

Could It Be Autism?

What is Autism?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disability. Signs usually appear during early childhood. ASD affects the ability to communicate and interact with others. ASD is defined by a certain set of behaviors. It is a “spectrum condition” that affects people in different ways.

No one knows one single cause of autism. But knowing more about ASD yourself, getting an early diagnosis, and getting the right services will help your child improve as much as is possible for them.

Some behaviors associated with ASD include challenges with: 1) learning to speak, 2) making eye contact, 3) having conversations, 4) thinking things through, 5) narrow and intense interests, 6) motor skills, 7) regulating emotions, and 8) reacting to touch, sounds, sights, smells or tastes. Someone with ASD may have just a few of these behaviors or many.

Source: <http://www.autism-society.org/what-is/>

I think my child may be on the autism spectrum. What can I do?

First, contact your child’s doctor. Tell them what worries you about your child’s behavior. Ask them to do an autism screen. A screen is quick test that can be done in your doctor’s office. It will help them decide whether to do more testing to learn more about your child’s behavior.

Maybe your child already received a screen or other kind of test from a different provider (like a therapist, early intervention provider, or school psychologist). If so, show those screen or test results to the doctor. If you sign a written permission, your provider can also send the results directly to the doctor.

Next, ask the doctor if your child should get an autism evaluation from a specialist. If yes, ask for a referral. To qualify for some autism services in Washington State, your child’s evaluation must be performed by one of these specialists: 1) [Developmental Pediatrician](#), 2) [Pediatric Neurologist](#), 3) [Child Psychiatrist](#), or 4) [Child Psychologist](#). Certain services require that the evaluation and diagnosis be made at a state-certified Autism Center of Excellence (see [ABA handout](#)).

Your doctor can request an evaluation from our local Autism Center of Excellence by using the [SEAS Fax Referral Form](#) and checking the box for evaluations for developmental and behavioral concerns.

A complete list of Autism Centers of Excellence can be found here:
<http://www.hca.wa.gov/free-or-low-cost-health-care/apple-health-medicaid-coverage/autism-and-applied-behavioral-analysis>

There can be a *long* wait list before your child gets an autism evaluation. Meanwhile, you can still get help for your child while you are waiting. Contact some of the therapies and support services (see list below) right now even before you get a diagnosis. Many therapists have their own waitlists, so get on those right now. Important: Get a copy of every document and keep in your records. Never give away the last copy!

What else can I do to help my child?

1. Get your child the particular kind of treatment they need (see “[Specialty Therapies and Treatments](#)” handout)

*Get on the wait lists! When? Right now!
If you don't, it will take even longer for your child to be seen!*

2. (Under age 3:) Enroll your child in [Early Support for Infants and Toddlers \(ESIT\)](#)

This program has no wait list. ESIT helps you get Family Resource Coordination and access to therapies such as Speech and Occupational Therapy (if your child qualifies). Contact [Single Entry Access to Services \(SEAS\)](#) at (360)715-7485 for an evaluation to see if your child qualifies.

3. (Age 3 or older:) Get your child enrolled in school district services

Contact your school district. Ask them to give your child an evaluation for special services. If your child qualifies, they may be able to receive:

- Developmental preschool
- An [Individualized Education Plan \(IEP\)](#)
- Therapies such as [Speech](#) and [Occupational Therapy](#) (see “[School Services](#)” handout)

4. Enroll your child with the [Developmental Disabilities Administration \(DDA\)](#)

Your young child may qualify for DDA services even *before* being diagnosed with autism. DDA can provide lifelong support for children who qualify for their services. DDA can help pay some costs of caring for a child with autism, such as therapy and care providers. For more information, see our handouts on DDA Services and DDA Eligibility.

5. Educate yourself

Our community has many ways to get free training on autism related issues including:

- ✓ Attend workshops at The [Arc of Whatcom County](#) and subscribe to their newsletter
- ✓ Watching the “Autism 200” series offered by [Seattle Children’s Autism Center](#)
- ✓ Check out the free lending library from the [Northwest Educational Service District](#)
- ✓ Download a 100-day toolkit for families with a newly-diagnosed child from [Autism Speaks](#)

6. Find support

Caring for a child with autism can be a challenge. There is a lot to learn! Connect with other families and providers to get valuable support from them:

- ✓ [Parent to Parent](#) support groups, newsletter, Helping Parent matches, and fun family events
- ✓ Autism Caregiver Support Group and the Parent Coalition at The [Arc of Whatcom County](#)
- ✓ [Washington Autism Alliance and Advocacy \(WAAA\)](#)
- ✓ [Single Entry Access to Services \(SEAS\)](#)
- ✓ [National Association of Mental Illness](#) or [NAMI-Whatcom](#). Family trainings and support groups
- ✓ Online support groups and local websites – see our [social media resources handout](#)

I need a break! Where can I get some help?

- ✓ [Parent to Parent](#) has a list of Super Sitters that have extra training.
- ✓ [DDA](#) can provide Personal Care and Respite services for eligible clients (see *handout*).
- ✓ [FACES Northwest](#) has a summer camp for children with autism.
- ✓ Other camps, classes, and after-school programs may be a good fit for your child. Keep up to date with offerings from [Bellingham Parks and Recreation](#) and other groups.
- ✓ Check out [Whatcom Taking Action’s “Respite Handout”](#) for more ideas