

Early Childhood Screening and Diagnosis AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

How is autism diagnosed?

Diagnosing autism can be difficult as there is no specific medical test to make the diagnosis. Instead, autism is diagnosed by looking at an individual's behavior and development to determine if they are developing on target. Developmental screenings are used from birth to age 24 months to identify potential delays and refer for a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation. After 24 months, children are simply referred for a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation.

What goes into the diagnostic process?

Developmental Screen: A short test to tell if a child is learning basic skills on time or if there are any delays. These typically occur at 9, 18, and 24 month well-child doctor visits, with more frequent screenings when a child is at risk for autism. During a screening, the doctor may ask caregiver questions or talk/play with the child to see how he or she learns, speaks, behaves, and moves.

Comprehensive Diagnostic Evaluation: Often involves a team of professionals led by a physician, psychiatrist, or psychologist. It is used to establish a formal diagnosis and identify strengths and weaknesses for intervention planning. This typically includes a caregiver interview, observation of the child, and administration of behavior checklists and rating scales.

Examples of developmental screeners and behavior checklists/rating scales include:

- Checklist for Autism Spectrum Disorders (CASD)
- Childhood Autism Rating Scale – Second Edition (CARS)
- Gilliam Autism Rating Scale – Second Edition (GARS 2)
- Autism Spectrum Rating Scales (ASRS)
- Autism Behavior Checklist (ABC)
- Social Responsiveness Scale – Second Edition (SRS 2)
- Social Communication Questionnaire (SCQ)
- Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers, Revised (M-CHAT-R)

Observation tools include:

- Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule – Second Edition (ADOS 2)
- Childhood Autism Rating Scale – Second Edition (CARS)

Who can diagnosis autism?

- Autism can be diagnosed by a medical or mental health professional with expertise in child development
- This includes: developmental pediatricians, psychiatrists, neurologists, clinical psychologists, advanced practice clinicians and licensed school psychologists



What do I do if I suspect my child has autism?

- Monitor your child's development and keep track of any developmental delays or concerns
- Contact your child's doctor to discuss your concerns and request an autism screening