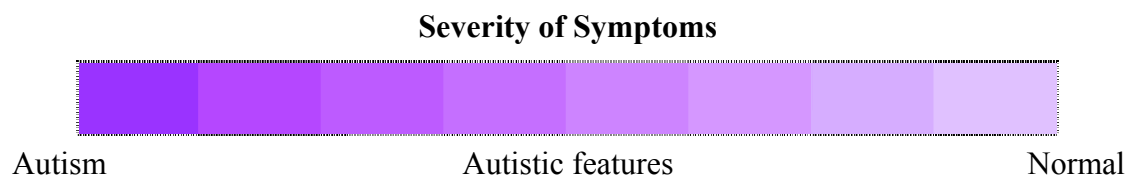


Autism Spectrum Disorders

I. What is Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is a group of developmental disorders. Children with ASD have difficulties in communication and social interaction. ASD varies in the degree of severity, with different behavioural manifestations. Broadly speaking, autism refers to the severe type while autistic features are used to describe ASD of a milder degree. .



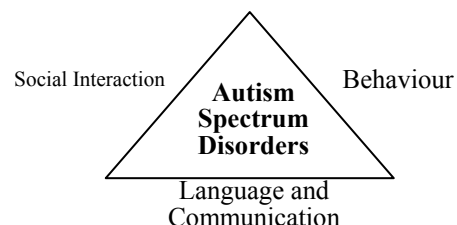
II. What causes Autism Spectrum Disorders?

The cause of ASD is uncertain, but possible factors include:

- Hereditary factor
- Differences in the development of certain brain functions, leading to impairment in cognitive and social aspects

III. What are the symptoms of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders?

They have varying degree of difficulties in social interaction, language and communication, as well as behaviour



Social Interaction:

- Lack of body language and other non-verbal communication skills, e.g. eye contact
- Weak communication and interpersonal skills, e.g. having difficulty sharing ideas and feelings with peers and making friends
- Failure to notice, understand and respond to others' feelings and needs

Language and Communication:

- Weak ability to comprehend and express self through conversation
- Show stereotypic, repetitive or parrot-like speech
- Weak in verbal expression and in organising phrases and sentences, e.g. confusing “you” and “I”
- Unusual pronunciation or intonation, e.g. missing consonants and vowels or using excessively high pitch
- Show a “one way communication” mode when talking with others, e.g. keep on speaking and refusing to listen

Behaviour:

- Rigid and ritualistic, e.g. insisting on taking the same route when going out
- Narrow scope of interest, e.g. being pre-occupied with rotating wheels or reciting route maps of buses
- Reluctance to accept new things
- Repetitive / stereotypic activities e.g. spinning or rocking self or waving hands

IV. Other possible problems or associated features

Developmental delay or mental retardation

- Research has shown that approximately 70% of children with ASD have delayed development or mental retardation. Some ASD children may show certain particular strength or “gift” e.g. strong rote memory.

Abnormal sensory responses

- Over-sensitive or under-responsive to visual, audio and tactile stimuli, e.g. being extremely afraid of or showing no response to certain sounds

Hyperactivity and inability to sit quietly

Sleep disorder

- Irregular sleep pattern, etc.

