



What Should You Do If You Suspect Your Child Has Autism?



Kerry Peterson, MA, CCC-SLP, BCBA
KCC Director of Autism Programs

While the thought of an autism diagnosis is certainly scary, parents who suspect their child may have autism should act immediately to find out. With early and intensive treatment, many children experience significant gains in their ability to communicate, play and learn.

Talk to your doctor

When autism is suspected, parents should first share concerns directly with the child's pediatrician. Be prepared for a "wait and see" recommendation remembering a pediatrician may not see the behaviors of concern in a short office visit. Come to the appointment prepared with specific reasons you feel an evaluation to rule out autism is necessary. You are your child's best advocate. Waiting lists exist for these evaluations, so it is important not to wait.

Find an AAEC

Once you have a referral to receive an autism evaluation, contact your insurance provider to obtain a list of evaluation centers in network for you. In order to access some autism benefits (should a diagnosis be made) it is necessary that

the autism evaluation was conducted by a multi-disciplinary team in an Approved Autism Evaluation Center (AAEC). Be sure to ask if an evaluating center has the AAEC designation.

Get an evaluation

Two components of the autism evaluation should include an extensive parent interview, the Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADIR) and a structured play session with your child, the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS). These measures are very sensitive and able to differentiate autism from global developmental delay or speech and language delay alone.

Find support

The Autism Alliance of Michigan is a wonderful resource for any family who has concerns about autism. They have navigators standing by to help guide families through the evaluation process or find treatment providers. Visit their website at autismallianceofmichigan.org

Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means that there is a range in how much it affects a child's behavior and abilities. Don't assume a worst-case scenario. Many children with autism are able to attend regular schools and participate in activities with their peers successfully. And many people on the spectrum or who are suspected to be, like Mozart or Temple Grandin, have grown up to be incredibly successful.

But the key is getting diagnosed and getting treatment as early as possible in a child's life.

