



# Could My Child Have Autism?



A basic rule for treating autism is the earlier the intervention, the better. Autism is a lifelong spectrum disorder that affects each individual differently and in varying degrees. Getting the right help at the earliest stage of life can help a child gain the skills he or she needs to be successful.

If you're worried your child may have autism – or feel something just isn't quite right – you should:

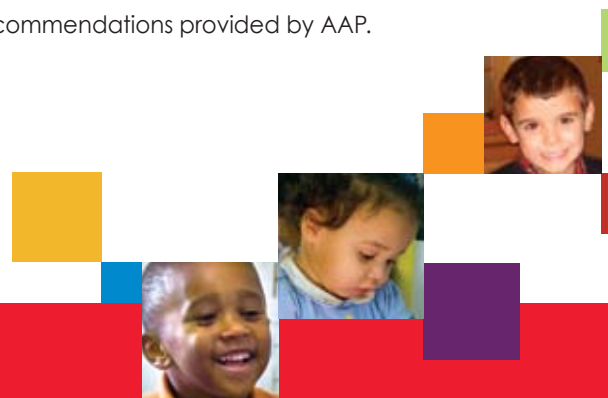
1. First and foremost, **follow your instincts**. Don't assume that your child will catch up.
2. **Share your concerns with your pediatrician**. Consider seeing a doctor who is familiar with autism. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offers an online pediatrician referral service, searchable by specialty and location.
3. **Know your rights**. As the government mandates services, consult the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities at [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org) and your local early intervention lead agency at [www.nectac.org/contact/ptccoord.asp](http://www.nectac.org/contact/ptccoord.asp). The lead agency is required to provide a timely evaluation, typically within 45 days of being contacted. If your child is experiencing developmental delays in one or more of the following areas you're eligible for free early intervention services: cognitive, physical, communication, social, emotional or adaptive skills.

4. **Get a diagnosis**. Autism can be diagnosed as early as 18 months old. Many children are diagnosed before age five, although many children get misdiagnosed or not diagnosed until later in life.
5. **Seek help** from community service and treatment providers like Easter Seals. Start by visiting [autism.easterseals.com](http://autism.easterseals.com).

You may also want to consider the following. Does your child...?

- Not speak as well as his or her peers?
- Have poor eye contact?
- Not respond selectively to his or her name?
- Act as if he or she is in his or her own world?
- Seem to "tune others out"?
- Not have a social smile?
- Seem unable to tell you what he or she wants, preferring to lead you by the hand or get desired objects on his or her own, even at risk of danger?
- Have difficulty following simple commands?
- Not bring things to you simply to "show" you?
- Not point to interesting objects to direct your attention to objects or events of interest?
- Have unusually long and severe temper tantrums?
- Have repetitive, odd, or stereotypic behaviors?
- Show an unusual attachment to inanimate objects, especially hard ones (e.g., flashlight or a chain vs. teddy bear or blanket)?
- Prefer to play alone?
- Demonstrate an inability to play with toys in the typical way?
- Not engage in pretend play (if older than age 2)?

Above recommendations provided by AAP.



## How can you tell if someone you know has autism? Are there specific signs or symptoms?

If you've met one person with autism, you've done just that – you've met one person with autism. Autism manifests itself differently for every individual, varying in the severity and type of symptoms. While there are strong and consistent commonalities, there is no single behavior that is always typical of autism and no behavior that would automatically exclude an individual from receiving a diagnosis.



## That said, generally speaking, children and adults with autism may...

**Interact with others differently.** They may appear to live a life of isolation or have difficulty understanding and expressing emotions or convey personal attachments in a different manner.

**Not effectively use spoken language.** Some have echolalia, a parrot-like repeating of what has been said to them. And, people with autism often have difficulty understanding the nonverbal aspect of language such as social cues, body language and vocal qualities (pitch, tone and volume).

**Have difficulty relating to objects and events.** They may have a great need for "sameness" that can make them upset if objects in their environment or time schedules change. Children with autism may not "play" with toys in the same manner as their peers and may become fixated to specific objects.

**Overreact to sensory stimuli** that they see, hear, touch, feel or taste; or, conversely, not react at all to various stimuli from the environment.

**Have a different rate of development** especially in the areas of communication, social and cognitive skills. In contrast, motor development may occur at a typical rate. Sometimes skills will appear in children with autism at the expected rate or time and then disappear.



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