

## **What is autism?**

Autism is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder associated with difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviors or interests. Other characteristics can include unusual responses to sensory experiences, such as sensitivities to noises, textures, tastes, or the way certain objects look. It is part of a group of disorders called autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), so named because impairments range from mild to severe and vary with each individual.

The range of severity applies to each symptom of ASD. That is, some children may rarely use words to communicate, while others may hold extensive conversations and use rich language. Some children may not like to be hugged or touched, while others seek out and enjoy physical touch. ASDs are found in all ethnicities, races, and countries, and occurs in more boys than girls.

The autism spectrum disorders include autistic disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS).