

## What is Autism?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a *neurodevelopmental* disorder, traditionally characterised by a triad of impairments in 1) social interactions, 2) communication and use of language, and 3) restricted or repetitive interests, behaviours and activities.

ASD is a 'spectrum' disorder because of the varying degrees of impairments and strengths that each individual shows. These different patterns are based on the individual's biological makeup (*neuro*) and their history of learning (*developmental*); no two people with an ASD are the same.

### Early Identification: "Red Flags"

While no two individuals with an ASD are the same, there are a number of differences from the typical course of development that help parents and professionals to identify children at risk. As we research more about ASD, we continually realise the importance of early identification and intervention.

Social	Communication	Behaviour
Atypical eye contact	Echolalia	Obsession with objects, interests or routines
Not orientating when name is called	No babbling by 12 months	Inappropriate or unusual toy play
Preferring to be alone/ ignoring others	No single words by 16 months	Repetitive body movements/ unusual body postures
Limited initiation (e.g. not waving hello or good-bye)	No two-word spontaneous phrases by 24 months	Attachment to unusual objects
No initiation of social games (e.g. Peek-a-boo)	Failure to attract attention to self	Over- or undersensitivity to sensory stimuli:
Little interest in being held	Peculiar use of language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inconsistent responses to sound</li> <li>• Unusual visual interests</li> <li>• Unusual reactions to tactile input such as pain, cold or heat</li> <li>• Extreme preferences or aversions to smells and tastes</li> </ul>
Delay/deficits in joint attention	Relies on early forms of communication (e.g. crying)	
Limited pointing/gestures		

## Early Identification: Barriers and Fears

Very early in life, even before 12 months of age, many parents describe a feeling or sense that something is different about their child's development. It is common for nervous parents and professionals to put these differences down to individual traits ("He's just shy"), or a delay that they will catch up on ("She's just taking her time"). The prospect of testing, diagnosis, of sourcing and paying for good intervention can be scary.

Know that you are not alone. We at CDC are here to support you through every step of the way with our family based approach. Using the well-defined benchmarks or red-flags above can also give you confidence when speaking with professionals about any concerns you may have. Every month, day, minute spent putting these worries to one side, is a month, day, minute lost. Set aside your worries and act now: early intervention offers your child the chance to be the best that he or she can be.

