



Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

Autism

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), autism affects 1.5 million Americans and 67 million people around the world. Autism is defined by significant impairments in social interaction and communication and the presence of unusual behaviors and interests. This disability affects children from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and is four times more likely to occur in boys than girls.

Early Warning Signs

Autism affects every child differently; therefore, no child will exhibit the same symptoms as another. Currently, there is no clear definition as to what causes autism, but parents and caregivers can look for early warning signs which are often noticeable by the time a child turns three years old and last throughout his or her lifetime. As soon as a parent/caregiver notices the following symptoms, they should take their child to a doctor or health care provider:

- **Eye Contact.** Autistic children make little or no eye contact.
- **Speech.** Look for late speaking or no speaking at all. Some autistic children have trouble expressing needs or do not respond to verbal communication.
- **Relationships.** Sometimes autistic children have difficulty relating to other people, prefer to be alone or don't like to cuddle.
- **Play.** Children are active and creative, so take note if your child doesn't play. Also keep in mind that autistic behavior sometimes includes unusual play patterns like spinning objects over and over.



- **Extreme Behaviors.** Watch for extreme behaviors like too much laughing or crying for no reason, tantrums and sensitivity to pain (or lack of it). Sometimes autistic kids don't have a natural fear of danger, and are fixated on certain objects for a long time. Repetitive movements like hand-flapping also can be an early sign of autism.

First 5 Sonoma County encourages all parents to be aware of their child's development and share any concerns with a health care professional.

First 5 Sonoma County Behavioral Consultation Project

The Behavioral Consultation Project provides on site consultation to childcare and preschool programs serving children 0-5 years old. Consultants help the provider work with behavioral, temperamental, developmental, or mental health issues and suggest interventions and/or referrals for these children. For more information, contact Early Learning Institute at 591-0170 or visit www.earlylearninginstitute.com.

The Sooner, The Better

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) strongly believes in the importance of early assessment and screening for autism to ensure that children are identified and receive access to services as early as possible. Research shows that children diagnosed at an early stage, and who visit the doctor regularly for treatment, show improvements in learning and communications skills.

- **Developmental Screenings.** Doctors and nurses use developmental screenings to tell if a child is learning basic skills when s/he should, or if s/he might have a problem. Since there is no lab or blood test to tell if a child may have a delay, the developmental screening will help tell if a child needs to see a specialist.
- **Early Intervention.** Research shows that early intervention reduces the effects of autism. By starting treatment at an early age (0 to 3) when the brain is developing, children can make great progress by the time they start kindergarten.
- **Treatment.** Autistic children benefit from programs that help develop their communication, social and mental skills. According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, some of the most common treatment options include speech therapy, diet, and treatments that focus on improving relationships.

Resources Available to Help

If you have concerns about your child's development, don't wait - talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting an autism screening. The following services can also help:

- **California Department of Developmental Services.** For children under age 3, call 1-800-515-BABY (2229) and select the "Early Start" extension number or visit www.cdc.gov/actearly. For children between ages 3 and 5, call First 5 California at 1-800-

KIDS-025 for screening services and information on whether your child can receive free special needs assessments.

- **The Autism Society of America (ASA).** The Autism Society of America has chapters throughout California and provides information on symptoms and treatments. For more information, visit www.autism-society.org
- **Kit for New Parents.** This free resource, a \$75 value, includes educational DVDs, guide books and brochures with parenting information, advice, and useful tips including: developmental milestones from ages 0 to 5, and warning signs that indicate whether a child might need to be tested. To order a *Kit*, call 1-800-KIDS-025 (English, Spanish, Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin and Vietnamese)
- **Early Learning Institute (ELI).** ELI provides assessment and early intervention services for children 0-3 who may be experiencing a developmental delay. Services include: one-to-one play based developmental activities for child, family support and referrals to other services. Parent or caregiver can call 591-0170 for an appointment.
- **Infant School and Home Autism Program through Education (InSHAPE).** Sonoma County Office of Education Preschool program offers an intensive, specially designed and individualized program for young children diagnosed on the autism spectrum, from birth to age three, and a supportive transition to a preschool program. Call 524-2712 for more information.

To learn more about Autism, child's development, early warning signs, symptoms, and other developmental disabilities please visit:

- www.aap.org/healthtopics/autism
- www.hhs.gov/autism
- www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism
- www.autismspeaks.org
- www.researchautism.org

About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit www.first5sonomacounty.org