

WHAT IS AUTISM?

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The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition (DSM-5) describes **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** as a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition.

Autistic people may:

- Communicate and connect with other people differently
- Have sensory processing differences
- Focus intensely on certain interests or activities.

While autism is considered a lifelong condition, support needs can differ based on the environment and the resources available.

What causes Autism?

Despite ongoing research, it is unclear what exactly causes Autism. That means we are continuously learning about how each person's autistic experience impacts them and how we can better provide support.

How many people have Autism?

In Canada, 1 in 50 (2%) children between 1 and 17 years old have an autism diagnosis. In Québec, there are about 1.7% of children between 1 and 17 years old with a diagnosis.

It is true that autism diagnoses are increasing. This may be due to:

- Including more symptoms/criteria for diagnosis.
- Diagnoses being made at a younger age.
- Improvements in recognizing Autism

What are some common differences for someone diagnosed with Autism?

Autism is an “invisible” neurodevelopmental condition so you may not know who has it just by looking at them. Children or adults diagnosed with autism may experience:

- Differences in social interactions – conversations, sharing, initiating, developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
- Differences understanding social communication – facial cues, sarcasm, jokes, body language and gestures
- Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech – hand flapping, pacing, spinning objects, body rocking, vocalizing, echolalia (repeating words or phrases)
- Insistence on sameness, strictly sticking to routines, or ritualized patterns of behaviour
- Fixated interests - intense, focused attention towards a specific thing, such as an object, person, or behaviour
- Heightened sensitivity to sensory input
- Lowered sensitivity to sensory input

It is important to remember that every Autistic person experiences these differences at varying levels; some more, some less, and some not at all. This is why we think about Autism as existing on a spectrum.

How does Autism change over time?

The long-term challenges that individuals diagnosed with autism experience can change over the course of their lives.

Depending on their unique challenges and available support, Autistic individuals have the potential to lead fulfilling and productive lives in their communities.

How can I support someone on the Autism spectrum?

Each Autistic individual will face challenges at some point and may need individualized supports to help them succeed.

Early and ongoing intervention that occurs before, during, and after getting a diagnosis will provide the most benefits for an Autistic person. Help from social services, community resources, and rehabilitation services assist families with case management and setting up available interventions and services.

Effective interventions include:

- Training and education for the people that are supporting an Autistic person.
- Teaching useful skills to Autistic individuals, in the areas of language, communication, and social skills.

Behavioural and educational plans are also beneficial for those who need support in these areas. In some situations, medication can help with more specific and persistent needs or co-existing conditions.

Families must work closely with their doctor when discussing medications for children with an autism diagnosis.

Creating the right plan for each unique person will require some trial-and-error and will change over time. Good plans will include input from the Autistic person, adjustments, collaboration with others, and checking in often.

Where can clients and caregivers get more information?

Click on the links:

- [AIDE Canada](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [Disability Programs Specialized Services](#)

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- This fact sheet is based on the medical model. It is for general information only and does not replace professional medical advice. If provided to clients and their family, it must be reviewed with them to ensure understanding and address any questions or concerns.
 - Please keep in mind that a disability is only one part of a person. Identifying and fostering their strengths will be critical for supporting the person to reach their goals.
 - For more information and/or support, please visit your local clinic/Community Miyupimaatisiun Centre (CMC) and ask to be connected with a case manager.