

Autism Support Levels in Plain Language

Doctors sometimes sort support needs into three levels. This isn't a label for life - it's a quick way to say how much help someone needs right now at school, at home, or in the community.

Level 1 - Needs Some Support

- Needs some support to handle daily life.
- Talking with others can be hard - may miss social cues or need reminders for back-and-forth conversation.
- Change can be stressful - benefits from a plan, extra time, and clear next steps.
- Helpful: checklists, visuals, flexible routines, quiet space to reset.

Level 2 - Needs A Lot of Support

- Needs a lot of support through the day.
- May use fewer words or need help starting/keeping a conversation.
- Strong interests or sensory needs can make school, home, or community harder without support.
- Helpful: structured schedules, reduced demands, regular coaching, speech/OT, AAC if useful.

Level 3 - Needs Very High Support

- Needs very high support in most settings.
- Communication is very limited without strong supports.
- Changes or unexpected events can be overwhelming and affect safety or basic routines.
- Helpful: intensive individualized support, robust AAC, very predictable routines, safety planning.

Good to Know

- Levels are about support needs today. They can change over time.
- People may have different levels for social communication vs. flexibility/sensory needs.
- Levels don't measure intelligence or potential. Avoid "high/low-functioning" labels.