

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) - Early signs.

Know what to look for in your child

Most children with autism start to show signs before the age of 3. The signs of autism can show up very early. Some children may have signs of autism at 6 months old, others will not show any until they are almost 2.

Early Signs of Autism

Patricia Evans, M.D., Ph.D. and clinical co-director for the Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities (CADD) at Children's HealthSM, says parents can look for signs of an autism spectrum disorder like:

Trouble with social skills - All children with autism have trouble with social skills. But they may not be the same for every child. A child may have signs of autism if they:

- Don't look you in the eye or do not look at people
- Don't look up when you say their name before the age of 1
- Don't know how they feel or talk about how they feel
- Don't want to cuddle or hug
- Don't seem to hear when you speak to them
- Don't know how to interact with others

Trouble talking with others - Autistic children often have trouble talking or talking with others. Your child may have trouble if they:

- Learn to talk or understand later than other children
- Say the same words over and over
- Do not answer questions or the answer they give is not to the question they were asked
- Have a strange voice, or it is flat or has a sing song tone
- Do not move their hands or point to communicate

Dr. Evans says many parents may hear things that are not correct about autism signs in boys. "There is a common myth that boys don't speak as early as little girls," says Dr. Evans, "but little boys who aren't speaking should be assessed for hearing, autism and seizures. Any time you have a child not developing language as they should, you have an immediate red flag."

Acting very differently from other children their age - Children with autism may also act in unusual ways like:

- Being too interested in an object or item
- Being more interested in objects than people
- Having a strong reaction to a sound, smell, taste or the way something feels
- Getting upset by changes in the way they usually do things, or where things are
- Moving over and over in the same way, like flapping their hands or rocking back and forth

Dr. Evans says many children with autism may also have anxiety. This may happen more when they are in a new situation. "An autistic child just wants to do the same thing," says Dr. Evans. "He is just overwhelmed by new things. Anxiety gets worse if you stress out the person with autism."

What do I do if my child shows signs of autism?

If you think your child may have autism, take your child to their doctor. The doctor can watch your child and see if they may have autism by the way your child acts. If the doctor sees any of the signs of autism, they will ask you to see a doctor who treats brain and nervous system issues (called a pediatric neurologist) who works with children with autism.

When you bring your baby for a check-up, your child's doctor may also see signs of autism. Dr. Evans says parents should never miss their baby's check-up. That is a very important time to check your baby's health and see how they are growing.