
AOTA's Societal Statement on Autism Spectrum Disorders

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) asserts that occupational therapy services are grounded in the belief that persons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are integral members of their families and communities and have the right to fully participate in the educational, social, cultural, political, and economic life of society (AOTA, 2008).

ASD is a lifelong condition currently diagnosed in an estimated 1 in 150 children, and the rate of diagnosis is rapidly increasing (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2007). Individuals with ASD experience significant challenges in communication, social interaction, sensory processing, play, and regulation of emotions and behavior as compared with peers (CDC, 2007). These differences affect the ability of individuals with ASD to make sense of the world around them and to participate in everyday activities such as interacting with others, performing educationally related tasks, obtaining and maintaining employment, and being involved in community events (AOTA, 2005). Although intellectual functioning among persons with ASD ranges from "profound mental retardation–extreme giftedness" (Sternberg, Lautrey & Lubart, 2002), fewer than 20% attend post-secondary education, and only 15% achieve independence as adults (Lawer, Brusilovskiy, Salzer, & Mandell, 2008).

Occupational therapy practitioners work collaboratively with individuals on the autism spectrum, their families, other professionals, and community members in multiple contexts to advocate for and provide a range of needed resources and services that support the individual's ability to participate fully in life (Case-Smith & Arbesman, 2008).

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