



Should My Child be Screened for Autism?

There are nearly 1 in 36 children in the United States who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). ASD is reported to occur in all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups and is four times more common among boys than among girls (CDC, 2023).

ASD is not a mental illness or disease. Rather, it is a developmental disorder caused by differences in the brain. There is no one cause of ASD, and the abilities of individuals with ASD vary greatly from person to person.

People with ASD may have differences in communication, behavior, social interactions and learning styles, and the severity or impact on daily functioning varies based on the individual. Some people with ASD are nonverbal, while others may need support with social cues and interactions.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all children get screened for autism at their 18-month exam, 24-month exam and whenever a parent or doctor has concerns. If you have concerns about your child's development, early intervention is important. This includes learning the signs, examining your child's developmental milestones, getting an evaluation and accessing treatment early.

As a parent or caregiver, it's very important to become familiar with typical developmental milestones. These are things related to communication and social skills, such as pointing, babbling, using gestures or waving "bye-bye," imitating play, using limited eye contact, or not showing interest; or restrictive or repetitive behaviors such as unusual responses to lights, sounds, textures, or new items, unusual repetitive behaviors such as flapping hands, and difficulty adapting to new environments.

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/screening.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/signs-autism>

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>

If you have concerns about your child missing milestones, having trouble with changes in routine, or losing previously learned skills, it is important to have your child screened for ASD by their health care provider. They can screen your child to assess the likelihood of ASD and make a referral to a specialist for a diagnostic evaluation.

To make a diagnosis of ASD, doctors will look at your child's developmental history and behavior. Early signs vary from person to person, and not all children show all the signs. Some show signs as infants while others start displaying behaviors as late as two or three years old.

Children with undiagnosed autism may experience difficulties with relationships and communication in adolescence and young adulthood. Early detection and screening are important to make sure children receive the supports they need to reach their full potential.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Learn the Signs. Act Early." program provides free resources to help families monitor developmental milestones and recognize signs of developmental concerns, including autism. To learn more visit [CDC's Developmental Milestones | CDC](#).

Early detection and intervention make a difference!

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