

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Fact Sheet

What are autism spectrum disorders?

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities caused by a problem with the brain. Scientists do not know yet exactly what causes this problem. ASDs can impact a person's daily life at different levels, from very mild to severe. There is no way to tell that a person has an ASD by looking at them. But they may talk, act, and learn in other ways from most people. The skills of people with ASDs can vary – from gifted to severely challenged. Autistic disorder is the most commonly known type of ASD, but there are others, including “pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified” (PDD-NOS) and Asperger Syndrome.

What are some of the signs of ASDs?

People with ASDs may 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 ASDs also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things. ASDs begin during early childhood and last throughout a person's life.

A child or adult with an ASD might:

- not play “pretend” games (pretend to “feed” a doll)
- not point at objects to show interest (point at an airplane flying over)
- not look at objects when someone else points at them
- have trouble relating to others or not have an interest in other people at all
- not look people in the eye; likes to be alone
- have trouble understanding their own and others' feelings
- prefer not to be held or cuddled or might cuddle only when they want to
- appear to ignore other people, but react to other sounds
- be interested in people, but not know how to talk, play, or relate to them

- repeat actions over and over again
- have trouble adapting when a routine changes
- repeat words or phrases in place of normal language (echolalia)
- have trouble expressing their needs
- have odd reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound
- lose skills they once had (for instance, stop saying words they were using)

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 think there could be a problem, ask to be referred to a developmental pediatrician.
- **Call Early ACCESS Iowa** if your child is younger than 3 years of age at 1-888-425-4371.
- **Call your local school** if your child is over 3 years old.
- **Contact the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY)** by logging onto www.nichcy.org or call **1-800-695-0285**. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has information for families on their Autism Information Center Web page at www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/aic/resources.



For local ASD screening & care, call:

Child Health Specialty Clinics

100 Hawkins Dr.

Iowa City, IA 52242

Phone: 319-356-1117

Toll-free: 1-866-219-9119

<http://www.chsciowa.org>



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