

# Autism

## *What is Autism?*

- Autism is a complex neurobiological disorder that typically lasts throughout a person's lifetime. It is part of a group of disorders known as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Autism impairs a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. It is also associated with rigid routines and repetitive behaviors, such as obsessively arranging objects or following very specific routines. Symptoms can range from very mild to quite severe.



## *What Causes Autism?*

- There is no known single cause for autism, but it is generally accepted that it is caused by abnormalities in brain structure or function. Brain scans show differences in the shape and structure of the brain in a child with autism versus a child without autism. Researchers are investigating a number of theories, including the link between heredity, genetics, and medical problems.

In many families, there appears to be a pattern of autism or related disabilities, further supporting a genetic basis to the disorder. While no one gene has been identified as causing autism, researchers are searching for irregular segments of genetic code that children with autism may have inherited.

It also appears that some children are born with a susceptibility to autism, but researchers have not yet identified a single "trigger" that causes autism to develop.

## *Statistics About Autism*

- 1 in 150 individuals is diagnosed with autism, making it more common than pediatric cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined.
- Autism occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups.
- Autism is four times more likely to strike boys than girls.
- A new case of autism is diagnosed nearly every twenty minutes.
- Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the U.S. today.
- The number of people diagnosed with autism grows 10-17% annually.
- 75-80% of people with Autism also have mental retardation.

## *Teachers and parents should be aware that children with autism may:*

- have difficulty playing with other children.
- laugh or giggle inappropriately.
- have little or no eye contact.
- have an apparent insensitivity to pain.
- prefer to be alone or show aloof behavior.
- spin objects repeatedly.
- show inappropriate attachment to objects.
- show physical overactivity or extreme underactivity.
- seem unresponsive to normal teaching methods.
- insist on sameness or resist changes in routine.
- show no real fear of dangers.
- display sustained odd play.
- repeat or echo words or phrases in place of normal language.
- not want to cuddle or act cuddly.
- not be responsive to verbal cues or acts as if deaf.
- have difficulty expressing needs and uses gestures or pointing instead of words.
- throw tantrums and display extreme distress for no apparent reason.
- demonstrate delayed motor skills



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## *What is The LEAD Center, Ltd.?*

■ The LEAD Center, Ltd. is a private therapeutic day school that serves 5 to 21-year-old students with mental and emotional disabilities who live in central Virginia. The mission of The LEAD Center, Ltd. is to provide students in our care with the tools necessary to develop to his or her greatest capacity, to become able to independently take care of him/herself, and to become a reliable member of society. Successful and timely transition to the public school is the ultimate goal of The LEAD Center, Ltd.

## *How Can The LEAD Center, Ltd. Help Children with Autism?*

■ Faculty and staff at The LEAD Center, Ltd. recognize the potential of each student by providing an environment that nurtures the development of positive self-esteem and independence. The LEAD Center, Ltd. focuses on each student's personal strengths and develops individualized academic and behavioral programs to successfully meet long and short-term goals.

In order to achieve success, The LEAD Center, Ltd. uses a team approach based on consistency, predictability, family involvement, therapeutic counseling, alternatives to regular education, and community. Also included in the process are public service providers for continuity during the critical stage of transition back to the community.

■ **The LEAD Center, Ltd. offers multiple levels of service depending on specific academic and behavioral needs of the student.**

We offer three main levels of service depending on the specific academic and behavioral needs of the student.

- Higher functioning students with autism follow a Standards of Learning (SOL) grounded curriculum intended to keep the student academically on track to receive a diploma from their home school.
- The student who is not on an SOL track follows a functional curriculum to develop the ability to have basic academic skills and to be independent within the community.
- The more seriously challenged student will learn basic life skills, including communication, hygiene, and in other areas the student will need to live and communicate with care givers.

Depending on specific needs of the student with autism, The LEAD Center, Ltd. will administer the SOL or Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) assessments as required by the state.

- Upon enrollment at The LEAD Center, Ltd., the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is reviewed and appropriate goals are set for the student. Each goal is broken down into its very core components through a task analysis.
- The LEAD Center, Ltd. offers tailored programs that identify each child's needs. The child is treated and managed according to his or her specific needs. If students can be integrated into small groups or if they require individual attention, the program is adjusted to help them understand the social settings in which they may come in contact. Depending on results of the enrollment screening and the first thirty days of observation, a non-academic life skills or independent living skills curriculum is available for those students who require a more functional curriculum.

**For more information about The LEAD Center, Ltd., please visit [www.leadctr.com](http://www.leadctr.com) or call (804) 452-3730**