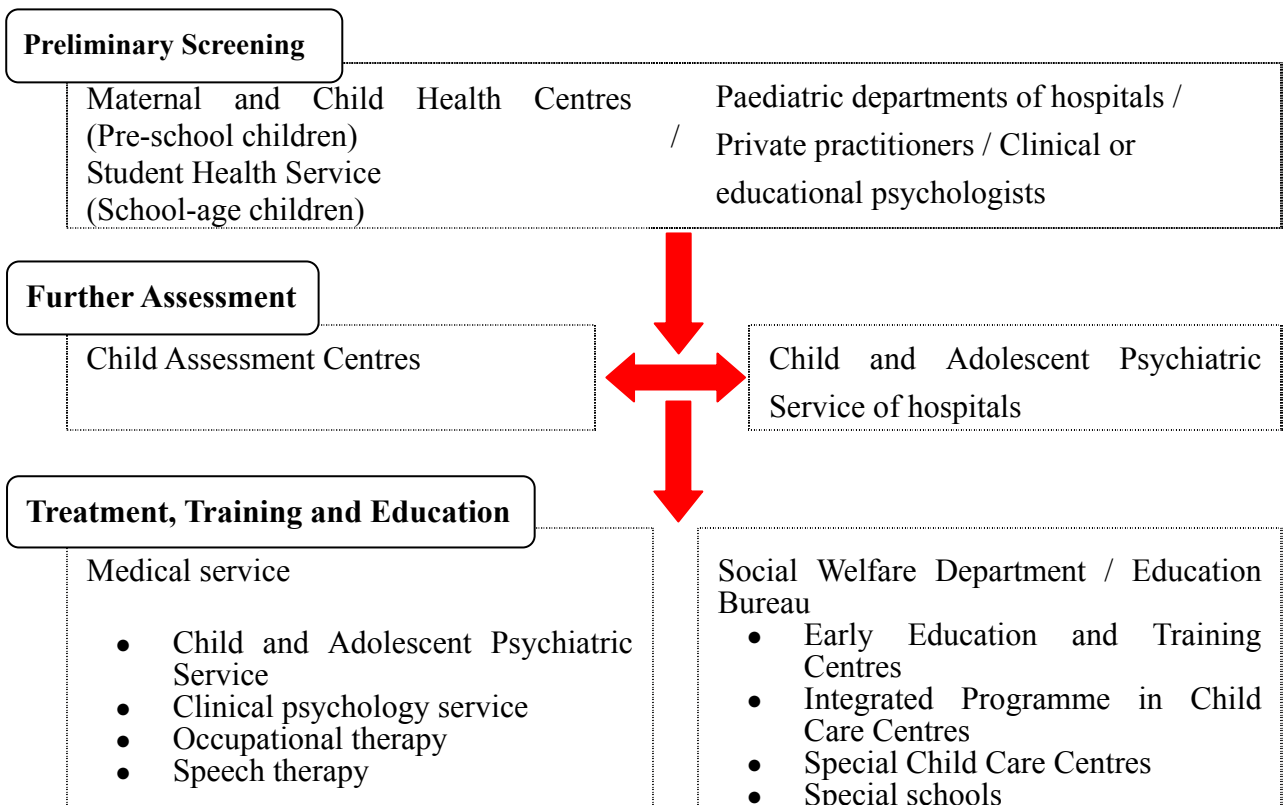
Emotional problems

- Being scared for no apparent reason, over-anxious or depressed, etc.

Epilepsy

- Research showed that some children with ASD also have epilepsy

V. Where can parents seek help if their child is suspected to have Autism Spectrum Disorders?



VI. How can parents help their child with Autism Spectrum Disorders?

1. Understand and accept the child's developmental conditions.
2. Arrange appropriate assessment and training for the child.
3. Provide the child with opportunities to participate in social activities, so that the child may be more motivated to communicate with others and build up social skills through life experiences.
4. Learn how to modify the child's behavioural problems, e.g. broaden the child's scope of interest in order to minimise his/her rigid behaviour.
5. Enhance the child's language and communication skills. Use visual hints, such as actions and gestures, to strengthen comprehension.

Enquiry Numbers and Related Websites

Government Bureau / Departments

- Department of Health
 - Child Assessment Service 2246 6633
www.dhcas.gov.hk
 - Family Health Service 2961 8855
(Maternal and Child Health Centres) www.fhs.gov.hk
 - Student Health Service 2349 2772
www.dh.gov.hk
- Social Welfare Department 2343 2255
www.swd.gov.hk
- Education Bureau 2891 0088
(24-Hour Hotline) <http://serc.edb.gov.hk>
Special Education Resource Centre

Other Organisations

- Hospital Authority 2300 6555
(General Enquiry) www.ha.org.hk
- Society for the Welfare of the Autistic Persons 2788 3326 / 3188 4504
Hong Kong Autism Resource Centre www.swap.org.hk

Overseas

- National Autistic Society (NAS), UK www.nas.org.uk
- Autism Society of America www.autism-society.org
- Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication - handicapped Children www.teacch.com

Copyright @ 2008

Child Assessment service, Department of Health, HKSAR