**FACT SHEET: AUTISM**

**What is autism?**

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are terms for disorders of brain development characterised by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication and restricted and repetitive behaviours/interests.

ASD is 4-5 times more common in boys than girls

Recent estimates from Centre for Disease Control, USA suggest that 1 in 88 children have ASD.

ASD can be associated with intellectual impairment, difficulties in motor coordination, seizures and Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The severity of autism varies widely, from mild to severe, depending on the severity; some children will be able to live fairly independently – although they may need a degree of support to achieve this, while others may require lifelong, specialist support. However, all people with autism can, and do, learn and develop with the right kind of support.

**What are the common signs of ASD?**

Children with ASD may

* fail to respond to their names,
* avoid eye contact with other people
* May not smile in response to others
* Prefer to be alone ,enjoy playing alone
* not point/show; use mother’ s hand to point for needs
* not imitate actions
* show delay in language development or loss of language skills
* Be preoccupied with spinning/rotating objects, lining up objects.
* Enjoy hand flapping, spinning, rocking
* Dislike change in routine or surroundings

**Very early indicators (‘Red Flags’) that require evaluation by an expert include:**

* no babbling or pointing by 1 year of age
* no single words by 16 months or two-word phrases by age 2
* loss of language or social skills

**What Causes ASD?**

 First and foremost, there is no **one** cause of autism .The clearest evidence of the autism risk factors involves events before and during birth. They include advanced parental age at time of conception , maternal illness during pregnancy and certain difficulties during birth, particularly those involving periods of oxygen deprivation to the baby’s brain. It is important to keep in mind that these factors, by themselves, do not cause autism. Rather, in combination with genetic risk factors, they appear to increase the risk.

**Is there a cure for ASD?**

Although there is no cure for autism, appropriate specialized treatment provided early in life can have a positive impact on the child's development.

Interventions for ASD are therapies and behavioural interventions designed to remedy specific symptoms and can bring about substantial improvement. The ideal treatment plan coordinates therapies and interventions that meet the specific needs of individual children.

Earlier the intervention, the better is the outcome.

Educational/behavioural interventions: The most effective treatments available today are applied behavioural analysis (ABA) , occupational therapy and speech therapy.

Medications: Doctors may prescribe medications for treatment of specific symptoms, such as aggression, hyperactivity ,stereotypies and seizures.

Other therapies: Parents should use caution before adopting any unproven treatments.

**Bibliotherapy**

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