming such as hand flapping, making repetitive noises or rocking back and forth.

"All schools shall promote fair and equitable access to education for all learners with disabilities regardless of their gender, age, social status, economic background, geographical location, race, ethnicity, religious background, sexual orientation and gender identity, or intersections between these factors."

(MoE, Special and Inclusive Education Policy)

"Every person has the right to early childhood education, primary and secondary education and further education."

(Fiji Constitution)

Who can help? For medical concerns contact your nearest health centre, the hospital in your division and your community health worker (if applicable). For therapy services, <https://www.frankhilton.org.fj/> and for teaching strategies, reference <https://www.education.gov.fj/special-inclusive-education/>

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Please note that this document is for informational/education purposes only and does not replace medical advice.



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