



## Understanding the Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by impairments involving social communication and social interaction in many settings and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests or activities. The symptoms are present in early childhood but may not be noticed until later.
- The symptoms of ASD cause significant impairments but there is a wide range of functioning and need for support across the spectrum. Many people with ASD can function well in various areas of life including living independently, having mutually rewarding relationships, and meaningful employment and their need for support may be subtle. Others with ASD may need very substantial support in all major areas of functioning.
- Early diagnosis is important because early, specialized intervention helps improve functioning. Some red flags of possible ASD include: no babbling by twelve months of age; no single words by eighteen months; no two words used together by twenty-four months; no response to name or use of gestures by twelve months; or loss of skills at any age. Poor eye contact and not sharing enjoyment or joint attention are also red flags. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have concerns.
- Concerns about possible ASD may first be noticed by a family member, healthcare professional, child care or school staff, or at later ages by the person who suspects he or she has ASD. Talk to your healthcare provider about how to get a diagnostic evaluation.
- Children between the ages of birth and thirty-six months who have developmental concerns may qualify for services through their state Early Intervention Program. A diagnosis is not necessary. Contact information can be found on The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center website at <http://ectacenter.org/contact/ptccoord.asp>.
- There is value in getting a diagnosis when ASD is present. A formal diagnosis helps link to needed services, helps understand and communicate what is going on, and may help link to support and reduce isolation.
- It is possible to have ASD and other diagnoses, too. These are called “co-morbidities.” Some common co-morbidities with ASD include anxiety, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, sleep or feeding issues, gastrointestinal disorders, or seizure disorders.
- There is a lot of information about ASD but not everything is accurate. Make sure the information source is credible.
- Quality of life is important. Involvement in the community can improve quality of life. In addition to skill development for the person with ASD, it is equally important that members of the community build awareness and acceptance to promote positive inclusion.

