Identifying and Supporting Children with Autism: A Guide for Mothers

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects communication, behavior and social interactions. This guide aims to help mothers of children with autism better understand the condition and provide strategies to support their children.



by Julio Cesar

The Importance of Early Diagnosis of Autism







Autism is a developmental disorder that affects the way a person thinks, feels, behaves and relates to the world around them. Although autism is a lifelong condition, it is possible to significantly improve the quality of life for children who have it through early diagnosis and appropriate intervention. In this text, we will explore in depth the crucial importance of early diagnosis of autism and how it can make a significant difference to children's development and future.



What is Autism

There is no single cause of autism, but it is believed to be a combination of genetic and environmental factors. People with autism may have problems with communication, social interaction, and repetitive behavior. Autism, officially known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the way a person thinks, feels, behaves, and interacts with the world around you. It is a complex condition characterized by a wide variety of characteristics and degrees of severity, hence the term "spectrum." Autism affects each individual uniquely, and experiences can vary significantly from one person to another.

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1. Communication:

Difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication.

Some children with autism may speak well, while others may have difficulty developing speech or may be nonverbal.



Communication is a key area of challenge for many children with autism. These difficulties can manifest themselves in a number of ways, including:

◯ Difficulties in Verbal Communication:

- Some children with autism may have difficulty developing speech or may begin speaking later than their peers.
- There may be challenges in articulating words, correct pronunciation and organizing sentences.
- Language may be repetitive, with echolalia (repetition of previously heard words or phrases).

◯ Non verbal comunication :

- Many children with autism also have difficulties with non-verbal communication. This includes facial expressions, gestures, eye contact and body posture.
- A lack of direct eye contact is common in some children with autism, which can be misinterpreted as disinterest or lack of empathy.

◯ Functional Communication:

- Some individuals with autism may have difficulty using language functionally, that is, to express needs, desires and feelings.
- They may have difficulty asking for what they need, expressing discomfort, or sharing information.

◯ Limited Understanding:

- Understanding spoken language can also be a challenge. Some children with autism may have difficulty understanding commands or complex conversations.

◯ Alternative and Augmentative Communication **(CAA)** :

- For children who are nonverbal or have limited verbal communication, AAC, such as communication boards, communication apps, or sign language, can be an important tool to help with communication.

◯ Interest Specialization:

- Some children with autism may specialize in specific interests and can communicate effectively about those topics of interest.

It is important to note that communication is highly individualized in children with autism. Support from speech therapists, speech therapists and occupational therapists can be essential in helping to develop communication skills. Additionally, strategies such as visual communication, patience, encouraging functional communication, and creating developed communication environments can be very helpful for children with autism, regardless of their verbal communication ability.



2. Social interaction:

- Challenges in understanding and interpreting social cues, such as facial expressions and body language.
- Difficulty establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Social interaction is one of the key areas in which children with autism can face innovative challenges. These challenges can manifest themselves in many ways, including:

- Understanding Social Cues:

- Many children with autism have difficulty understanding and interpreting social cues, such as verbal expressions, body language, and tone of voice.
- They may not notice others' emotions or interests, making it difficult to understand what others are thinking or feeling.

- Establishing and Maintaining Relationships:

- Children with autism may have difficulty forming meaningful interpersonal relationships with peers and friends.
- They may prefer solitary activities over social interactions, or may not know how to start or maintain a conversation.

- Game and Play Skills:

- Social play can be challenging for children with autism. They may not understand the unspoken rules of the game or may have difficulty participating in imaginative play with others.

- Lack of Empathy and Social Reciprocity:

- Some children with autism may have difficulty showing empathy or responding to others' emotions appropriately.
- Social reciprocity, like starting a conversation or answering questions, can be challenging.

- Restricted Interests and Repetitive Behaviors:

- Children with autism may engage in repetitive behaviors or restricted interests, which can make social interaction with their peers difficult.

It is important to note that the severity of these challenges can vary widely from one child with autism to another. Some children may have limited social skills, while others may have a greater degree of success in social interactions. However, support and appropriate intervention can help improve the social skills of children with autism.

