

Autism Spectrum Disorders

What are Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities that impact a person's functioning at different levels. There is usually nothing about how a person with an ASD physically appears that sets them apart from other people, yet individuals with ASDs may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from most people. The thinking and learning abilities of people with ASDs can vary – from gifted to severely impaired. There are three different types of ASDs: autistic disorder, also called “classic autism,” pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger Syndrome.

What are some of the signs of ASDs?

Children with ASDs typically experience difficulty with social, emotional, and communication skills. They might repeat certain behaviors or resist change in their daily activities. Many people with ASDs also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things. ASDs develop before age 3, but are sometimes not apparent until later. They remain throughout a person's life.

Some examples of how a child with ASD might act include not responding to his/her name by one year of age, or for an older child, not pointing at objects to show interest by 14 months (point at an airplane flying over), not playing “pretend” games by 18 months (pretend to feed a doll), poor eye contact, and not looking at objects when another person points at them. Even at a later age you might observe a child having trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings. Research has shown that addressing these issues through therapeutic interventions as early as possible lead to significant developmental improvements.

To learn more signs of ASD's visit the Center for Disease Control's Web site:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/AutismFactSheet.pdf

To learn more about the growth milestones of children go to the milestone checklist:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/MilestonesChecklists.pdf

Or visit the growth chart for children:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/GrowthChart.pdf

To learn more about ASDs and services, supports, and resources available in New York State visit:

<http://www.nyacts.com>

Tips for Talking to Families

If you suspect a child has an ASD, it may be difficult to communicate your concern to the child's parent. How you express your concern can help the parent receive what you are saying without taking offense. Be sure to point out some of the child's strengths and talk about some specific behaviors that you have observed in the child. Encourage the parent to speak with the child's pediatrician about any issues or concerns they may have.

For additional tips on how to talk to parents about ASDs visit CDC's Web site:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/TipsTalkingParents.pdf

*** The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, in collaboration with several national partners created a public awareness campaign called "Learn the Signs –Act Early." The goal of this campaign is to educate parents and others on the early signs of autism and other developmental disorders. The CDC will be sending autism awareness toolkits and information cards to each of the Healthy Families New York Home Visiting Programs. ***

