



Autism is Suspected. What next?

It is only natural that you might feel concerned if your baby or child is showing delays with development, or is demonstrating some of the possible signs or characteristics of autism.

However, getting answers sooner rather than later can be a good idea, so you can access supports and services for your child, and yourself.

On a personal level, getting a diagnosis can allow you and your family to have a better understanding of autism and how this may impact your child.

Seeking an Assessment (keep in mind, only qualified, trained professionals are able to make an autism diagnosis.)

When autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is suspected, your child will need a full assessment or evaluation and should be referred for intervention.

Ideally, this is done by a team of professionals and includes asking parents and caregivers a number of questions, observing the child, performing a physical examination, and administering various tests.

Typically, an evaluation to assess speech/language and social delays can include:

- Careful observation of play and child-caregiver interactions.
- Detailed history and physical examination.
- Review of records of previous early intervention services, school, or other evaluations.
- Developmental assessment of all skills (motor, language, social, self-help, cognitive). ASD is suspected when the child's social and language functioning are significantly more impaired than the overall level of motor, adaptive, and cognitive skills.
- Hearing test. All children with any speech/language delays or those suspected of having ASD should have their hearing formally tested.

QUICK FACT

A full assessment or evaluation for ASD is needed before arriving at a diagnosis.

QUICK FACT

Autism may be associated with a known genetic syndrome or medical condition.

- Language evaluation that provides standardized scores of expressive language (including speech) and receptive language (understanding language), as well as an evaluation of pragmatic language (social use of language) and articulation (pronunciation).



Autism Support

If you've recently learned that your child has or might have autism spectrum disorder, you're probably wondering and worrying about what comes next. No parent is ever prepared to hear that a child is anything other than happy and healthy, and an ASD diagnosis can be particularly frightening. You may be unsure about how to best help your child, or confused by conflicting treatment advice. Or you may have been told that ASD is an incurable, lifelong condition, leaving you concerned that nothing you do will make a difference.

While it is true that ASD is not something a person simply "grows out of," there are many treatments that can help children acquire new skills and overcome a wide variety of developmental challenges.

Reach out to us for all you need to help your child thrive with autism.

- Contact:
- Make an appointment with:
- Talk to a qualified health professional



Note: Children with ASD may have other medical problems that may need further evaluation and treatment. These may include seizures, problems with sleep, gastrointestinal problems (feeding problems, abdominal pain, constipation, diarrhea, and behavioral health problems (such as anxiety, ADHD, irritability, and aggression).



WHAT IS AUTISM?

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What is Autism?

Autism is a complex, lifelong developmental disability that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person's social skills, communication, relationships, and self-regulation. Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum condition" that affects people differently and to varying degrees.

While there is currently no known single cause of autism, early diagnosis helps a person receive the support and services that they need, which can lead to a quality life filled with opportunity.



Characteristics & Diagnosis

Autism is characterized by:

1. Persistent differences in communication, interpersonal relationships, and social interaction across different environments.

What this may look like.

Being nonverbal or having atypical speech patterns, having trouble understanding nonverbal communication, difficulty making and keeping friends, difficulty maintaining typical back-and-forth conversational style

2. Restricted and repetitive behavior, patterns, activities and interests.

Repeating sounds or phrases (echolalia),

What this may look like.

repetitive movements, preference for sameness and difficulty with transition or routine, rigid or highly restricted and intense interests, extreme sensitivity to or significantly lower sensitivity to various sensory stimuli

According to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, which is used by clinicians to diagnose autism, these core features of autism must be present in early childhood but may not fully manifest until social demands exceed the person's capacity to cope with them, and challenges may be masked by learned coping strategies.



QUICK FACT

Some of the signs of autism may be noticed before the age of 1, although a reliable diagnosis by a health professional with expertise in autism most often occur from when the child is 18 months or older.

QUICK FACT

The acronym 'ASD' means Autism Spectrum Disorder.



Early Signs

Autism impacts an individual throughout the lifespan. However, research shows that early diagnosis can lead to improved quality of life.

Here are some signs to look out for.

- Speaks later than typical or not at all (nonverbal)
- Repetition in language or movement, such as repeating the same word or sounds, hand flapping, or any repeated movement
- Atypical nonverbal communication, including avoiding eye contact, giving few facial expressions, or having a monotone
- Prefers solitary or parallel play rather than engaging in associative or cooperative play with other children
- Extremely distressed by changes, including new foods or changes in schedule
- Preference for predictable, structured play over spontaneous or make-believe play
- Strong, persistent interest on specific topic, part of a toy, or item



Checklist for Early Childhood

Babies and young children develop at their own pace, and in different ways. So, at what point should you question if your child's development is on track?

Developmental Milestones

From the moment they're born, children embark on a journey of behaviours and skills called developmental milestones.

These milestones are different for each age group. For babies they might include rolling over or smiling for the first time; while for toddlers, they might include talking or walking.

Each developmental milestone comes with its own 'average' range. That is, the typical range in which a child may reach that milestone.

If these milestones are not met in a particular timeframe then a 'red flag' may be raised to investigate why.



While there are many reasons why a child might experience differences in their development, sometimes, the reason babies and toddlers will have developmental differences to their peers is because they are on the autism spectrum.

Checklist

Note that the information below is just a list of some of the common signs and characteristics of autism. It is unlikely that a child will display all of these characteristics. It is important to remember, only a qualified professional can carry out an assessment for autism.

Early signs of autism in babies (6 months to one year) may include.

- Smiling rarely in social situations
- Unexpected reactions to new faces
- Little or no eye contact
- Doesn't respond to their name
- Doesn't turn their head to locate sound or react to loud sounds
- Overreacts to sounds
- Displays a lack of social 'anticipation'. For example, baby doesn't reach out their arms to be picked up, or doesn't seem to understand the game of 'Peek-a-Boo'.
- Doesn't use 'chatter' or 'babble'
- Doesn't use gestures such as pointing or waving in context.
- Dislikes being cuddled or touched
- Displays repetitive and unusual body movements.

QUICK FACT

The most common age of a diagnosis on the autism spectrum is between three and five

Early signs of autism in toddlers up to 24 months may include.

- Does not speak
- Only walks on their toes
- Unable to follow simple verbal instructions
- Doesn't imitate actions
- Has an intense interest in certain object and gets 'stuck' on them, such as constantly flicking a light switch.
- May be very interested in 'unusual' objects, such as metal objects.
- Engages in repetitive activities, such as lining up objects.

Early signs of autism in young children up to 36 months may include.

- Has limited speech
- Has difficulty understanding simple verbal instructions
- Has little interest in 'pretend' or 'imaginative' play
- Shows little interest in other children
- Likes to follow routine and gets easily upset by change.
- Is extremely sensitive to sensory experiences, such as sight, sound, smell and taste.
- Is under-sensitive to sensory experiences such as hot and cold, touch and pain.

QUICK FACT

Boys are 4 times more likely to have an autism diagnosis than girls of the same age. However, recent research suggests that girls may not show autism in the same way as boys and might go undiagnosed because of that.