

# WHAT IS AUTISM?

~~~~~ (SIGNS TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR CHILD) ~~~~~

IF YOU BELIEVE YOUR CHILD MAY BE AUTISTIC, OR YOU WOULD LIKE HELP WITH UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR, YOU CAN FIND MORE INFORMATION AT [WWW.AUTISMNZ.ORG.NZ](http://WWW.AUTISMNZ.ORG.NZ).

**#1** Autistic kids experience the world differently. They may have trouble communicating, find it difficult to be around a lot of sensory input, or behave oddly and sometimes distressingly.



**#2** Everyday sights, smells, sounds, tastes and textures can be overwhelming or even painful for autistic kids. An autistic child may have a strong negative reaction to bright lights, loud noises, or certain textures. They may be very picky eaters, or feel sick around strong smells. They may also be fascinated by certain sights, sounds or textures - staring at light patterns, or constantly rubbing a stone or toy that they like the texture of.



**#3** Autistic kids communicate and socialise differently to typically developing kids. You may notice your child playing on their own more than the other kids; seeming particularly sensitive and unable to cope with interacting with other children; or playing differently - they may want to line all their toys up instead of telling stories with them, for example. If your child is younger and not socialising with peers yet, you may notice that they don't make eye contact, they don't smile when you do, or they don't seem to want to show you things or share their experiences with you.



**#4** Many autistic kids use repetitive movements, called 'stimming', to regulate and express their emotions, and to make sense of sensory input. These can include hand flapping, rocking, making noises, playing with their fingers, hair or face, chewing on things, and many other repeated actions. Some of these are normal in very young typically developing children (most babies go through a stage of chewing everything, for example). Stimming in response to a strong emotion or an environmental change, or continuing to use a particular stim once they're past the developmental stage associated with it, could be a sign that your child is autistic.



**#5** Autistic kids often experience delays in developing speech and/or motor skills. They may start speaking very late or not at all, and may find signing or another form of visual communication easier than speech. They may also experience something called a 'mind-body disconnect' - not being able to control their body, or finding it very difficult to give their body instructions. An autistic child may seem clumsy and often collide with objects, may knock things over without meaning to, and may have difficulty learning fine motor tasks like writing or tying their shoes.

**#6** Autistic kids often have deep rather than broad interests. They may have a single topic, or a few topics, that they are deeply fascinated by and passionate about. They often have incredibly long attention spans when engaged in an activity that relates to their fascinations, and may want to keep doing the same repetitive-seeming thing for hours at a time. These fascinations are sometimes called 'special interests', and autistic kids can acquire enormous amounts of knowledge about their particular interests.

