



## Autism: Information for Parents, Caregivers and Families

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a wide range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), autism affects an estimated 1 in 54 children in the United States. There are many subtypes of autism which are influenced by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Because autism is a spectrum disorder, each person with autism has a distinct set of strengths and challenges. The ways in which people with autism learn, think and problem-solve can range from highly skilled to severely challenged. Some people with ASD may require significant support in their daily lives, while others may need less support and, in some cases, live entirely independently.

### Facts and Statistics

- Autism affects 1 in 54 children
- Boys are four times more likely to have autism than girls
- Signs of autism usually appear by age 2 or 3; When developmental delays occur, it can be diagnosed as early as 18 months
- 40% of children with autism do not speak; 25%-30% of have some words at 12 to 18 months of age and then lose them; Others might speak later in childhood
- Autism varies greatly; No two people with autism are alike
- Autism is often accompanied by gastrointestinal (GI) disorders, seizures or sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, attention and sensory challenges
- Children with autism can make progress; Research shows that early intervention leads to positive outcomes
- Autism is treatable and not a hopeless condition

#### References:

[www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)  
[www.nationalautismassociation.org](http://www.nationalautismassociation.org)  
[www.autismcenter.org](http://www.autismcenter.org)  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**1 in 54**  
**children**



## ADHD: Information for Parents, Caregivers and Families

### Causes

There is no one cause of autism. Research suggests that autism develops from a combination of genetic or environmental influences. The following are risk factors, NOT causes.

**Genetic:** Autism tends to run in families. Changes in certain genes increase the risk that a child will develop autism. If a parent carries one or more of these gene changes, they may get passed to a child (even if the parent does not have autism).

**Environmental:** Research also shows that certain environmental factors may increase the risk of autism. These include: Advanced parent age (either parent), Pregnancy and birth complications (e.g. extreme prematurity - before 26 weeks, low birth weight, multiple pregnancies (twins, triplets, etc.)), Pregnancies spaced less than one year apart. Vaccines do NOT cause autism.

### Symptoms

The core symptoms of autism include social communication challenges and restricted, repetitive behaviors that begin in early childhood and interfere with daily living.

**Social Communication Challenges:** Individuals who have autism may not understand or appropriately use: Spoken language. Gestures, Eye contact, Facial expressions, Tone of voice, and Expressions not meant to be taken literally.

**Restrictive and Repetitive Behaviors:** These behaviors vary across the autism spectrum and can include: Repetitive body movements (e.g. rocking, flapping, spinning, running back and forth), Repetitive motions with objects (e.g. spinning wheels, shaking sticks, flipping levers), Staring at lights or spinning objects, Ritualistic behaviors (e.g. lining up objects, repeatedly touching objects in a set order), Interests in specific or unusual topics, the Need for consistent routines/resistance to change (e.g. same daily schedule, meal menu, clothes, route to school).

Trouble Making Eye Contact

Difficulty Listening

No/Slow Response to Verbal Requests

Can't Sustain Back-and-Forth Conversation

Sensitive to Noise, Lights, and Other Sensory Inputs

Exceptional Ability to Remember Details, Numbers and Facts



## Diagnosis and Treatment

There is no medical test, like a blood test, to diagnose autism. Doctors look at the child's developmental history and behavior to make a diagnosis. Treatments include early intervention, dietary intervention, medical intervention and a variety of therapies including: applied behavior analysis, social skills training, occupational, physical, and sensory integration therapy.

## Resources and Information for Parents, Caregivers and Families

If your child has been diagnosed or if you suspect your child may have an autism spectrum, we encourage you to visit the following websites for more information and to contact your doctor.

- [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)
- [www.nationalautismassociation.org](http://www.nationalautismassociation.org)
- [www.autismcenter.org](http://www.autismcenter.org)

## Support for Parents and Caregivers

There are a number of resources available to help parents and caregivers who are concerned about their child's mental health or who are looking for supports and services for their child who has a behavioral health diagnosis.

### We encourage you to explore the following:

- Missouri Families 4 Families - [www.mofamilies4families.com](http://www.mofamilies4families.com)
- MPACT Parent Training & Information - [www.missouriparentsact.org](http://www.missouriparentsact.org)

**MISSOURI FAMILIES 4 FAMILIES**  
**(573) 619-1322 | [MOFAM4FAM@GMAIL.COM](mailto:MOFAM4FAM@GMAIL.COM)**

MOF4F represents families from around the state by being a voice for families on state and local committees and advocating for families who have children/youth with mental health needs.