

“**Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)** is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain. People with ASD often have problems with social communication and interaction, and restricted or repetitive behaviors or interests. People with ASD may also have different ways of learning, moving, or paying attention... for people with ASD, these characteristics can make life very challenging.” — Center for Disease Control, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/signs.html>

Mainstream medical science defines three most significant areas of impairment in ASD:

- In social interaction;
- In communication and the use of language;
- In restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior.

Social interaction and communication: avoids or does not keep eye contact; does not respond to name by the age of one; does not show facial expressions by 12 months of age; does not play simple interactive games by 12 months of age; uses few or no gestures by 12 months of age; does not share interests with others by 12-15 months of age; does not notice when others are hurt or upset; does not notice other children or participate in interactive play by three years of age.

Restrictive and repetitive behavior: repeats words or phrases mechanically again and again (echolalia); plays with toys the same way every time; neatly arranges toys or objects and gets upset when order is changed; has obsessive habits and interests; focuses attention on parts of human bodies and objects; must follow predictable routines; flaps hands and arms, rocks body, or spins; displays unusual interest to the way things smell, sound, taste, or feel.

Use of language and development: delayed speech and language development; clumsy movements; delayed cognitive skills, learning difficulties; picky eating habits; irregular sleep patterns; gastrointestinal issues, indigestion, juvenile onset diabetes; impulsive, disruptive, and inattentive behavior; anxiety, stress, or depressed mood; unusual mood or emotional reactions; possible epilepsy and seizures.

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Let us look at the problem of autism from another perspective. While the mainstream science emphasizes the brain's role alone in causing this disorder, more comprehensive scientific approach based on principles of three-fold and four-fold human organization offers a deeper insight into this problem. In accordance with Anthroposophical medicine's viewpoint, the root of this disorder lies in incomplete engagement of the *I-organization** into the child's organism (see the table below).

- Autism is the result of improper incorporation of the *I-organization* in both nerve-sense system and metabolic-limb system. The *I-organization* is the core or the uniting and organizing force that brings together the faculties of willing, feeling, and thinking.
- Many features of autism point to disengagement of the *I-organization* from the rest of the body. The inability of an autistic child to keep eye-contact, respond to name by 12 months of age, properly use personal pronouns and instead speaking in a third or second person directly points to the profound inability to relate to oneself as having a center or any concrete sense of *I am*. Moreover, such features as emotional withdrawal, lack of appropriate facial expression, aloofness and disinterest in playful interactions with other children can be explained in exactly the same way.
- This lack of *I am* perception explains why many autistic children enjoy playing with and neatly arranging inanimate objects, yet they are unable to relate to other people. Having a sense of one's own ego enables a person to recognize other individual egos which is the cognitive foundation for being able to relate.
- The sense of one's own *I*, or the ego, is directly engaged in perception of being separated as an individual human being from the rest of the environment. This perception of separateness is the foundation of individual consciousness, and it begins to manifest at the age of 15 months - 24 months as speech and language development, ability to relate to others, finer control of purposeful movements, gradual development of attention, and it frequently coincides with *temper tantrums*. All these essential developmental features including temper tantrums represent the beginning of a very gradual incorporation of the *I-organization* into the entire organization of a child. However, the full development of the human ego will occur much later, usually by the age of 21.
- Obsessive interest in sameness, repetitive and restrictive behavior are the result of autistic child's inability to exercise intentional, creative, and willful actions. Such actions require the warmth and full cooperation of the *I-organization* as the source of enthusiasm and will.

Unfortunately, modern materialistic science accepted the restrictive model of human organization as a biological, physiological, and genetically predetermined entity only. Modern paradigm does not yet recognize the subtle, soul-spiritual members of the human organization as scientifically verifiable realities. This incomplete image of a human being leads to limited understanding of the causes of many morbid conditions since many of diseases originate in the sphere of soul and spirit. There is an intimate, reciprocal dynamic connection between the upper, nerve-sense system, and the lower, metabolic system. Many organic processes of the lower sphere can manifest in the upper sphere whenever they become displaced. Therefore, the origins of many mental diseases must be sought in physical disorders of the lower part of the human organization, or the metabolic-limb pole. Autism may be thought of as dysfunction in the lower

organs of metabolic activities. Therapeutic measures should be directed at strengthening and guiding the I-organization into the metabolic-limb pole.

In addition, modern conditions of life with strong emphasis only on tangible, material surface of reality, incessant avalanche of information and random, disorganized stimuli have created the atmosphere of mechanicalness and soul-spiritual coldness. Young children may sense this coldness as completely alien, unnatural to their environment. In order to protect themselves, they withdraw into their own inner world and revolt against this cold emptiness outside by building the walls around them.

Four members of human organization

Constituent Element of a Human Being	Organic Medium	Natural Element
Ego, or Human Spirit	Warmth-organism	Fire
Soul Body/Astral Body	Air-organism	Air
Etheric Body	Water-organism	Water
Physical Body	Mineral-organism	Earth

* Please refer to video lecture #2 of the educational series *From troubled to healthy: pathways to children's well-being*.