

# **Autism Spectrum Disorders**

## **An Overview for Parents and Caregivers**

### ***What is Autism?***

Autism is a developmental brain disorder that can manifest as a mild impairment to severe disability. It is unknown what causes Autism, but scientists believe it may be a combination of genes and environment and many other variables.

### ***What are the symptoms of Autism?***

Autism is characterized by significant delays in communication and socialization, in addition to the presence of repetitive and stereotyped behaviors. For example, your five-year-old child may flap his hands, not be able to speak in a full sentence, not respond when spoken to, and not interactively play with others. These behaviors may be signs of Autism. There are many screening tools available, please speak with your primary care physician if you have noticed developmental delays in the areas of communication and socialization and have seen repetitive or “odd” behaviors.

### ***How do I get my child an Autism diagnosis?***

First go to your PCP for a screening. If Autism is indicated, you can schedule an appointment with a psychologist/psychiatrist/neurologist or other professional qualified to provide a diagnostic evaluation.

### ***Which therapy will help my child progress developmentally?***

As of right now, ABA therapy (applied behavior analysis) and other therapies that use the science of ABA have over 30 years of research demonstrating the effectiveness of the interventions. But the therapy you choose may depend on your lifestyle (ABA is quite intensive), parenting approach (your family may prefer Floortime/play therapy) and the severity of your child's Autism (mildly impaired individuals may need social groups or support in school). As a parent, do your research to provide the best intervention you can for your child. Ask for data to demonstrate progress, and if you do not see progress, research again. Not all therapies work for all kids and families, though behavior modification and ABA interventions have demonstrated the most impact on development of functional skills and reduction of problem skills for decades. The worst thing one can do is.. nothing. Without intervention, very few children with Autism will develop the skills they need to communicate or socialize.

### ***Is there a cure for Autism?***

No. There is no cure for Autism, but with early, intensive intervention you can significantly reduce the symptoms of Autism.