

AUTISM SCREENING & EVALUATION

A decision-support tool for Families and their Birth-to-Three Intervention Providers



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HOW SCREENING & EVALUATION CAN HELP YOUR CHILD

A guide from the On-Time Autism Intervention (OTAI) Program

This decision aid is for families whose child has received a positive screen for autism spectrum disorder (ASD), or have a family or provider with a concern about ASD symptoms. This guide can help you and your providers make decisions that can support both you and your child. The uncertainty of this time can be overwhelming for many parents. This aid will help you and your care team discuss next steps for your child. In this booklet, you will learn about ASD, explore some next steps for your child, and find out about possible resources.



OVERVIEW: WHAT IS AUTISM?

An overview of autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

What is ASD?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a disability that impacts development. Screening is recommended at ages 18 and 24 months and research has shown signs to be present even before then. The two main components of ASD are:

- Challenges with communication and social interaction
- Repetitive or unusual behaviors

What does it mean if my child has signs of ASD?

This means your child is showing some of the behaviors consistent with autism. Your provider might need to collect additional information to find out more about your child's overall development.

What expectations should I have about ASD?

ASD can impact how children connect with and learn from others. A diagnosis of ASD now will allow your child access to treatments that may increase communication, play, and social skills. Every child has a unique set of skills and talents. A diagnosis can be a way for your child to gain the resources they might need to fulfill their potential.

“

Autism can impact a child's ability to communicate. With early intervention, most children can develop the ability to talk

-Annette

Estes, PhD

On-Time Autism Intervention (OTAI) Team

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SIGNS OF AUTISM

What are the signs of autism? No two children with autism look exactly alike. But there are some common behaviors.

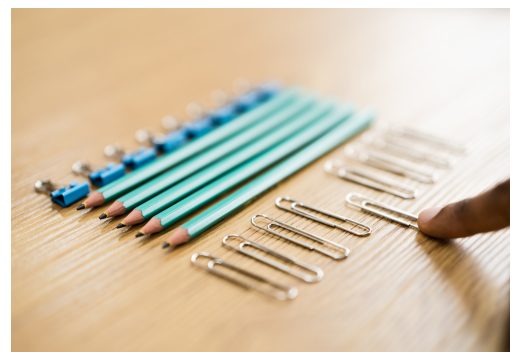


Differences in Communication and Social Interaction

- Delayed speech
- Limited use of: 'showing', giving, pointing
- Limited response to name
- Reduced eye contact
- Less interested in social games (Ex: patty cake, peek-a-boo)

Repetitive or Unusual Behaviors

- Unusual use or examination of toys or objects
- Lining up objects
- Flapping hands
- Saying the same word or phrase over and over in the exact same way
- Insisting on doing things in a particular way or order
- Unusually strong interests
- Strong reactions to light, sound, taste, smell, or touch.





HOW IS AUTISM DIAGNOSED?

What is the process?

In the state of Washington, psychologists, neurologists, psychiatric nurse practitioners, and some specially trained pediatricians are able to make a diagnosis of ASD.

This diagnosis can happen sometimes in your pediatrician's office (if they have the specialized training), and sometimes in a specialty clinic like a neuro-developmental center or an autism center.

A diagnosis is made based on a parent interview and behavioral observations.

At your appointment, typically the specialist will review your records from your Birth to Three Center (and potentially talk with your team there), have you complete questionnaires, thoroughly interview you, and conduct standardized play-based assessments.

You will be with your child the whole time. The professional will carefully consider all of your concerns. They will write a thorough report of their findings (including recommendations) and will share them with you directly. You will also be able to ask questions.

A diagnosis of ASD doesn't change who your child is, it just provides more information so you and your team can use strategies that research shows help children with ASD learn and grow!



PAUSE AND REFLECT: AN EXERCISE FOR PARENTS

Taking in new information about your child can be challenging. Parents can benefit from knowing "how to be ready" to approach an ASD diagnosis. Most people approach big decisions in the stages below. It's helpful to know these stages are normal!

