

Overcoming obstacles
**Will your child benefit
from an evaluation?**

Do you have concerns about whether your child is developing normally? If so, begin with a thorough physical exam by a pediatrician in order to ensure his or her general health. The symptoms of autism often mimic or overlap with other problems with brain functioning, so it is especially important to take the time to diagnose and understand any and all of the physical issues related to your child's behavior.

Further exploration of possible autism symptoms will require a diagnostic evaluation by a highly trained team that specializes in autism and related disorders. Because autism is such a complex disorder, diagnosing and understanding your child's symptoms will take patience and time. If you seek an assessment, be sure that the evaluating team learns about your child's history and current behaviors in school, at home, and in other social settings. Also be sure that they spend a significant amount of time observing your child before making a diagnosis.

Recognizing strengths
What's next?

Appropriate, consistent, and early treatment for individuals with autism is essential. Repeated studies show that interventions result in positive outcomes for young children with autism. Treatments vary greatly depending on the needs of the individual, and can include social skills training, communication therapy, physical therapy, speech/language therapy, occupational therapy (daily skills), and specialized education programs. Families of children with autism often benefit from an ongoing relationship with a therapist who can provide support through daily challenges along with community resources and problem solving strategies for the whole family.

There is a wealth of information and support in your community that is designed to assist families and children touched by autism. Check out these websites for more information: www.autism.com, www.autism-society.org, and www.autism.org. Ask your child's pediatrician or school administration for information regarding the diagnosis and treatment of autism.

Finding solutions

Listening to your child



And Related Disorders

Knowing your child

Overcoming obstacles

Recognizing strengths

Knowing the facts

Celebrating a healthy family

Finding solutions



Information Provided By:
Dr. Mary Monroe
1115 Grant Street • Suite 307
Denver, CO 80203 • 303.587.8779

Safeguarding your child

What is autism?

Autism is a complex disorder that affects the brain functioning of some people. Usually, signs of autism emerge within the first three years of life as a child fails to learn language skills and develops unusual behaviors. Children and adults with autism have some or all of the following symptoms:

- **impairments in social interactions:** lack of non-verbal expressions (such as eye contact)
- **failure to develop peer relationships** at the same age as other children, failure to seek others to share enjoyment or interests, failure to reciprocate emotions.
- **impairments in communication:** delayed language development or the absence of language development, trouble initiating conversations or keeping them going, repetitive use of language, use of strange words or phrases.
- **impairments in imaginative play:** failure to pretend or "make believe," failure to imitate others.
- **behaviors, interests, and activities:** preoccupation with certain interests beyond what is normal for the child's age, strong needs for routines and rituals, repetitive movements, preoccupation with parts of objects.

More about Autism

Autistic individuals are often described as "living in a world of their own" because they may stare into space for hours or show no interest in other people. Some autistic individuals show aggressive or self-harming behaviors, and some have increased sensitivities to the five senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. A small percentage of autistic children and adults are remarkably gifted in certain areas such as mathematics or music.

Some individuals with autism may also have other disorders that affect brain functioning, making the accurate diagnosis and treatment of autism even more complicated. The likelihood of having an autistic child is not related to race, family income, lifestyle, or educational level. However, boys are more likely than girls to have autism.

Autism has a "spectrum" of severity, meaning that there is a wide range of symptoms and styles of the disorder among individuals who are diagnosed with it. For example, many autistic individuals may make eye contact or have a sense of humor. Some autistic adults earn college degrees, get married, and live independently, while others require more support from their families and communities.

The PDD spectrum

There are several disorders (such as Asperger's Disorder and Rett's Disorder) that are unique but that also reflect problems with communication and social skills. For example, Asperger's is similar to autism but is less severe because it does not usually involve deficits in language and intelligence. Autism and these similar disorders all fall under the heading of "Pervasive Developmental Disorders" (PDD).

What causes autism?

Currently, extensive research is devoted to discovering the causes of autism. So far, researchers have found that autistic individuals have certain biological or neurological differences in their brains. There are also some family patterns that suggest that autism may be partly hereditary. Autism is not caused by bad parenting or other psychological or emotional factors in childhood.

For many years autism occurred in about 5 children per 10,000, but the rate has dramatically increased throughout the last several years to as many as 60 children per 10,000. There are many theories that try to explain this alarming increase, including over-vaccinations of children and environmental toxins. It is also likely that as awareness of autism and related disorders increases, medical and mental health professionals are more accurately and thoroughly identifying and diagnosing autism.