

Inclusion Begins with Acceptance: April is National Autism Awareness Month

This April, campaigns across the nation will kick off in recognition of both World Autism Awareness Day, on April 2nd, and National Autism Awareness Month in an effort to shift the conversation surrounding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from awareness to acceptance.

ASD is a lifelong developmental disorder that causes abnormal development and usually develops prenatally or during early childhood. According to the Autism Society, “Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a ‘spectrum condition’ that affects people differently and to varying degrees.” And, because ASD encompasses such a diverse set of indicators and impairments, there is no medical testing nor physical markers used to confirm diagnosis. Instead, diagnosis is based on repeated symptoms and behaviors, as well as a combination of responses on medically supported assessments.

Variations of ASD now include the following diagnoses, which were formerly diagnosed separately:

- **Autistic Disorder:** Characterized by impaired social interaction, communication barriers, and unusual, repetitive or severely limited activities/interests. Intense learning disabilities are not uncommon.
- **Asperger’s Syndrome:** Often confused and/or associated with Autistic Disorder but symptoms are less severe and typically the largest struggle is with socialization. Individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome may be very intelligent and able to handle daily life and often don’t struggle with communication as much. However, fixation and/or obsession with topics of interest are common.



- **Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD-NOS):** Used to describe individuals who display only some of the signs of Autistic disorder or Asperger’s Syndrome. Symptoms are often milder and typically only affect socialization and communication.
- **Childhood Disintegrative Disorder:** This is categorized as the rarest, most severe end of the ASD spectrum. It is used to describe individuals who develop normally and then very quickly lose their social, language, and mental skills. Typically occurs between the ages of 2 and 4 and, oftentimes, it is diagnosed in combination with a seizure disorder.

With approximately 1 in every 54 children being diagnosed within the ASD spectrum, as reported by the U.S. Centers for Diseases Control (CDC) and the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network, organizations – such as Autism Speaks – use this month to encourage increased education and learning about ASD in hopes to establish more inclusive environments where individuals can be recognized and connected through their abilities, rather than their disabilities.

Want to get involved? April 2nd is World Autism Awareness Day and landmarks across the globe will light up blue in honor – join them by wearing blue and lighting up your home or business in blue! Learn more through [Autism Speaks’ Light It Up Blue campaign](#). You can also create awareness and promote acceptance within your community. Learn how to take action and [#CelebrateDifferences this month through the Autism Society!](#)