



- **Level 1: Some support** – Here, individuals experience some difficulty responding to social interactions and making friends. Some challenges occur when activities change. Independence can be gained but organizational struggles will likely present.

#### ACTION STEPS

- ✓ **Stay informed** – Take notes to aid decision-making when meeting with doctors, educational staff, and other health professionals.
- ✓ **Advocate** – Work with your child's school system to check for intervention services. Develop a plan to access your community's resources.
- ✓ **Seek support** – Ask your doctor or a health professional about support groups and other services for both you and your child. Don't hesitate to speak with a counselor or mental health professional about the stress or concern of caring for your child.

#### KEEP IN MIND

An autism diagnosis can be initially overwhelming. However, there are many treatment options, programs, and resources available. Talk with your physician or pediatrician if you detect any symptoms. Early intervention can improve a child's developmental progress for a full and satisfying life.

*What steps can you take today to educate yourself about Autism?*

# Autism Spectrum Disorder

Not sure if you're observing normal developmental delays or early signs of

## AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

Imagine how much more you can do for your child once you know the answer and are informed about how best to help him or her.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability marked by behavioral and communication difficulties. Individuals face a broad range, or spectrum, of functionality.

Some will require significant support throughout their lives, while others can live more independently. Roughly one in 68 children are on the autism spectrum. In recent years, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* incorporated those diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome into the broader diagnosis of ASD.

### SYMPTOMS OF ASD

Autism can be detected in early childhood, and the symptoms typically persist throughout a person's life. Impaired functioning in social, occupational, or other daily activities are present in early childhood development. By age two, a medical professional can give a fairly reliable diagnosis. Early intervention is beneficial.

### DIAGNOSIS REQUIREMENTS

Identifying autism is a two-step process involving a pediatric screening and an evaluation by a specialist. Symptoms indicating the disorder include communication, social, and behavioral struggles.

#### • Communication Deficits

- Failure to engage in back-and-forth conversations or speak about emotions.
- Nonverbal communication struggles, including lack of eye contact, minimal facial expressions, and trouble understanding gestures.

#### • Social Interaction Difficulties

- Being unable to start and respond to social interactions. Lacking interest in peers or shared imaginative play.
- Struggle to change behavior to fit appropriate social context.

#### • Repetitive Behaviors

- Echoing words, phrases, or movements (e.g., lining up objects or toys).
- Fixating on interests with abnormally high intensity levels.
- Sensitivity or lack thereof to sensory input (i.e. lights, sounds, smells).
- Difficulty adapting to altered plans, patterns, or routines.

### SEVERITY LEVELS

Because ASD is a spectrum of functionality and impairments, the support level needed varies from significant to very little.

- **Level 3: Very substantial support** – These individuals experience serious deficits in verbal and nonverbal communication, extreme social struggles, and severe behavioral inability to cope with change.
- **Level 2: Substantial support** – There are still significant communication deficits and limited social interactions associated here. Change is difficult, and individuals exhibit frequent repetitive and/or restricted behaviors.