



Does My Child Have Autism? Frequently Asked Questions

Parents often have questions when they suspect their child may be showing signs of autism. Here are some common FAQs they might ask to better understand the signs and symptoms.

1. What is autism?

Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a developmental condition that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior. It is called a "spectrum" because it presents differently in each child, ranging from mild to more significant challenges.

2. At what age can autism be diagnosed?

Parents are often curious about when they should seek professional help. Autism can sometimes be diagnosed as early as 18 months, although many children may not be diagnosed until they are older. Autism can often be **reliably diagnosed by age 2**, but some children may not receive a diagnosis until later, especially if their symptoms are mild. Early screening is recommended at **18 and 24 months** during well-child visits.

3. What are the early signs of autism in children?

Parents often want to know what to look for in the early stages. Some early signs may include:

- Limited eye contact
- Not responding to their name by 12 months
- Lack of interest in social interactions and lack of gestures (e.g., not pointing or waving)
- Difficulty with or lack of speech and communication
- Repetitive behaviors (e.g., hand-flapping, rocking)
- Intense focus on specific objects or activities
- Sensitivity to sensory input (lights, sounds, textures)

4. Is my child's behavior normal or a sign of autism?

Parents may wonder if their child's behavior is part of typical development or a sign of autism. Autism can present differently in each child, but there are common patterns. Delays or differences in social communication, play skills, and behavior may be signs to watch for.

5. How do I know if my child has communication difficulties?

Parents might ask if their child's speech or language development is delayed. Signs to look for include:

- Not speaking or having limited speech by age 2
- Difficulty with understanding or using gestures
- Limited use of facial expressions or body language
- Challenges in maintaining back-and-forth conversations
- Limited range of interests or topics in conversations

6. Are there certain behaviors that are red flags for autism?

Parents often seek guidance on what behaviors are concerning. Some red flags for autism may include:

- Engaging in repetitive movements or motions (e.g., rocking, hand-flapping)
- Difficulty adjusting to changes in routine or surroundings
- Strong preference for being alone or avoiding group activities
- Inability to understand social cues, such as taking turns or reading facial expressions

7. Can my child be social but still have autism?

Some parents wonder if a child can be social but still have autism. Yes, some children with autism may appear social but have difficulty with the nuances of social communication. They may struggle with forming relationships or understanding social rules.

8. What are sensory issues associated with autism?

Many parents ask about sensory sensitivities. Children with autism often experience heightened or diminished sensory input, such as:

- Extreme sensitivity to lights, sounds, textures, or smells
- Strong preferences for certain fabrics or food textures
- Overreacting or underreacting to pain or temperature

9. Does my child have autism if they are not showing all the symptoms?

Parents may wonder if they should be concerned even if their child isn't displaying all the classic symptoms. Autism exists on a spectrum, so children can have a wide range of strengths and challenges. A child might show only a few signs, but early intervention is key in addressing developmental needs.

10. Is autism caused by something I did during pregnancy or after birth?

Many parents are worried that something they did or didn't do caused their child's autism. Research suggests that autism is likely due to a combination of genetic and environmental factors, but there is no definitive cause.


11. What should I do if I think my child has autism?


- Parents are often unsure of next steps. If they suspect autism, they should seek guidance from a pediatrician or specialist who can conduct developmental screenings and refer them for further evaluations. Early diagnosis and intervention can make a significant difference.
- **Who diagnoses autism?**
A **pEDIATRICIAN, child psychologist, child psychiatrist, or neurologist** can provide an official autism diagnosis. Pediatricians may conduct initial screenings and refer families to specialists for a comprehensive evaluation.
- **Does my child’s school participate in the autism diagnosis process?**
Schools do not diagnose autism, but they can assess children for developmental delays and learning disabilities. If autism is suspected, a school may recommend the parent follow up with their pediatrician. If your child is diagnosed with autism, the school is obligated to develop an **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** or **504 Plan** to provide support and accommodations.






Resources available:




Supported by the Children’s Services Council <https://www.cscbroward.org/>



First Steps If Autism Is Suspected	
Child’s Age	First Step
0–3	Early Steps (CDTC) – childrensdiagnostic.com/early-steps
3–5	Child Find (FDLRS) – reach.fdlrs.org/child-find
Any age	Help Me Grow – elcbroward.org/helpmegrow or your child’s pediatrician




Early Steps – Children’s Diagnostic & Treatment Center
 childrensdiagnostic.com/early-steps
Description: Supports infants and toddlers (birth–3) with developmental disabilities or delays. Services include family-centered planning and individualized developmental goals.
Bilingual Services: Available


The Journey Institute Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health
 954-559-2936
Description: Provides early childhood mental health and developmental screenings for children birth through age 5. Support includes behavioral and emotional development.
Bilingual Services: Varies by provider—call to confirm


FDLRS / Child Find
 754-321-7200  754-321-7217
 esechildfind@browardschools.com
 Child Find Forms
 Child Find Resources
Description: Offers screenings for children ages 3–5 who may need early intervention or ESE (Exceptional Student Education) services. Referral required.
Bilingual Services: Available

Help Me Grow Broward
 elcbroward.org/helpmegrow
 Request a Screening
 hmgbroward@elcbroward.org
Description: Provides free developmental screenings and connects families to local resources and services. Support from child development experts ensures early identification and intervention.
Bilingual Services: Available

211 Broward – Special Needs Connections
 Special Needs Connections (Call 211)
 ASQ Developmental Screenings
Description: Connects families to free, online Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) developmental screenings, helping identify delays and offering guidance on next steps.
Bilingual Services: Available

NOVA Southeastern University – CARD
 www.card.miami.edu
 954-262-7111  card@nova.edu
Description: Offers comprehensive psycho-developmental evaluations for children suspected of autism or related disorders. Accepts private insurance and provides sliding-scale fees for uninsured families.
Bilingual Services: Spanish available

Nicklaus Children’s Hospital – Autism Program
 nicklauschildrens.org/programs/autism-program
Description: Offers comprehensive autism evaluations and a variety of therapies, including speech, occupational, and behavioral interventions tailored to each child’s needs.
Bilingual Services: Spanish available

Autism Society of Florida
 autismfl.org/about-5
Description: Provides state-wide autism education, advocacy, and links to early screening tools like the M-CHAT-R (Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers, Revised).
Bilingual Services: Varies—online resources may be limited

12. Can my child with autism improve with therapy?

Parents are often hopeful and want to know if therapy can help. Early intervention, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioral therapy, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), can significantly help children with autism improve communication skills, social interactions, and daily living skills.

13. What treatments and therapies are available for children with autism?

There is no one-size-fits-all approach, please check with your pediatrician or insurance company, but common therapies include:

- Behavioral therapy (ABA - Applied Behavior Analysis)
- Speech and language therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Social skills training
- Sensory integration therapy

14. What are the long-term outcomes for children with autism?

Parents are often concerned about the future. With the right support and interventions, many children with autism go on to live fulfilling, successful lives. However, outcomes vary, and some children may continue to need support into adulthood.

15. How can I support my child if they are diagnosed with autism?

- Educate yourself about autism – <https://www.autismspeaks.org>
- Connect with support groups and advocacy organizations
- Work closely with doctors, therapists, and teachers
- Celebrate your child’s unique strengths and progress

These questions represent common concerns that parents have when they are considering the possibility of autism. The best course of action is to consult with a pediatrician or developmental specialist for a thorough evaluation if there are concerns about a child's development. If parents would like more information, screeners on the following website <https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-screening> are easy to use and there are different screeners based on the child's age to assist in determining if a parent needs to take their child for further evaluation.