



What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)? Children who are on the ASD have social – interaction difficulties, communication challenges, and tend to demonstrate repetitive behaviors; the spectrum can range from mild to severe and have a variety of impact on everyday life. Early diagnosis of ASD is critical. There are a variety of signs that may indicate a need to engage in discussion with your child’s pediatrician or healthcare provider.

#### Social-Interaction Difficulties:

- By age 2-3 months of age, your baby should gaze at faces, move towards your voice, grasp at fingers, or even smile – children who have ASD, have difficulty with understanding the reciprocal nature of our society and social interactions. This includes taking turns or responding to voices in turn. A critical sign is if your baby fails to respond to their name and a decrease in interaction or interest with people. As the child ages, social activities, including games will become more difficult. Children may have difficulty engaging or understanding non-verbal communication.
- Children who have autism, may have difficulty understanding that other people have perspective too. They may have difficulty understanding or interpreting another person’s actions.
- Emotional Regulation may be difficult. They may have inappropriate responses, such as crying or outbursts not typical for other children their age. This can in turn lead to aggressive behaviors. Frustration may be displayed as self-injurious behaviors (i.e. head banging, self-biting).

#### Communication Challenges:

- The earliest of language milestones are babbling. By a child’s first birthday, they will say a word or two. Children will begin to point to objects and respond when their names are called. When a child has ASD, that child may experience delays in babbling, speaking, and understanding gestures.
- Children may repeat what they hear, this is called echolalia. Monologues about favorite subjects or from television shows may be repeated with children on the spectrum. While other children, may demonstrate increased language skills.
- Additional skills that are difficult for children on the ASD include understanding sarcasm, body language, tone of voice, and expressions.

#### Repetitive Behaviors:

- Children who are on the autism spectrum may display repetitive behaviors. Common repetitive behaviors include rocking, jumping, hand-flapping, object rearranging, repeating language (i.e. sounds, words, phrases). Stimulating behaviors may include wiggling objects in front of their face.
- The area of play may be impacted. Children with autism may play with the same toys or in a certain way for hours at a time and not willing to change the way they play with such a toy.

References used Autism Speaks and Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Websites.