

Early Childhood Indicators of Autism

2021



You've heard a lot about autism but may be wondering about the early signs of autism. If you observe multiple items on this list, it may mean that your child is developing differently. If you suspect your child is on the autism spectrum, consider talking to your family doctor or pediatrician about what you can do to learn about and support your child in growing their communication skills, fostering connections, and interacting with the world around them in a way that allows them to flourish and meet their potential.



Are you seeing your child reflected in any of these points?

Age 6-12 months

- Limited reciprocal sharing of sounds, smiles, or facial expressions
- Does not respond to gestures and facial expressions used by others
- Limited or no eye contact
- Limited response to their name being called
- Does not spontaneously use gestures such as waving, reaching, or pointing while interacting with others
- Diminished, atypical, or no babbling

Age 9-12 months

- Lacks interest in toys, or plays with them in seemingly unusual ways (e.g. lining them up, spinning, smelling, opening/closing parts rather than using the toy as a whole)
- Emerging repetitive behaviours (e.g. flapping hands, rocking, spinning)

Ages 12-18 months

- No single words
- Doesn't point to show others things they're interested in
- Lack of pretend play
- Limited joint attention (initiating, responding, sharing of interests)

Age 15-24 months

- Diminished, atypical, or no spontaneous or meaningful two-word phrases

Any Age

- Loss of previously acquired language or social and communication skills
- Repeats words or phrases over and over (echolalia)
- Gives unrelated answers to questions
- More interested in looking at objects than other people's faces
- May be content to spend extended periods of time alone
- Seems to be in their "own world"
- Avoids or ignores other children when they approach or interact
- Has trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings
- Displays a strong reaction to certain textures, sounds, or lights (e.g. may reject clothing or want to be completely covered, puts hands over ears, stares at lights)
- May appear indifferent to pain or temperature
- Insists on routines (e.g. has to perform activities in a special way or certain sequence, requires a particular route) and is difficult to calm if even small changes occur
- Preoccupation with unexpected interests, such as light switches, doors, fans, or wheels, and difficult to distract from these activities
- Uncommon fears, but may not seek comfort from adults

If you see your child reflected in several of the points above, in addition to speaking with your family doctor or pediatrician, we suggest the following resources to help understand autism and develop skills for you and your child to keep yourselves safe and happy.

To learn more about autism, visit our [About Autism](#) page.

To connect with an autism professional who can ease you into the available autism supports in your area and answer questions, register for our [Service Navigation Program](#).

DISCLAIMER: This document reflects the views of the author. It is Autism Ontario's intent to inform and educate. Every situation is unique and while we hope this information is useful, it should be used in the context of broader considerations for each person. Please contact Autism Ontario at info@autismontario.com or 416-246-9592 for permission to reproduce this material for any purpose other than personal use. © 2021 Autism Ontario 416-246-9592 www.autismontario.com