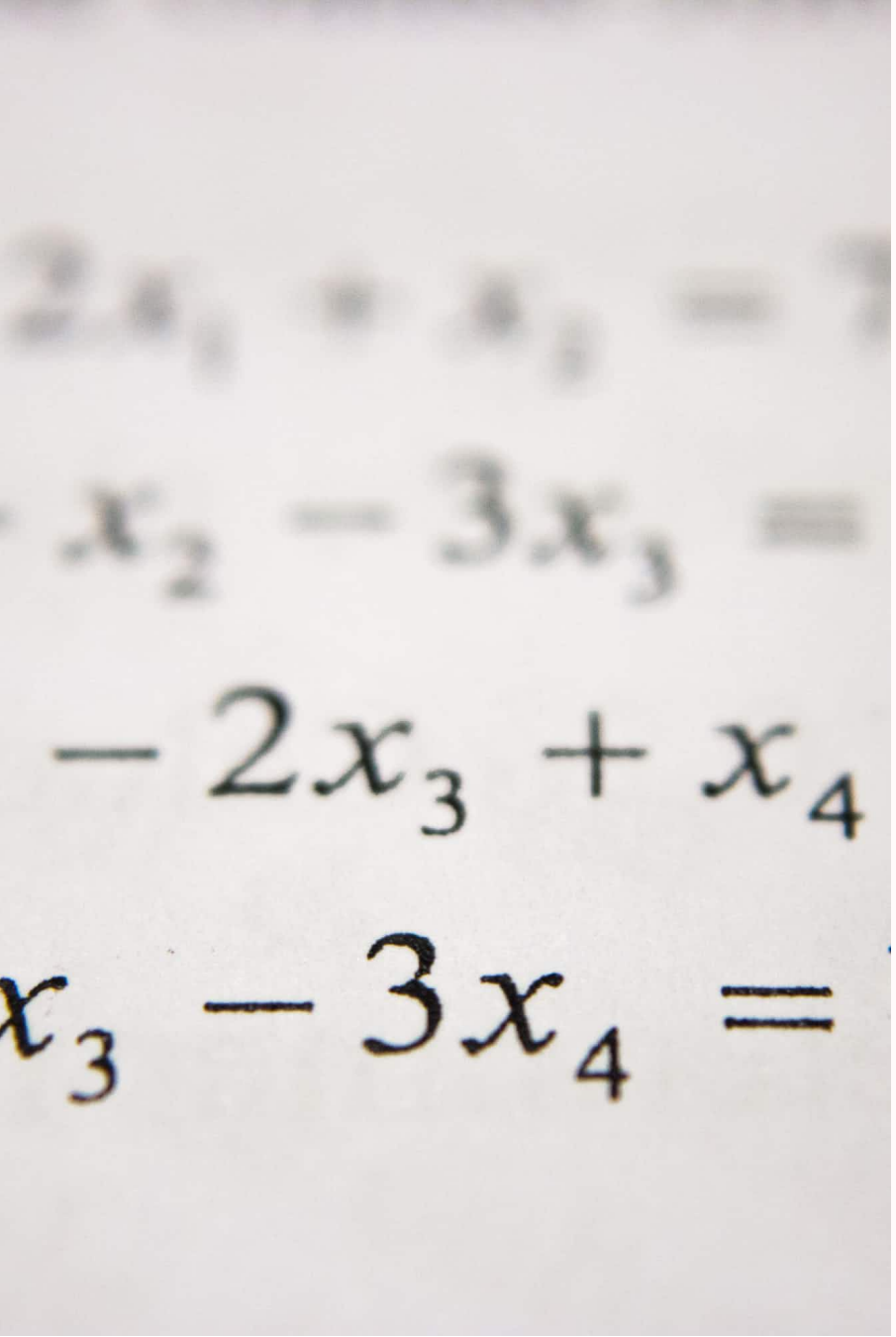
Early interventions, such as behavioral therapy and social development therapy, can be particularly effective in helping children with autism develop more satisfying social skills and interpersonal interactions. Additionally, creating developed social environments, promoting understanding, and educating about autism can help peers and family members interact more effectively with children with autism.

Repetitive behaviors are a common feature of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and can encompass a variety of manifestations. Here are some of the most common forms of repetitive behaviors seen in children with autism.:

- Repetitive Movements (Stereotypies):
  - This may include rocking the body, swinging the hands, hitting or hitting objects, spinning, twisting fingers, among other repetitive movements.
  - These behaviors are one way a child with autism self-regulates or copes with stress.
- Object alignment:
  - Some children with autism have a strong desire to line up objects in a precise, orderly manner. This can include toys, everyday objects or the same foods.
  - These alignment patterns can be a source of comfort and predictability.
- Interests and Repetitive Activities (Obsessions):
  - Children with autism may develop intense and specific interests in particular topics or activities, often turning to those interests repeatedly.
  - This can include fixations on subjects such as trains, numbers, maps, among others.
- Sensory Sensitivity:
  - Many children with autism have heightened sensory sensitivities. This can manifest as hypersensitivity to sound, light, touch, smells or textures.
  - These sensations lead to intense reactions, such as avoiding noisy or unpleasant environments when wearing certain clothes.
- Attachment to Objects:
  - Children with autism can develop intense exercise on specific objects, such as a toy, blanket or even a piece of clothing.
  - These objects can be a source of comfort and security.

