

# Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

ADED – The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists

ASD can cause social, behavioral, verbal and non-verbal communication challenges. Individuals with ASD who pursue driving typically have a normal to gifted IQ. Commonly associated conditions with ASD include motor planning challenges, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, and sleep disorders.

Warning signs:

- **Motor skills** – Drivers use motor coordination with visual skills to control the vehicle. Individuals with ASD may have motor coordination and/or visual motor integration challenges that make it difficult to:
  - Control the vehicle through turns, hills and curves.
  - Carry out the visual and physical steps for lane changes.
- **Social skills** – Drivers need to interpret the behaviors of other roadway users. Individuals with ASD may have difficulty:
  - Anticipating actions of other roadway users including pedestrians and cyclists.
  - Recognizing and reacting to aggressive drivers.
- **Visual processing skills** – Drivers can't process all the information on the roadway. Instead, they need to identify and react to the critical information. Individuals with ASD may have difficulty prioritizing what they see and staying focused which may result in:
  - Delayed or absent reactions to important information such as traffic lights or hazards.
- **Executive function skills** – Drivers make quick (tactical) decisions, and problem solve every time they drive. Individuals with ASD may have difficulty managing:
  - Roadside emergencies, routine police stops, or significant changes in weather.
  - Detours or a sudden change in traffic conditions.
- **Learning differences** – Driver education can be challenging for individuals with ASD because they may experience:
  - Anxiety about driving or being with other students in a car.
  - Difficulty interpreting instructions that are not presented in a rule-based concrete manner.
  - A baseline of driving skills that is below their peers without ASD.
  - Difficulty transferring knowledge from classroom to behind-the-wheel sessions.

continued



A driver rehabilitation evaluation will examine these skills as they relate to driving. The goal is to be independent drivers that can compensate for challenges. A driver rehabilitation specialist can help to identify readiness to learn to drive and appropriate training methods.



This assessment should include:

- A review of medical history and medication
- Assessment of life skills
- Vision
- Executive functions
- Motor planning
- Visual motor integration
- Behind-the-wheel, simulator, or passenger activities

If you or someone you know has Autism Spectrum Disorder and is having difficulty driving or obtaining a driver’s license, a driver evaluation may be indicated. A driver rehabilitation specialist can provide a comprehensive evaluation and create a customized training program to address issues with driving.

**References:**

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To locate a driver rehabilitation expert in your area contact:

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