

What are autism spectrum disorders?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain. Scientists do not know yet exactly what causes these differences for most people with ASD. However, some people with ASD have a known difference, such as a genetic condition.

There are multiple causes of ASD, although most are not yet known. There is usually nothing about how people with ASD look that sets them apart from other

people, but they may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged. Some people with ASD need a lot of help in their daily lives; others need less.

A diagnosis of ASD now includes several conditions that used to be diagnosed separately: autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger syndrome. These conditions are now all called autism spectrum disorder.

What are some of the signs of ASDs?

People with ASD often have problems with social, emotional, and communication skills. They might repeat certain behaviors and might not want change in their daily activities. Many people with ASD also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things.

Signs of ASD begin during early childhood and last throughout a person's life.

Children or adults with ASD might:

- not point at objects to show interest (for example, not point at an airplane flying over)
- not look at objects when another person points at them
- have trouble relating to others or not have an interest in other people at all
- avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- prefer not to be held or cuddled, or might cuddle only when they want to

- have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings appear to be unaware when people talk to them, but respond to other sounds
- be very interested in people, but not know how to talk, play, or relate to them
- repeat or echo words or phrases said to them, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language
- have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions
- not play "pretend" games (for example, not pretend to "feed" a doll)
- repeat actions over and over again
- have trouble adapting when a routine changes
- have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound
- lose skills they once had (for example, stop saying words they were using)

Autism Spectrum Disorder Fact Sheet

What can I do if I think my child has an ASD?

Talk with your child's doctor or nurse. If you or your doctor thinks there could be a problem, ask for a referral to see a developmental pediatrician or other specialist. At the same time, contact your local early intervention agency (for children under 3) or local public school (for children 3 and older), even if your child does not go to that school.

To find out whom to speak to in your area, contact the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities by logging onto www.nichcy.org.

In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has links on its Autism Spectrum Disorder Web page to information for families (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/links.html>).

Don't wait. Acting early can make a real difference!

www.cdc.gov/actearly | 1-800-CDC-INFO

Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

M-CHAT-R™

Please answer these questions about your child. Keep in mind how your child usually behaves. If you have seen your child do the behavior a few times, but he or she does not usually do it, then please answer **no**. Please circle **yes** or **no** for every question. Thank you very much.

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| | 1. If you point at something across the room, does your child look at it?
(FOR EXAMPLE , if you point at a toy or an animal, does your child look at the toy or animal?) | Yes | No |
| → | 2. Have you ever wondered if your child might be deaf? | Yes | No |
| | 3. Does your child play pretend or make-believe? (FOR EXAMPLE , pretend to drink from an empty cup, pretend to talk on a phone, or pretend to feed a doll or stuffed animal?) | Yes | No |
| | 4. Does your child like climbing on things? (FOR EXAMPLE , furniture, playground equipment, or stairs) | Yes | No |
| → | 5. Does your child make <u>unusual</u> finger movements near his or her eyes?
(FOR EXAMPLE , does your child wiggle his or her fingers close to his or her eyes?) | Yes | No |
| | 6. Does your child point with one finger to ask for something or to get help?
(FOR EXAMPLE , pointing to a snack or toy that is out of reach) | Yes | No |
| | 7. Does your child point with one finger to show you something interesting?
(FOR EXAMPLE , pointing to an airplane in the sky or a big truck in the road) | Yes | No |
| | 8. Is your child interested in other children? (FOR EXAMPLE , does your child watch other children, smile at them, or go to them?) | Yes | No |
| | 9. Does your child show you things by bringing them to you or holding them up for you to see – not to get help, but just to share? (FOR EXAMPLE , showing you a flower, a stuffed animal, or a toy truck) | Yes | No |
| | 10. Does your child respond when you call his or her name? (FOR EXAMPLE , does he or she look up, talk or babble, or stop what he or she is doing when you call his or her name?) | Yes | No |
| | 11. When you smile at your child, does he or she smile back at you? | Yes | No |
| → | 12. Does your child get upset by everyday noises? (FOR EXAMPLE , does your child scream or cry to noise such as a vacuum cleaner or loud music?) | Yes | No |
| | 13. Does your child walk? | Yes | No |
| | 14. Does your child look you in the eye when you are talking to him or her, playing with him or her, or dressing him or her? | Yes | No |
| | 15. Does your child try to copy what you do? (FOR EXAMPLE , wave bye-bye, clap, or make a funny noise when you do) | Yes | No |
| | 16. If you turn your head to look at something, does your child look around to see what you are looking at? | Yes | No |
| | 17. Does your child try to get you to watch him or her? (FOR EXAMPLE , does your child look at you for praise, or say "look" or "watch me"?) | Yes | No |
| | 18. Does your child understand when you tell him or her to do something?
(FOR EXAMPLE , if you don't point, can your child understand "put the book on the chair" or "bring me the blanket"?) | Yes | No |
| | 19. If something new happens, does your child look at your face to see how you feel about it?
(FOR EXAMPLE , if he or she hears a strange or funny noise, or sees a new toy, will he or she look at your face?) | Yes | No |
| | 20. Does your child like movement activities?
(FOR EXAMPLE , being swung or bounced on your knee) | Yes | No |

