



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder emerging in early childhood which often affects how one interacts with others, communicates, and behaves. People with ASD often face difficulties in social communication and interactions. Some people with ASD may also have relatively restricted interests. It is important to understand ASD as a spectrum. Each person experiences ASD differently, shaped by their developmental stages and personal characteristics.

Individuals with ASD may have the following conditions:

Difficulties with social communication and social interactions

- Find it challenging to initiate interactions and maintain conversations when engaged with others
- Find it hard to understand others' perspectives and anticipate their actions
- Have trouble expressing thoughts and emotions, feeling uneasy in sharing
- Struggle to establish, connect and maintain social relationships
- Struggle to match nonverbal communication with verbal content, such as having limited eye contact and poor use of gestures
- Struggle to respond to social cues and implicit social rules, leading to anxiety in unfamiliar situations

Other common conditions

- Engage in repetitive behaviors, like finger flicking or lining up objects, for comfort and self-regulation
- Exhibit hyper- or hyposensitivity to various sensory inputs such as sight, sound, taste, texture, temperature, balance, internal body cues, etc
- Focus intensely on specific objects or topics
- Have trouble adjusting to changes, feeling uneasy and preferring consistent routines or rituals

It is common for people with ASD to experience co-occurring psychiatric diagnosis or mental health challenges, such as anxiety and depression, which can further affect their daily functioning.



Diagnosis and Treatment

In Hong Kong, ASD is diagnosed by mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and educational psychologists. With early support and intervention, meaningful improvement can be experienced in terms of symptoms, daily functioning and overall quality of life.

Intervention and support for ASD vary depending on the individual's needs and challenges encountered. As individuals grow, the support would have to evolve to adapt to the changing environment and needs. Typical interventions involve speech and language therapy, social skills training, occupational therapy and psychotherapy. In some cases, medication may be prescribed to help the individual to manage co-occurring psychological and medical conditions.



Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

University life can present unique challenges for individuals with ASD, particularly in social communications, academic performance, and emotion well-being. Helpful tips may include:

Social Communication

- ✓ Encourage participation in peer support group to practice social skills and build a support network
- ✓ Offer training in communication and interpersonal skills, such as techniques to initiate and maintain conversations, appropriate body gestures, understand implicit social cues or rules, and perspective-taking skills

Academic Support

- ✓ Allow early access to course materials and assignment details for preparation
- ✓ Allow extended time in examinations (with professional's recommendation)
- ✓ Give clear, explicit, concise and concrete instructions
- ✓ Offer assistance in group formation and group work
- ✓ Offer training on organization, planning, time management and study skills
- ✓ Prepare students for transitions and changes by providing additional support and resources
- ✓ Use visual cues such as graphics to facilitate learning

Psychological Support

- ✓ Refer to psychological counseling service for students' mental health and adversity coping capability

It is essential to recognize that individuals with ASD have unique strengths and capacity. Fostering an inclusive and supportive environment can empower students to pursue their goals with confidence and resources they need.