

Handout 2—Frequently asked questions

These FAQs can be provided to teachers, child care providers, or other individuals who are unfamiliar with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and work with a child with ASD.

What are autism spectrum disorders?

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are developmental disorders that affect a person's ability to communicate and interact with other people. This disorder affects different people in different ways. Some individuals can function well on their own, while others need more assistance. Some people with autism have good verbal skills; others do not speak at all. ASD is characterized by difficulties involving social relationships, communication, and an unusual attachment to objects or routines.

What are the characteristics of autism spectrum disorders?

There are three major groupings characteristics:

- *Problems with social interactions*, such as lack of eye contact and inability to maintain attention
- *Problems with communication*, such as infrequent use of language or odd language patterns
- *Problems with behaviors* (insisting that routines are always the same) or with repetitive behaviors (flapping arms or spinning around)

How are high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome different from autism?

Asperger syndrome is one of five developmental disorders (Pervasive Developmental Disorders) that represent the autism spectrum. HFA falls at the "high" end of the autism spectrum, where people with this diagnosis may be able to communicate better socially, have more language skills, and exhibit fewer behavior problems than people at the lower end of the spectrum. The main difference between Asperger syndrome and autism is in the language and cognitive areas. Typically, people with Asperger syndrome do not experience delayed language development and may have average to above-average intelligence.

What are characteristics of HFA and Asperger syndrome?

While everyone with HFA and Asperger syndrome is different, symptoms of people with HFA and Asperger syndrome involve problems in socialization, communication, cognition, and sensation. Examples of symptoms and characteristics include: repetitive behaviors or interests, difficulty with fine motor skills (such as writing), difficulty communicating or connecting with others, inability to understand social cues and rules, poor organizational skills, literal (not abstract) thinking, specific focus on a particular interest, and strict adherence to routines and rules.

How many people have ASD?

Current research indicates that an average of 1 in 110 people is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder.

