

ARTICLE ON AUTISM (Children with Special Needs)

By

Amrutha Ramanujam, M.Tech (IIT)

Autism & Special Ed Consultant / EC Member of ASI / Parent Advocate / Inclusion Expert
Yahoo support group owner of "Special-Kids-India", email: ramrut1@gmail.com



What is Autism?

- It is a neurological, developmental disorder that affects one in every 88 children (Ref #1), with the female : male ratio of 1:4. It means that 1 in every 54 boys falls in the Autism spectrum.
- Speech / language & social delays are observed. Symptoms start & become prominent usually around 2 years of age.
- Precise cause is unknown, though MMR vaccination also seems to play a major role as per Research, despite possible environmental triggering factors.

Categories:

Mild to moderately affected: High functioning children with Autism. As per statistics, 30-40% of the kids may have average or above average IQ, who can cope up with inclusion with typical peers with minimal help from resource room. ~20% of the Autism population could be Savants (Genius) Ref#2.

Moderate to severely affected: Very severe delays in all areas, along with severe sensory processing disorder, may have lesser IQ. Challenges may be involved in testing them.

CURRENT CONCERNS:

1. Parliament has not yet released the newly drafted PWD Act (Persons With Disability Act drafted in 2012), which includes Autism as a different ability.

2. Students with Autism are forced to follow the exam accommodations designed / set up for students with Dyslexia, whose needs are totally different.

What do we want?

1. We request the Parliament to immediately release the newly drafted PWD Act which includes Autism as a different ability. This will ensure them all the rights, including the Right To Education, that they deserve. Given the right support system, many of them can shine in their education.
2. All Educational Boards (CBSE, ICSE, State Board schools, NIOS etc) should provide suitable exam accommodations for students with Autism, as per THEIR needs, considering into account their language and social delays. They can't be abused with descriptive type of question paper, when they have severe speech delay.

TABLE-1, DIFFERENCES BETWEEN KIDS WITH

AUTISM	DYSLEXIA
1. Severe speech and language delay is observed for most of the kids in the spectrum	No speech delay is observed
2. Social delays are observed – usually doesn't mingle much with peers.	No social delays observed
3. Many of them can read, though they have problem with comprehension	They may have trouble reading
4. IF they can say something, they can write those words on their own	Though they can say everything, they may have trouble writing with correct spelling
5. Sensory issues / attention issues observed mostly	Not observed to that extent, unless one has ADHD diagnosis too.
6. 20-48% of children with autism at some point have seizures; EEG abnormality is much more common than clinical seizures.. So, it is important to keep their stress level less in general. (Ref 3)	Epilepsy is usually not observed

SUITABLE EXAM ACCOMMODATIONS BASED UPON TABLE-1, FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM:

1. MODIFIED, NON-DESCRIPTIVE TYPE OF QUESTION PAPERS SHOULD BE PROVIDED FOR ALL SUBJECTS, WITH A COMBINATION OF MCQ, MATCH THE FOLLOWING, FILL UP THE BLANKS FROM THE LIST OF GIVEN OPTIONS, MAP LOCATIONS, LABELING DIAGRAMS, EX. CIRCLING ONLY THE 5 RIGHT SET OF OPTIONS OUT OF 10 RANDOM OPTIONS LISTED (CAN BE USED FOR 5 MARK QUESTION)
2. FOR MATH, DESPITE MORE DIRECT QUESTIONS / LENGTHY WORD PROBLEMS SHOULD BE BROKEN DOWN TO SMALLER ONES WITH VISUALS. THE NUMBER OF PROBLEMS HAVE TO BE REDUCED TO A MAX OF 3/4TH OF THE REGULAR PAPER SO IT WON'T BE TOO STRESSFUL FOR THEM, DUE TO THE EXTRA TIME NEEDED FOR THEIR PROCESSING.
3. 1:1 ADULT PROMPTER NEEDED INSTEAD OF A JUNIOR SCRIBE STUDENT, TO READ WITH INTONATION, REINFORCE & MOTIVATE TO FINISH THE TASK, INSTEAD OF A JUNIOR SCRIBE STUDENT – AS ADULTS HAVE MORE RECIPROCATION, PATIENCE & PASSION TO DO THE ABOVE SAID ROLE.
4. USAGE OF CALCULATOR / EXTRA 1 HOUR TIME / QUICK BREAKS TO REDUCE STRESS SHOULD BE ALLOWED.

Ref:

- 1 http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/national_world/2012/03/30/autism-rate-jumps-to-1-in-88-kids-in-cdc-study.html
- 2 <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health/new-health/health-news/the-autistic-advantage-montreal-team-taps-researchers-potential/article2223348>
- 3 - <http://readingroom.mindspec.org/?news-item=age-and-iq-are-predictors-of-epilepsy-risk-in-asd>