

Similarities and differences in autistic and ADHD traits

Trait	Autism	ADHD	Notes
Ability to focus intensely for long periods of time	Yes	Yes	
Sensory sensitivities	Yes	Some	Children with ADHD are likely to be easily distracted by sensory stimulation; autistic children are more likely to find it overwhelming or painful
Difficulty with emotional regulation	Yes	Yes	
Fidgeting, constantly moving around, constantly making noise (either vocally or with objects)	Sometimes	Yes	
Hand flapping, rocking, staring at objects, and/or repeating words or phrases	Yes	No	
Trouble fitting in with peers	Yes – because they often don't understand social rules and boundaries	Yes – because they understand social rules and boundaries, but often break them impulsively before they can stop themselves	If your child is older, you may be able to talk to them about whether they are understanding social rules but breaking them impulsively, or whether they don't understand the rules.
Talking a lot, interrupting, monologuing	Yes	Yes	
Inability to focus on things that aren't interesting or new	No	Yes	
Deep fascinations or special interests	Yes	Yes	These are likely to change frequently in children with ADHD; autistic children are likely to have the same fascination for years.

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Lack of eye contact, shared attention, and/or response to their own name	Yes	No	
Difficulty with non-verbal communication (facial expression, body language, tone of voice)	Yes	No	Children with ADHD can sometimes seem like they are unable to read peers' communication signals; however, this is more likely a result of the child with ADHD overstepping a social boundary before they can stop themselves, not because they don't understand what the boundary is
Language delay and/or reliance on alternative communication over speech	Yes	No	
Delays or difficulty with motor skills	Yes	Sometimes	Some children with ADHD can seem clumsy or as if they are struggling with fine motor skills when they're impatient or rushing to get a task that they're not enjoying done; autistic children are more likely to have consistent motor difficulties, and to have difficulties with balance and knowing where they are in space
Need for routines, plans, and set schedules	Yes	No	
Inability to stick to a routine or schedule	No	Yes	