

Understanding Autism - Causes, Identification and Intervention

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Autism is a developmental disorder that affects a child's communication, behaviour and social interaction. It is a neurological condition that may begin very early in life, often becoming noticeable before the age of three. The brain development of children with autism happens differently which causes them to respond differently towards environmental situations unlike other kids. Autism is also known as **AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)**.

Let us understand that Autism!!!

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is not a disease. It is a lifelong condition that affects how an individual perceive the world and interprets the information and interacts with others. Children with Autism may exhibit issues like delayed speech, repetitive behaviours, lack of sensory coordination, limited interest in socialization, playing and understanding social cues.

Causes of Autism-

Researchers have not yet identified a single cause for autism but several factors are believed to contribute towards this disorder. Factors such as environmental and genetic are considered to be major causes. Children with a family history of autism are more likely to be diagnosed with this condition.

Sometimes complications during pregnancy (**pre-natal stage**) such as exposure to harmful chemicals, infections, poor nutrition, smoking and consumption of alcohol can affect the proper growth and development of the foetus as well as increases the risk of autism.

In other cases complications like premature delivery, low birth weight, forced delivery; accident during delivery, oxygen deprivation during birth (**natal stage**) may also be contributing factors for Autism in a child.

Even after birth (**post natal stage**) if a child has severe infections, injuries or exposure to toxins them it may contribute to developmental challenges that are associated with Autism.

It's important to note that Autism is not caused by parenting style, emotional neglect or old karmas. These are out-dated beliefs that have been disproved by modern science.

Symptoms and early signs-

Early detection of Autism is very important. Parents, teachers and care givers are the first to notice when

something is different in a child's development. Early identification is the key to effective intervention. Some common signs to watch for in children include-

- Slow or no response to name.
- No pointing or gesturing by 12 months.
- Absence of verbal communication by 16th month.
- Avoidance of eye contact.
- Repetitive movements like hand flapping or rocking.
- Resistance to change in routine.
- Sudden crying or laughing without any reason.
- Lacks of identification of even own parents, other family members or general objects.

Diagnosis and its types-

Autism is diagnosed through clinical observation, developmental screening and standardised assessments. It falls under a spectrum may manifest as

- High functioning autism.
- Classic Autism.
- Asperger's syndrome (now considered part of ASD).

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Depending upon the intensity, it can be categorised as

- Mild- Minor challenges with social interaction.
- Moderate- Noticeable communication, cognitive and behavioural difficulties.
- Severe- Significant impairments in all areas of functioning.

Intervention (therapeutic) and management-

Once Autism is identified, the child needs to go through proper assessment process. Assessment will help to identify the need areas and basic areas of the child. Assessment process also plays an important role in the placement service. The areas of assessment may include-

- Behavioural Assessment.
- Speech and language assessment.
- Occupational and sensory needs analysis.
- Educational assessment.
- Cognitive function assessment.
- Autistic rating assessment etc.

Therapeutic support- Once assessment is done; we can have a clear picture in our hand regarding the child's need. Accordingly we can choose the therapeutic support for the intervention process. The therapeutic support includes-

- Speech therapy.
- Language and communication therapy.
- Educational intervention.
- Sensory integration therapy.
- Parental guidance and counselling.
- Behavioural therapy.
- Cognitive therapy etc.

Key point to be considered is that every child does not need all kinds of therapy. We should go through proper assessment process to find out what kind of therapy is needed.

Autism is a journey that is unique for every child and its family. Early identification, acceptance and targeted intervention can greatly improve the quality of life of the child. Let us stand together for a world where neuro-diversity is celebrated and every child is empowered to reach their full potential.

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