RCADD

Resource Center for Autism
and Developmental Delays

Visual Supports Overview



What are visual supports?

- Pictures or visual items to communicate with a child who has difficulty understanding and processing verbal directions

Who can benefit from visual supports?

- People with autism or developmental delays
- Young children who need assistance in redirection

Why do we use visual supports?

- To clearly define expectations
- To teach social skills
- To promote communication
- To reduce anxiety

How can I use visual supports?

- Visual schedules: "Where am I going?"
- Work Systems: "What am I doing?"
- Behavior Supports: "What is the payoff?"
- Visual Rings: "How can I redirect the child?"

Ask an RCADD staff member for assistance in creating a visual support.

10 HELPFUL TIPS

- 1 Use calendars, schedules, and checklists.**
We all use visual cues. Individuals with an ASD may find it difficult to organize their activities, so these tools are even more important for them.
- 2 Organize the environment.**
Identify different areas of the room for different tasks, such as one area for reading, one for puzzles, one for schoolwork. This will give cues about which activity is to occur. Keep appropriate supplies handy in each area and accessible to the child if possible.
- 3 Avoid phrases that are confusing; don't use sarcasm.**
Individuals with an ASD tend to interpret verbal information literally and have difficulty with abstract thought or recognizing that remarks are sarcastic.
- 4 Avoid repeating instructions.**
Individuals with an ASD often find it difficult to interpret auditory information. Give the child time to process the information. Use visual cues, gestures, or physical prompts along with verbal instruction.
- 5 Be observant - Make changes to lighting and noise, if necessary.**
Individuals with an ASD may be easily overwhelmed by noise and light, and may react in unexpected ways.
- 6 Prepare the child for changes or transitions.**
Changes in routine are particularly difficult for individuals with ASDs. The use of visual schedules, written reminders, and advance warnings (in 5 minutes we will . . .) will help make transitions easier and smoother.
- 7 Emphasize social learning.**
Children with ASDs must learn social skills that many of us take for granted. Social groups organized around a child's favorite activities can provide a safe forum for social learning. Play games that require taking turns. Socially interactive games (like peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake) can improve coordination and help the child "tune in" to those around him.
- 8 Encourage the child to communicate their needs and wants.**
For example, don't automatically provide dessert -- get dessert for yourself, and wait for your child to communicate their desire for dessert.
- 9 Seek out support from other parents of children with ASDs and other disabilities.**
- 10 Have Fun! Make sure that you have some fun activities that are not related to your child's ASD.**

Communication Tips for AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

It is helpful to think of ASD as an information processing disorder. Allow enough time for both sharing information and understanding information.

COMMUNICATING MORE EFFECTIVELY WITH YOUR CHILD:

- Slow down when speaking with your child.
- Wait to give the child enough time to understand and respond.
- Replace long, complex sentences with short, simple sentences.
- Stress key words.
- Use visual cues, gestures, pictures, and physical prompts to help your child understand.
- When using spoken directions, make them simple and clear.
- Be consistent by using the same words and phrases.

HELPING YOUR CHILD COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY:

- Teach communication in the context of everyday activities.
- Provide lots of opportunities for communication practice throughout the day.
- Arrange the environment to create the need for your child to communicate.
- Reduce stressful speaking situations. Work to avoid:
 - Frequent interruptions
 - Loss of listener attention
 - Frequent questions
 - Excitement when speaking
 - Competition for speaking opportunities



**For more resources and information about services,
visit us at www.TAP-illinois.org**

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