

Autism Spectrum Disorders: What You Should Know

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are disabilities that usually appear very early in life and can lead to life-long social, communication, and behavioral challenges. Medical and behavioral health researchers do not yet know exactly what causes ASDs. The federal Centers for Disease Control estimate that only one in 110 children has an ASD, but if you are the parent of a young child, it's a good idea to be aware of the warning signs.

If a young child has trouble socializing, making eye contact, responding to his or her name, or understanding the concept of pointing, these can be problems associated with ASDs. As the child grows older, he or she may also have trouble with learning to speak correctly. In some of the worst cases, children can become involved in repetitive or even self-damaging behaviors such as rocking; spinning; or banging their head against the floors, walls, or furniture.

Strangely, some children with ASDs are able to concentrate very well on a particular activity and may even be advanced for their age in their focused area of interest – be it drawing, building with blocks, playing music, or other activities.

Doctors can sometimes diagnose a child with ASD at 18 months or younger, and it's usually very clear by the age of 2 if a child has an ASD. If your child is showing warning signs, it's important to see a doctor as soon as possible, because early treatment can significantly lessen the symptoms that a child develops. While there are no medications that can cure ASDs or even treat the main symptoms, there are many types of therapies that can help children with these disorders learn how to interact better with the world around them.

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