You might want to ask yourself, "*Where am I in this journey?*".

1

Step 1: Not Ready

I am feeling overwhelmed and am not ready to talk about this process.

2

Step 2: Thinking About It

I am neutral about the decision to get a diagnosis, but fear a sense of loss. I don't understand the benefit of diagnosis. I fear the cost in time, expense, hassle, or emotions.

3

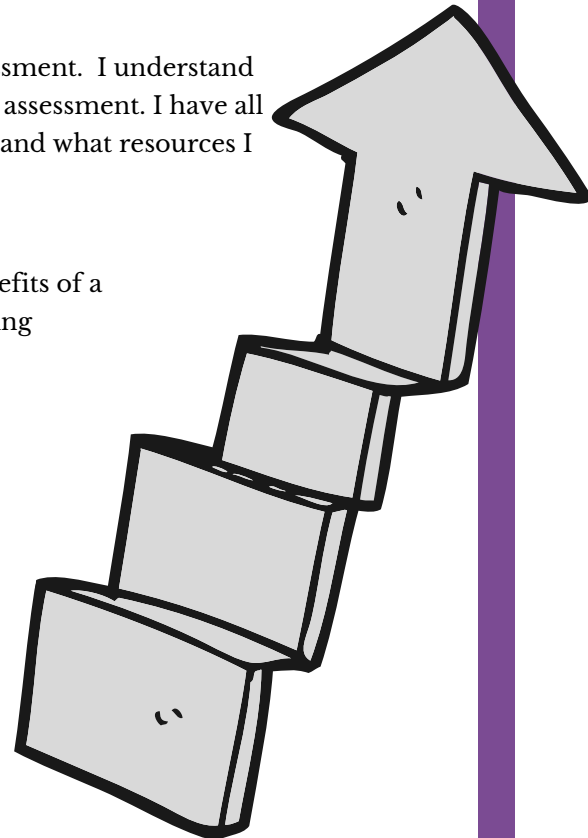
Step 3: Looking At My Options

I have decided to consider the options and benefits of a diagnostic assessment. I'm interested in exploring resources and hearing about options.

4

Step 4: Ready To Go!

I am fully ready for a diagnostic assessment. I understand what is needed and the benefits of an assessment. I have all my questions answered and I understand what resources I have.





PAUSE AND REFLECT: A CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS

Where are you on this journey? What step can you relate to? Families can benefit from being ready to "take action". But it's a process! Talking with your care team and sharing your thoughts can help you feel ready.

1

Parents who don't yet feel ready for a diagnosis yet might feel:

- Shocked, sad, scared, overwhelmed*
- Don't understand the results of the screening or feel there's a different explanation*
- Don't believe a diagnosis would change anything*
- Don't agree with the results of the screening*
- Think the E.I. Team and I need more time to "see how things shake out"*
- This is something we don't talk about in my culture*

*Many people
feel this way
while in Step 1
(Not Ready)*

2

Parents who are starting to consider a diagnosis might feel:

- Fear about what this means*
- Confused about next steps*
- Confused about what options are or what they might mean*
- More comfortable talking about ASD*

*Many people
feel this way
while in Step 2
(Thinking About It)*

3

Parents who have decided a diagnostic evaluation is needed might feel:

- Curious
- Empowered by new knowledge
- Interested in learning new skills
- Interested in exploring diagnostic resources
- Motivated to talk with others and share my questions
- Interested in meeting other parents with children that had ASD signs or a diagnosis (especially with people within my own cultural community)

Many people feel this way while in Step 3
(Looking At My Options)

4

Parents who are ready to schedule a diagnosis evaluation might feel:

- Ready to make an appointment
- Empowered by help from my team
- Open to new perspectives or new understanding of my child's behavior.
- Ready to process a diagnosis, if one occurs
- Ready to ask for help! I understand my support system and who I can go to for assistance with different needs

Many people feel this way while in Step 4
(Ready To Go!)