It is important to understand that these repetitive behaviors often have a function for a child with autism. They can help normalize emotions, deal with stress, or provide a sense of predictability and control in a world that can be assailed by them.

Therapeutic approaches, such as behavioral therapy, can be effective in helping children with autism channel these behaviors in more functional ways. Furthermore, supportive strategies, such as adapting environments to accommodate sensory sensitivities, can improve the quality of life of children with autism. Understanding and understanding these behaviors on the part of parents, family members and educators are also essential to creating a supportive and understanding environment.



4. Specific and Intense Interests:

Many autistic children develop intense and specific interests in certain topics, such as trains, dinosaurs or mathematics.

Intense and specific interests, often called "fixations" or "obsessions" on particular topics, are a common feature in children with autism. These interests can be notable and stand out for their intensity and focus. Here are some characteristics of these interests:

- Intensity:
  - Children with autism often demonstrate an exceptional level of interest in a specific topic. This interest can be passionate and consume a significant amount of your time and attention.
- Focus on Details:
  - They tend to focus on minute details related to their topic of interest. For example, you might memorize specific details about dinosaurs or know all the names of car models.
- Resistance to change :
  - Children with autism may resist changes to their routines or activities, especially if it interferes with their specific interest.
- Comfort and Predictability:
  - These interests can provide a sense of comfort and predictability to children with autism in a world that can be confusing and unpredictable for them.
- Learning Potential:
  - Although these interests may seem narrow, they can also be a valuable source of learning. Many children with autism gain in-depth knowledge in their topics of interest.
- Incorporation into Therapeutic Activities:
  - Therapists and educators often incorporate the specific interests of children with autism into therapeutic or educational activities, leveraging that interest to promote learning and engagement.

It is important to note that these interests are not necessarily harmful and can have benefits. They can be a source of pleasure, learning and self-expression for a child with autism. Furthermore, these interests can evolve over time and can even become a foundation for future interests or careers.

Parents and educators can support the development of a child with autism by balancing encouraging their specific interests with gradually introducing new topics and experiences. By doing this, you can build on your child's strengths and help them engage more flexibly with the world around them.

Sensory Sensitivities::

Unusual sensory sensitivities, such as hypersensitivity to sound or touch, are common. This can affect the way the child reacts to the environment.

Natural sensory sensitivities are an important feature of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Children with autism can experience sensory sensations in intense and unique ways. This can affect your perception and response to your environment in several ways:

- Sensory Hypersensitivity:
  - Many children with autism are hypersensitive to sensory stimuli, meaning they may be sensitive to sounds, lights, touches, smells, or textures.
  - For example, a sound that most people consider soft and tolerable may be hyper-painful loud to a child with hearing sensitivity.
- Excessive Reactions to Stimuli:
  - Due to hypersensitivity, children with autism may overreact to sensory stimuli. This may include covering your ears in response to loud noises or avoiding touching certain textures.
- Stress and Sensory Overload:
  - Constant exposure to intense sensory stimuli can be stressful and lead to sensory overload. This can result in avoidance behaviors, anxiety, or irritability.
- Self-Regulation Behaviors:
  - Some repetitive behaviors, such as rocking, hitting, or making repetitive noises, may be a form of sensory self-regulation. They can help your child deal with sensory overload.
- Sensory Preferences:
  - Children with autism may have specific sensory preferences. For example, some may be attracted to repetitive lights or movements, while others may prefer quieter, more controlled environments.
- Sensory Interventions:
  - Specialized occupational therapists may work with children with autism to develop sensory regulation strategies, such as using sensory tools (such as noise-cancelling headphones) or relaxation techniques.

It is important for parents, caregivers and educators to understand the sensory sensitivities of children with autism and create environments that accommodate these needs. This may include reducing aversive sensory stimuli whenever possible, providing emotional support during times of sensory overload, and offering options so the child can self-regulate in healthy ways.

Remembering that each child with autism is unique, sensory sensitivities can vary widely from one child to another. Therefore, an individualized approach to understanding and supporting sensory needs is key.