

What is Autism?

Autism is part of a group of developmental disabilities known as autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) which includes autism and pervasive developmental disorders (PDDs). People with autism handle information in their brain differently than other people. A person with autism may talk, interact, behave, and learn in different ways. Autism can range from being mild to severe. Signs of autism can be seen before age 3 and last through a person's life. About 1 in 110 kids in the U.S. has autism. Boys are 4 times more likely than girls to have autism.

What Causes Autism?

We do not know all of the causes of autism. However, we have learned that there are likely many causes for multiple types of autism. There may be factors that make a child more likely to have autism, including having a brother, sister or parent with ASD. Some harmful drugs, such as thalidomide, taken during pregnancy have been linked with a higher risk of ASD and people with certain other medical conditions may be more likely to have ASD. Autism is not caused by bad parenting.

Checklist for Growing Children

The list below is what you might expect as your child develops from 15 months to 24 months:

15 Months

At 15 months of age, most toddlers:

- Make eye contact when spoken to.
- Reach to anticipate being picked up.
- Show shared attention in an object or an activity
- Display social imitation, such as returning a smile.
- Wave "bye-bye."
- Respond consistently to spoken name.
- Respond to a simple spoken request.
- Say "Mama" and "Dada."

18 Months

At 18 months of age, most toddlers do all of the above plus the following:

- Point to body parts.
- Speak some words.
- Pretend play, like feeding a doll.
- Point out objects.
- Respond when a person points.

24 Months

At 24 months of age, most toddlers do all of the above plus the following:

- Use two-word phrases.
- Imitate household work.
- Show interest in other children.

Possible Signs of Autism

Below is a list of signs that a child may have autism:

- Delay or absence of speaking words.
- Loss of words that were spoken.
- Lack of nonverbal communication.
- Looks through people or not aware of others.
- Not responsive to others' facial expressions or feelings.
- Unable to share pleasure.
- Not playing "pretend", having little or no imagination.
- Does not play with other children.
- Lack of taking turns or imitation.
- Does not initiate activity or social play.
- Does not point at an object to "tell" another person to look at it.
- Unusual or repetitive hand and finger gestures.
- Limited or no "joint attention" (where two people share attention to the same object).
- No response or responds unusually to touch, sight, sounds, smells or tastes.

If any of these signs are seen, further tests may be needed.

If you're Concerned

If you are concerned about the way your child plays, learns, speaks, or acts, talk to your child's doctor. Ask about tests used to screen children who are between 16 and 30 months old for autism. If you or your doctor think your child may have a problem, ask to see a specialist who is an expert in diagnosing autism such as a developmental pediatrician, psychologist or neurologist.

If your child is under 3 years old

If your child is under 3 years old, you can call New York State's early intervention program to request a free evaluation. You do not need to wait for a doctor's referral or medical diagnosis to make this call.

If your child is 3 years or older

If your child is 3 years or older, you can call your local school district where you live and ask for an evaluation even if your child is not of school age yet.

Remember: The earlier your child gets help, the better.

If you are concerned, act early!

How to Contact Your Local Early Intervention Program

New York State Early Intervention Programs are located in each county and New York City and provide services and support to infants and toddlers under the age of three.



For the phone number to your local Early Intervention Program call the New York State "Growing Up Healthy" 24-hour hotline at 1-800-522-5006 or TTY: 1-800-655-1789.

In New York City, call 311 or 212-639-9675.

For more information about New York State Early Intervention:
www.nyhealth.gov/community/infants_children/early_intervention/



Other Information Resources

Additional information about autism and New York State services and supports can be found at:

NYACTS Web page

<http://www.nyacts.org/>

NYS Autism Web Page

http://www.nyhealth.gov/community/infants_children/early_intervention/autism/

NYS Education Department

<http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/autism/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Autism Information Center

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/>

American Academy of Pediatrics

<http://www.aap.org/>

Autism Science Foundation

<http://www.autismsciencefoundation.org/>



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Autism Spectrum Disorders Learn the Signs

