

# What is Autism?

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Autism is one of a group of serious developmental problems called autism spectrum disorder (ASD) that appear in early childhood- usually before age 3. Though symptoms and severity vary, all autism disorders affect a child's ability to communicate and interact with others.

## Symptoms to look for:

Problems in three crucial areas of development: social interaction, language and behavior.

- Fails to respond to his or her name
- Has poor eye contact
- Appears not to hear you at times
- Resists cuddling and holding
- Appears unaware of others' feelings
- Seems to prefer playing alone
- Starts talking later than age 2
- Loses previously acquired ability to say words or sentences
- Doesn't make eye contact when making requests
- Speaks with an abnormal tone or rhythm
- May repeat words or phrases verbatim
- Performs repetitive movements such as rocking, spinning or hand flapping
- Develops specific routines or rituals
- Becomes disturbed at the slightest change in routine or rituals
- Moves constantly
- May be unusually sensitive to light, sound and touch and yet oblivious to pain
- May be fascinated by parts of an object, such as the spinning wheels of a toy car

## Best Practices

No cure exists for autism, and there is no “one-size-fits-all” treatment. The range of home-based and school-based treatments and interventions of autism can be overwhelming. Treatment options may include: behavior and communications therapies, educational therapies and medications. Alternative therapies include: creative therapies, special diets and chelation therapy.

## Screening Tools/Resources

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### Screening Tools:

Due to the complex nature of autism, numerous screening tools exist. Here are some of the links that can be used for screening purposes.

[firstsigns.org/screening/tools/index\\_tools.htm](http://firstsigns.org/screening/tools/index_tools.htm)

### Resources:

#### **National Alliance on Mental Illness**

[nami.org](http://nami.org)

#### **National Institute of Mental Health**

[nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov)

#### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**

[samhsa.gov](http://samhsa.gov)



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