

Autism and Other Developmental Disorders

Autistic disorder is the most severe form of a spectrum of related disorders (autism spectrum disorders [ASDs]) characterized by impairments in reciprocal social interaction and communication and by the presence of repetitive, inflexible behavior. At an estimated prevalence of 1 in 150, ASDs are among the most common forms of severe developmental disability. Parents of children with ASDs generally identify concerns by the age of 12 to 18 months. However, recent US data suggest that the average age of diagnosis remains at about 4 years, and possibly older in socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. Some community physicians may be reluctant to raise concerns about early signs of ASDs to avoid upsetting parents, but numerous studies have indicated that parents would prefer to be informed and that delaying discussion can create much greater distress. Attention to parents' concerns and any atypical behavior patterns in the child's "medical home," supported by ASD-specific screening tools, may help reduce the time before treatment is initiated. Core symptoms might be more malleable when treatment is initiated in early childhood, making early screening and diagnosis important. Parental stress might impede the effectiveness of early interventions and support for families must be integrated into treatment. 1st Five supports the AAP-recommended autism-specific screening at 18 and 24 months.

Child Referred for Possible Autism Diagnosis in Need of Many Services

Millie, a four-year old, was referred to 1st Five by her physician for further screening for autism. The Taylor County 1st Five coordinator linked her to Child Health Specialty Clinics for further evaluation and Growing Strong Families for home support, as well as Medicaid, food assistance, and Bridge to Care transportation assistance to medical appointments. With the help of AEA and these other comprehensive interventions, Millie was able to attend preschool that fall. Millie's mother still accesses 1st Five care coordination services as needs arise and she is not sure of available community resources.

For more information, visit the following links:

[Clinical Assessment and Management of Toddlers with Suspected Autism Spectrum Disorder: Insight from Studies of High-Risk Infants](#)

[Autism](#) (from the Lancet, November 2009)

[First Signs©](#)

[Information on hearing loss](#)

[Information on intellectual disabilities](#)

[Information on vision impairment](#)