

AUTISM

ACROSS THE LIFE SPAN



Every person's development unfolds in a unique way. In autistic people, some aspects of development differ from neurotypical patterns—but the differences vary from person to person. Some of those differences will change, while others remain constant across the life span.

Early Childhood

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that delays or differences in developmental milestones may be present in autistic infants and toddlers.

Some indicators include:

- Difficulty with social communication (making eye contact or understanding nonverbal cues)
- Delayed language development or speech repetition
- Repetitive behaviors or routines
- Sensory sensitivities (i.e., aversion to loud noises or certain textures)
- Movement that is not neurotypical (spinning, stimming, hand flapping)

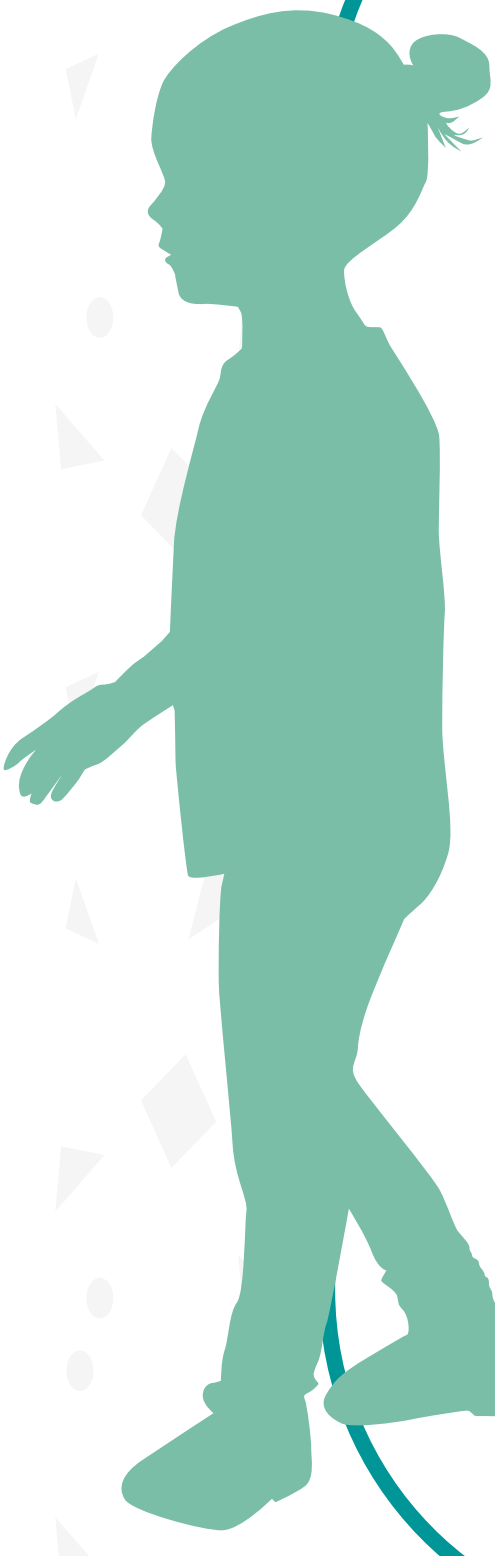
Autism traits can also be shaped by co-occurring language differences and intellectual disabilities.



Childhood

Traits that emerge in the toddler years may continue during later childhood. School-age autistic children may:

- Have a hard time interpreting social cues with friends
- Take the lead in determining what to talk about in conversation
- Speak in literal or concrete terms and have trouble understanding figurative language
- Have some trouble with complex sets of instructions
- Become overwhelmed with the stimuli and social demands in classroom settings



Adolescence

Autistic teens may have fewer challenging behaviors than young children but are more likely to:

- Experience depression
- Engage in risk-taking behaviors, especially when depressed
- Feel a constant pressure to socialize
- Experience sensory overload



Adulthood

The identification of autism in adults is increasing, and it can present new challenges in physical, adaptive, and mental health areas.

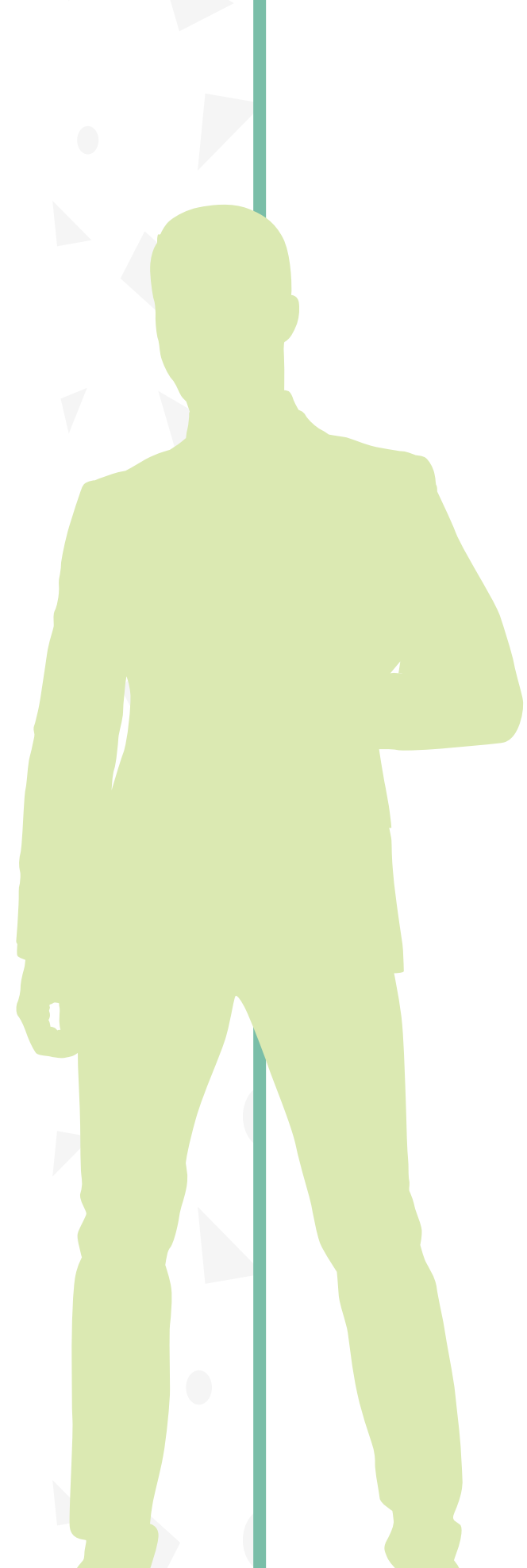
Autistic adults may:

- Experience extra anxiety and even exhaustion from suppressing repetitive behaviors in social situations, especially those who don't have intellectual or language disabilities
- Have difficulty managing, interpreting, or responding to emotions and social situations
- Face challenges accessing quality healthcare services
- Have trouble sleeping through early adulthood (20–39 years) and middle adulthood (40–59)

For those assigned female at birth, autism has been linked to a greater risk of endocrine dysfunction.

Despite many challenges, autistic people enjoy full lives developed around:

- A strong sense of justice
- A well-developed moral compass
- An outstanding memory
- A unique perspective on the world
- The ability to pay attention for long periods
- Success pursuing their preferred interests regarding their education, hobby, and career
- Greater creativity



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