

AN AUTISM GUIDE

FOR PARENTS AND CARERS OF CHILDREN AGES 0 - 2 YEARS OLD

This guide provides parents and carers with information about what Autism may look like in children from 0 - 2 years old and outlines some strategies they can try at home to support their child.



Joanne Fisher

What is Autism

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism is a developmental disability that affects how people process information. It is identified by a 'triad of impairments': difficulties with social interaction, social communication, and imagination, and are often rigid in their thinking.

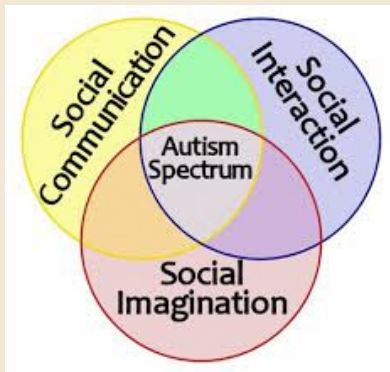
It is not clear why a person has Autism but there are links with abnormal brain developments (genetic factors) as well as possible environmental factors.

The signs of Autism usually start before the age of three and can cause delays or difficulties in many different skills that develop from infancy to adulthood. It affects an estimated 1 in 350 people; with 4 out of 5 being males.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder is like a spectrum of needs, where each person experiences Autism differently depending on where they fall on that spectrum.

A child will often display a combination of actions and traits which in time will lead to a diagnosis.

Triad of Impairments



Signs of Autism 0-2 years old

Social interaction and Communication

In the first year of life, children's social interaction and communication development is an important area to watch for early signs of Autism. Typical social and communication development in children includes things like responding to their name, making eye contact, and using gestures. Signs of possible Autism include:



Lack of eye contact to get someone's attention or to look at something they want



Does not point or hold up objects to show you



Does not consistently respond to their name



Does not use gestures e.g. wave goodbye, nod or shake their head or do not consistently smile back at you



Rarely copies people's actions



Does not babble, or when they do, they do not sound like they are having a conversation with you

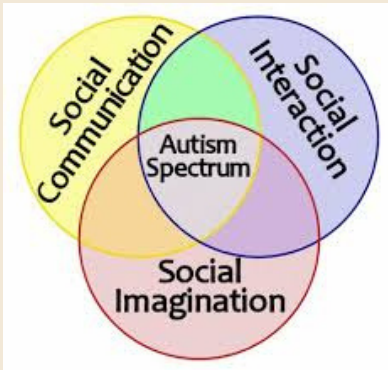


Has difficulty following one step instructions e.g. Give me the block



Does not show facial expressions e.g. happy, sad or surprised

Triad of Impairments



Signs of Autism 0-2 years old

Relationships and Play

If a young child is autistic, they might:



Rarely shows an interest in other children e.g. they may not look at them or try to get their attention



Rarely starts games like peekaboo



Rarely participates in pretend play e.g. they might not pretend to feed a teddybear

Behaviours



Have interests in certain objects or toys e.g. play just with cars, dinosaurs or dolls



Have repetitive behaviours e.g. they might spin the wheels of a car, take the clothes on and off a doll repeatedly

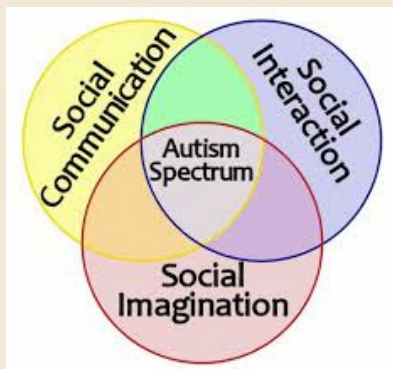


Interact with toys or objects in unexpected ways e.g. line up objects or put them into piles



Be very interested in certain activities and get upset if they can't do that activity e.g. follow the same route to their grandparents' house

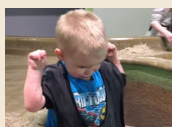
Triad of Impairments



Signs of Autism 0–2 years old

Repetitive movements

If a young child is autistic, they might repeat body movements or move their bodies in unexpected ways. For example, they might:



- arch their backs
- flap their hands
- fold their arms stiffly
- walk on the tips of their toes



Sensory Sensitivities

They also might:



- be sensitive to the environment – for example, they might be more easily upset by noise or bright lights than other children



- like their environment to stay the same – for example, they'll eat only foods with certain textures or colours, or they'll want to wear the same clothes each day



- enjoy seeking out sensations – for example, they might rub objects on their lips or face, or smell objects.

Strategies to support your child at home

Following your child's lead

You can do this by:

- Imitating or copying your child's actions
- Narrating your child's actions using simple words, phrases or sound effects such as "roll" if your child is rolling a ball, or "bang, bang" if you child is using a hammer
- Helping their play by holding out a toy for them to take

Intensive Interaction

Intensive interaction teaches the basic skills needed for communication such as: eye contact, using and understanding facial expressions, turn taking, sharing personal space and using vocalisation with meaning. Some techniques include:

- Mirror your child's body posture
- Mirror positive facial expressions such as smiling
- Join in with any noises that your child makes
- Seek out eye contact *
- Turn-taking – this can be with the noises that they make or non-verbal behaviours like hand squeezing or tapping rhythms.

Try to keep talking to a minimum, you are using their 'language' to communicate, not your own.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FEOeG-9Zpo>



*Do not force your child to make eye contact as this can cause them anxiety. Making eye contact is a skill they will need to be taught over time.

Strategies to support your child at home

Communication

To help your child understand what you are saying to them you should:

- Say their name, before speaking to them so they know you are talking to them
- Keep language to a minimum - use simple, familiar language
- Support spoken language with visual cards to help them understand
- Keep calm and do not raise your voice (Remember they are not ignoring you; communication is a skill they will learn over time with your support).

Using visuals

There are many different types of visual aids you can use to support your child in understanding what you are saying to them (by showing them the card) and supporting them to communicate with you (by allowing them to pick/point to a card to tell you what they want/need).

Visual cards on a lanyard



Who to contact for support

If you are concerned that your child maybe displaying signs of Autism, you can seek advice and support from:

- Your child's GP
- Your child's health visitor
- Your child's pre-school/nursery (ask to speak to the SENCO)

All local authorities should have an area on their website called the 'Local Offer' which outlines the support available to parents of children with additional needs. This should list different organisations, support groups and useful websites.

Remember, you know your child better than anyone else. Before you go and speak to someone about your child, write down your concerns as this will help you explain what your worries are.

