

Developmental Disorders of Children

Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD)

Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD) include a wide continuum of cognitive and neurobehavioural disorders with three core deficits. These include impairments in social interaction, impairments in verbal and nonverbal communication, and stereotypic and repetitive and restricted patterns of behaviour.

There are five diagnostic categories in PDDs including Autistic Disorder, Rett's Disorder, Childhood Degenerative Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Development Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified.

Autism is probably the most well known type of PDD. Autism occurs in approximately 4.5 out of 10000 children, with the ratio of boys to girls being 4:1.

Children with autism have qualitative impairments in social interaction. They may seem aloof having poor eye-to-eye gaze, they may lack facial expressions, and they may not have nonverbal gestures such as pointing. Autistic children often have few friends of their own age even if they want friends. They are often teased and bullied and may misinterpret what others say to them. They may lack spontaneity with others, and may show no interest in other people. They also often don't respond to social cues from others. Autistic children also have qualitative impairments in communication. Fifty per cent of children with autism do not develop language, while for those that do, often their comprehension of language is limited. They may find it difficult to have conversations with others, and they may repeat words or phrases they have heard. This is known as echolalia. They are often not creative in their play, and may use toys in a repetitive and mechanical manner. Autistic children also have restricted, repetitive and stereotypic patterns of behaviours or activities. This means that an autistic child may have a preoccupation with a particular interest such as dinosaurs. They may also engage in rituals such as eating only from a specific plate or insisting on wearing shoes to the dinner table.

Children with autism show the above features before the child is three years of age.

A multi-disciplinary team including pediatricians, psychologists, speech pathologists and occupational therapists should be involved in the diagnosis and treatment of a children with autism. There are a range of useful strategies than can be implemented by parents and teachers in helping an autistic child to improve their communication, their social interaction, and help widen their interests and behaviours enabling them to integrate more successfully with other children.