

# EARLY SIGNS OF AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

## AUTISM FACTS

- Children with autism have language delays or other communication problems, poor or limited social skills and engage in rigid and repetitive behaviors. Autism refers to a wide spectrum of disorders, symptoms ranging from severe to mild.
- Once considered a rare disorder, today autism affects as many as 1 in every 150 children; nearly every 20 minutes a new case of autism is diagnosed.
- Although some early signs of autism appear in the first year of life, it can be detected as early as 18 months of age, but the diagnosis of autism is typically not made until 3-4 years of age or later.
- Research has shown that early identification and intervention can make the critical difference for children with autism.

### BY 4 MONTHS OF AGE

- Does not make eye contact or makes little eye contact
- Does not seem interested in other people
- Does not react by looking at people when they are making social "sounds", such as humming or clapping
- Does not show as much interest in people as objects
- Does not have a social smile (smiling back to someone who smiles at them without being cooed at or touched)
- Does not show interest in watching other people's faces

### BY 12 MONTHS OF AGE

- Does not combine eye contact with smiling
- Does not babble (or the babble does not sound like "talking")
- Does not look at objects that another person is looking at
- Does not try to engage other people in what he/she is looking at or doing
- Does not follow a person's eye contact when the person points out an object and says, "Look at the airplane!"
- Does not engage in back-and-forth gestures, such as giving, showing or sharing toys
- Does not respond when name is called
- Does not point using the index finger
- Does not show a caring or concerned reaction to other people crying
- Does not use gestures, such as waving "hi" or "bye"

### BY 24 MONTHS OF AGE

- Does not point to share interests with others, such as pointing to an airplane
- Does not imitate common activities of others, such as sweeping the floor
- Does not develop pretend or make-believe play
- Does not use single words by 16 months; no two-word spontaneous phrases ("go car" or "look doggie") by 24 months

### OTHER DEVELOPMENTAL SIGNS

- May develop language and/or social skills normally and then lose some or all of these skills
- Has repetitive body movements (hand flapping, spinning)
- Fixates upon a single object, such as a spoon or book
- Cannot tolerate change in routine or environment, such as a new toothbrush or a replacement for a lost toy
- Has oversensitivity to texture, lights and/or sounds
- Has delayed motor skills (late walking, riding a tricycle or learning to jump)
- Prefers to play alone or does not interact with peers as expected, such as asking for friends to come over, playing together or taking turns
- Lines items up or puts things in order repeatedly
- Has excessive tantrums and is difficult to console
- Walks on tiptoes
- May not enjoy cuddling or being touched unless it is on own terms

The presence of any one or a combination of these warning signs does not necessarily mean that your child has an autism spectrum disorder. If your child demonstrates any of these signs, please discuss your concerns with your pediatrician and ask for a referral for further evaluation.

For more information, please visit  
[www.thehelpgroup.org](http://www.thehelpgroup.org)