

Who Should Use This Guide?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects 1 in 88 children. It is 5 times more common in boys than girls. Symptoms typically are present before the age of three. Autism is characterized by impairments in social communication and stereotyped or repetitive behaviors.

Tips for Parents.

Screening

- Autism Spectrum Disorder can be hard to detect at an early age. Pediatricians typically screen for ASD at 18 and 24 months of age. Ask your pediatrician for a screening if you have concerns about the following:
 - Lack of appropriate gaze or warm, joyful expression with gaze
 - Lack of turn taking patterns between infant and adult
 - Lack of recognition of parent voice
 - Lack of response to vocalizations
 - No babbling, pointing, or other gestures by 12 months
 - No single words by 18 months
 - No 2-word spontaneous phrases by 24 months
 - Loss of language or social skills at any age

Assessment

- Early diagnosis is essential to the best prognosis.
- Diagnostic criteria includes a certain number of deficits in social communication and social interaction in addition to restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.
- Diagnosis can be made by a developmental pediatrician, psychologist, psychiatrist, or neurologist.
- Comprehensive evaluations are performed by psychologists to assess cognitive ability, academic achievement, behavioral and social-emotional functioning, behaviors associated with autism, and adaptive behavior skills.
- Speech-language pathologists can assess expressive and receptive language ability and pragmatic language skills.
- Other professionals who may be involved in the assessment process may include physical and occupational therapists.

Early Education

- Before age 3, families can find assistance through Help Me Grow who can set up a plan for your child called an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).
- Research recommends early intervention to be intensive, individualized, and in a one-on-one or small group setting with a minimum of 25 hours every week, year around.
- Early education should include parent involvement and take place at the school, home, and in community settings.

School

- At age 3 or older, families can find assistance through their local school district. They will perform a comprehensive evaluation, called a Multi-factored Evaluation (MFE) or Evaluation Team Report (ETR) to determine your child’s need for an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Depending upon your child’s strengths and weaknesses, schools may provide academic accommodations, speech/language services, physical therapy services, occupational therapy services, and behavioral plans.

Treatment

- Research indicates that therapies focused on Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) are most effective with children with autism.
- Certain medications are also found to be effective at reducing problem behaviors.
- Other therapies that have been found to sometimes be effective include cognitive-behavioral therapies, the use of social stories, and group therapies focused on social skills.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends genetic testing for anyone diagnosed with autism as well as screenings for siblings of children with autism.

Books & Web Sites

Autism Society of American (www.autismsociety.org)

Families for Effective Autism Treatment (www.feaut.org)

The Association for Science and Autism Treatment (www.asatonline.org)

Right from the Start: Behavioral interventions for Young Children with Autism, A Guide for Parents and Professionals by Sandra Harris and Mary Jane Weiss

Behavioral Intervention for Young Children with Autism: A Manual for Parents and Professionals by Catherine Maurice

Local Resources

Help Me Grow

Cuyahoga County: 1-216-698-7500
Lorain County: 1-440-284-4443

Milestones, www.milestones.org

Daily Behavioral Health, 14538 Grapeland Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44111, 216-252-1399, www.dailybh.com Offices in West Cleveland and Avon

Building Behaviors Autism Center, www.buildingbehaviorscenter.org

Cleveland Clinic Center for Autism, 2801 Martin Luther King Jr Dr., Cleveland, OH 44104 (216) 448-6440

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