Autism – do you know the signs?
Children and Younger Adolescents

Social Interaction and Verbal Communication

Repeating certain words or phrases over and over again ("echolalia")
Does not follow simple commands relating to objects not in view (such as fetch your toothbrush)
Talks excessively about topics of own interest
Takes things literally, struggles with sarcasm and metaphor
Does not respond by looking when name is called. Talks ‘at’ others rather than sharing a two-way conversation

Limited use of language

Does not seek comfort when in pain or distress
Indifferent to, or no interest in, age peers
Approaches others in one sided way or on own terms
Can be over-formal or over-familiar
Does not respond to greetings and farewells

Emotional responses to others are inappropriate, rude and unsympathetic
Does not ‘share’ interests or enjoyment with others

Imagination, ideas and creativity

Lack of imaginative pretend play (pretending that dolls and toys are real and enacting out scenarios with them or role play)
Imaginative pretend play or role play is repetitive
Imaginative pretend play is over-focused or obsessive or copied (not invented)
Plays imaginative pretend play with others but not equally shared - may passively copy another’s imaginative game, or insist that others follows his/her own themes and rules

Imaginative pretend play is solitary or plays near but not with other children
Empathy reduced or absent

Lack of spontaneous gesture that expresses emotion (e.g. putting arm around someone)
Does not follow a pointing gesture to where someone is looking

Lack of social smile
Odd or flat/monotonous tone of voice
Reduced or unusual eye contact

Gestures and non verbal communication

Displays repetitive behaviours or rituals that negatively affect daily activities
Arranges objects in patterns or lines and dislikes these to be disturbed
Over-focused, unusual or highly specific interests and hobbies
Prefers familiar routines, likes things to be ‘just right’

Dislike of change, which can lead to anxiety or aggression
Self-chosen activities are limited and unchanged
Has strong adherence to rules or fairness that leads to arguments

Unusual sensory responses to sound sight, touch, taste, smell, movement and/or pain

Narrow range of interests, routines and repetitive behaviours

Unaware of other’s feelings
Problems with turn-taking or team activities
Does not spontaneously join in or interact with others of same age
Does not enjoy social situations that most children like (e.g. birthday parties)


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