Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

A guide for children, teens, and caregivers



Autism is a developmental condition that affects communication, social interaction, sensory experiences, and patterns of behavior or interests. Each autistic child or teen has a different mix of strengths, challenges, and support needs. Support should help the child communicate, learn, feel safe, and participate in daily life in ways that respect those differences.

Common symptoms

- Social and communication differences
- Difficulty joining play or making friends
- Repeated movements or focused interests
- Distress when routines change
- Different responses to sound or textures

Why does it happen?

Autism relates to differences in brain development. Genes and other factors contribute. There is no single cause, and families should not be blamed.

Treatment and outlook

Choose support around your child's communication, learning, sensory comfort, and daily living needs. Speech-language therapy, developmental and behavioral support, occupational therapy, and caregiver coaching may help. Agree on goals that matter to your child and review progress.

Medicines do not treat the core communication and behavior differences of autism. A clinician may use medicine for co-occurring problems or severe irritability, with a clear target and side-effect checks.

For developmental concerns, ask about early intervention before age 3 or school-district evaluation from age 3. You do not need to wait for a final autism diagnosis to request help; service eligibility is assessed separately.

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Living with autism

Practical steps between appointments



Home and school

Make days predictable. Use clear language, visual schedules, and notice before changes when these help your child.

Support communication. Use speech, pictures, gestures, or a device. Offer sensory breaks and comfortable spaces.

Build on strengths. Include your child in choices. Share helpful approaches with school, and make time for rest and enjoyable activities.

Coordinate communication tools, sensory breaks, and transition plans across home and school. Ask about an IEP or 504 evaluation when learning or access is affected; a medical diagnosis alone does not guarantee eligibility.

When to seek help

Arrange an assessment for developmental concerns. Seek prompt medical advice for new self-injury, loss of skills, sudden behavior changes, or persistent feeding, sleep, or pain concerns. If wandering is a concern, agree on a safety plan with caregivers and school.

Get urgent help

For suicidal thoughts or a mental health crisis, call or text **988** in the US. Call **911** for immediate danger or a life-threatening emergency. Children and teens: tell a trusted adult right away.

For your next appointment

How does my child communicate preferences or discomfort? Which daily task matters most to them? Could pain, sleep, or a different communication support explain a new difficulty?

Learn more

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Sources and References

1. **Treatment and Intervention for Autism Spectrum Disorder**
   Centers for Disease Control and Prevention · 2024
   https://www.cdc.gov/autism/treatment/

2. **Clinical Screening for Autism Spectrum Disorder**
   Centers for Disease Control and Prevention · 2024 · Updated 2025-04-15
   https://www.cdc.gov/autism/hcp/diagnosis/screening.html

3. **Frequently Asked Questions: Section 504 Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**
   U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights
   https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/civil-rights-laws/disability-discrimination/frequently-asked-questions-section-504-free-appropriate-public-education-fape