

While each child is unique, children's development in different areas—physical, social, and cognitive-- follows fairly consistent patterns within specific timeframes referred to as developmental milestones. Parents have the tough task of allowing their child to develop at his or her own pace while being alert to warning signs of developmental problems that require outside intervention.

Autism and related developmental disorders can show up differently at different ages. Today, many children with Autism or a related disorder are identified by age three or four, if not sooner. This is important because the earlier these children receive intervention, the greater the impact it is likely to have. So, if you have questions or concerns about your child's development, trust your own instincts. Talk with your child's doctor and request a developmental screening to ensure that s/he is developmentally on track.

Here are some typical characteristics of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders ("ASD"). While it does not necessarily mean that your child has Autism or a related disorder, the presence of any of these indicates that a child should be evaluated as soon as possible.

- Child does not use facial expressions and cooing/crying to communicate emotions and needs by six months of age or stops/decreases using them at any age thereafter.
- Child does not engage in back and forth exchanges of sounds and facial expressions by nine months or stops/decreases this behavior at any age thereafter.
- Child does not babble (making speech-like sounds) by twelve months.
- Child does not use intentional gestures such as pointing, reaching, or waving by twelve months.
- Child does not have any real words by sixteen months.
- Child does not use two-word phrases that are meaningful, without merely imitating or repeating words heard, by 24 months.
- Any loss of speech, babbling or social skills at any age.

[First Signs](#) is a great resource for more detailed developmental

[milestones](#) as well as a wealth of information for parents. We encourage you to visit their website for more information.

When it comes to Autism and related disorders, information is power. It is painfully difficult to face the possibility that your child may have a problem, but it is crucial to his/her development. A developmental screening can show if a full assessment is needed. A full assessment can show if such a problem exists, and what kinds of services are likely to be most helpful. The right services can help your child learn new skills and develop along more typical pathways.

If you have noticed warning signs, are worried about your child's development, or just have a feeling that something is wrong, don't wait—*take the step to have your child screened and/or evaluated now.* *Your action now can make all the difference to your child later.*