



The Pristine
Foundation

UNDERSTANDING AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

Free Guide for Parents and Teachers in Nigeria



By The Pristine Foundation

WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition that affects how a person communicates, interacts with others, and experiences the world around them. It is called a 'spectrum' because it affects people in different ways and to varying degrees.

Children with autism may:

- Find it hard to understand social cues or body language
- Prefer routines and struggle with changes
- Show deep interest in specific topics
- Have unusual responses to sensory experiences (e.g., noise, light, touch)

Autism is not an illness and does not have a cure. With the right support, autistic children can thrive at home, in school, and in their communities.



COMMON SIGNS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Autism is described as a spectrum because every autistic child is different. Some children may have clear speech but struggle with social understanding, while others may not speak at all and prefer visual communication. Every child with autism has a unique combination of strengths and needs.

Communication:

- Delayed speech or not speaking at all
- Repeating words or phrases (echolalia)
- Difficulty starting or holding a conversation
- May not use gestures (like pointing or waving)

Social Interaction:

- Limited or no eye contact
- Prefers to play alone
- Doesn't respond to name
- Struggles to understand other people's feelings or social cues

Behaviour and Interests:

- Repetitive movements (e.g., hand-flapping, rocking) - Strong need for routine; upset by changes
- Intense focus on specific topics or toys
- Lines things up or plays in unusual ways

Sensory Responses:

- Reacts strongly to certain sounds, textures, lights, or smells - May seem unaware of pain or temperature
- Enjoys spinning objects or watching patterns

Note:

Not every child will show all these signs. If you're concerned, it's okay to ask for help.

COMMON SIGNS AND CHARACTERISTICS



Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder often learn in different ways. These differences can be strengths, but they can also create challenges, especially in busy classrooms. Common learning differences include:

- Needing more time to process instructions
- Difficulty with group tasks or loud environments - Struggling with handwriting or fine motor skills
- Needing support to understand abstract ideas
- Finding transitions between activities difficult

Strengths many autistic children may show:

- Excellent memory for facts
- Attention to detail
- Creativity and originality
- Deep knowledge in areas of interest

With the right support and understanding, autistic children can learn and achieve just like any other child.

SUPPORTING A CHILD WITH ASD

At Home (For Parents)

- **Use Visual Routines:** Create a picture schedule showing steps for meals, bathing, bedtime, etc.
- **Create a Calm Space:** A corner with soft items like a pillow or mat can help them feel safe.
- **Encourage Interests:** Let them explore what they love (e.g., puzzles, animals).
- **Use Simple Language:** Speak slowly, clearly, and use gestures or pictures.
- **Try Visual Timers:** Use timers to show how long tasks or breaks last.
- **Praise Specific Actions:** Celebrate small wins like You put your shoes on - well done!

At School (For Teachers)

- **Use Visual Aids:** Diagrams, pictures, and posters help understanding.
- **Seat Them Mindfully:** Away from distractions but included in the class.
- **Offer Short Breaks:** Quiet, sensory-friendly breaks reduce overwhelm.
- **Pair with Peer Buddy:** Group them with kind, calm classmates.
- **Keep Instructions Clear:** Use short steps and check for understanding.
- **Provide Sensory Tools:** Like headphones, fidget toys, or soft materials.



GETTING HELP & WORKING WITH PROFESSIONALS

Autism is not something parents or teachers have to handle alone. There are professionals who can guide you and your child.

Key people who can help:

Paediatricians: Provide diagnosis and medical advice

Speech and Language Therapists: Help with communication

Educational Psychologists: Assess learning needs and recommend support

Special Needs Teachers or SENCOs: Help adapt the classroom

Social Workers: Support families with accessing services

Important advice:

If you notice any early signs, talk to your child's doctor or teacher. Getting support early makes a big difference.

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Sometimes, just a few kind words can make a huge difference. Whether you're a parent or a teacher, remember:

- You are doing better than you think
- Every child is unique and grows at their own pace
- It's okay to ask for help
- With love, structure, and patience, your child can shine
- You are not alone - there is a whole community here to support you