Subtle Differences

Looks don’t define autism, behaviors do.

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often have problems with social, emotional and communication skills. They might repeat certain behaviors and might not want change in their daily activities. Many people with ASD also have different ways of learning, paying attention or reacting to things. Signs of ASD begin during early childhood and typically last throughout a person’s life.

Common behaviors that may indicate that children or adults have ASD include the following:

- Not pointing at objects to show interest (for example, not pointing at an airplane flying overhead)
- Not looking at objects when another person points at them
- Having trouble relating to others or not having an interest in other people at all
- Avoiding eye contact and wanting to be alone
- Having trouble understanding other people’s feelings or talking about their own feelings
- Preferring not to be held or cuddled or cuddling only when they want to
- Appearing to be unaware when people talk to them but responding to hearing other sounds
- Being very interested in people but not knowing how to talk, play or relate to other individuals
- Repeating or echoing words or phrases said to them or repeating words or phrases in place of typical language
- Having trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions
- Not playing pretend games (for example, not pretending to feed a doll)
- Repeating actions over and over again
- Having trouble adapting when a routine changes
- Having unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel or sound

- Losing skills they once had (for example, no longer using words they once did).

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