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Autism Spectrum Disorders

Parents look for specific child development milestones in their baby's development, like first steps or first words. Sometimes, those milestones are delayed, reverse or don't come at all. First time parents may be concerned or just chalk up oddities to "a phase." Should you be concerned? Possibly. A clinical diagnosis may be in order, especially in older children. Autistic Spectrum Disorders are called "spectrum" because of the wide range of symptoms and severity in children.

ASD is simply a group of developmental social disabilities that can affect children as early as before their first birthday. ASD affects a child's communication, behavior and social skills. Symptoms may be mild, such as not paying attention to what's going on around them or not responding to their name, to severe, such as continually repeating words and phrases, wanting to be alone, or having unusual reactions to everyday situations.

The three types of ASDs are:

- Autistic disorder (aka "classic autism")
- Asperger Syndrome
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)

The first type, Autistic Disorder, is what you normally think of when you hear the word "autism." Language delays, social/communication challenges, unusual interests and odd behaviors are common, and are frequently accompanied by intellectual disability.

Asperger Syndrome is milder form of autism, with children frequently identified as "high functioning." While children with Asperger generally have the social challenges, unusual interests and odd behaviors, they do not have issues with language or intellectual disability.

PDD-NOS is the mildest form, with only some of the autism symptoms, such as social or communication challenges.

ASDs have a number of causes, including genetic, biological and environmental, beginning before birth. Possible causes include premature birth or low birth weight, age of parent at conception and birth, certain genetic/chromosomal conditions (i.e., Down's Syndrome), a sibling or parent with ASD, and low intake of folic acid during pregnancy.

Let's eliminate one fallacy: poor parenting does NOT cause ASD. Help is available to help your child grow and thrive.

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