

Early signs of autism

walkforautism.org.au



What is autism?



Autism is a condition that affects how a person thinks, feels, interacts with others, and experiences their environment. It is estimated that 1 in 70 people are on the autism spectrum. Autism is a lifelong disability that starts when a person is born and stays with them into old age. Every Autistic person is different to every other. This is why autism is described as a 'spectrum'. Aspect describes autism as a **different brilliant®**.

Autism in Early Childhood

Early childhood refers to children aged 0-6 years. At Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) our objective is to identify children on the autism spectrum early, assist their families to secure an appropriate assessment and facilitate their entry into early years support and therapy.

Early Signs

Young children with autism will show some of the following signs. No single indicator means a child necessarily has autism. Usually, a child will show several indicators from most or all of the following categories.

Communication

- Does not respond to his/her name by 12 months
- No gestures such as waving or pointing by 12 months
- Loss of words previously used
- Speech absent at 18 months
- Has no spontaneous two-word phrases by 24 months
- Has selective hearing/responding to certain sounds but ignoring the human voice

Social Skills

- Looks away when you speak to him/her
- Does not return your smile
- Shows lack of interest in other children
- Often seems to be in his/her own world
- Very limited social play, such as 'peek a boo'
- Does not share attention, interest or enjoyment or try to get your attention to show you objects
- Lack of shared positive emotions such as joy and excitement

Behaviour, Play & Interests

- Prefers to play alone
- Has unusual interests or attachments
- Play is limited to certain toys
- Has difficulty coping with change
- Has unusual motor mannerisms such as rocking, flapping hands or walking on tiptoes
- Plays with objects in unusual ways such as repetitive spinning or lining up
- Afraid of some everyday sounds
- Eats a limited range of foods

➡ While Autistic children may need support to learn new skills and reach their unique potential, autism is a part of the child, and can be associated with areas of incredible strength and different ways of viewing the world.

Next Steps

If you suspect a child is on the autism spectrum, the first step for them is to see their GP and secure a referral to a specialist for diagnosis.

Research shows that when a child receives an early diagnosis they are more likely to demonstrate improved cognitive, developmental and adaptive functioning, enhanced language and social skills compared to children who are diagnosed later.

Learn about the Aspect approach to a diagnosis here: autismspectrum.org.au/how-can-we-help/getting-a-diagnosis