



# Early Learning Digest

Research-based information provided through a partnership between the Minnesota Department of Education and the Working Family Resource Center

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## What are Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities that affect the way a child communicates, interacts with other people and perceives and reacts to the world. These disorders are caused by a problem in the brain that begins early in a child's life.

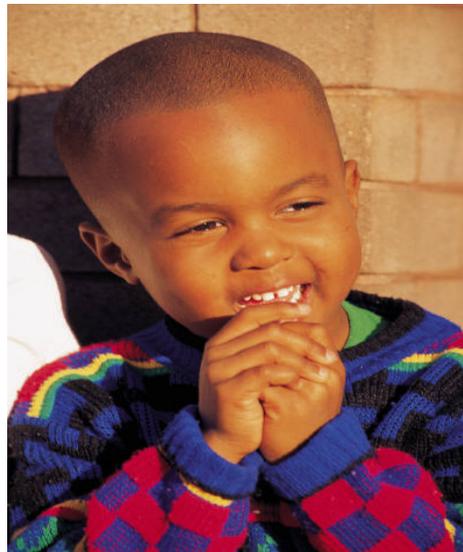
Autism is not a mental illness or something caused by bad parenting. Evidence indicates that there are genetic factors involved and biological differences in the brains of children with autism. Children with ASDs usually don't look different from their peers, but parents often notice delays or differences in development when their child is 15 to 18 months old. Many sources have lists of "red flags" that parents can check if they have concerns.

Patterns of behavior characteristic of ASD include problems with social interactions, difficulty communicating with others and a narrow range of interests or repetitive behaviors. Not all children with autism behave in the same way. This is what is meant by the "spectrum of autism." On one end of a continuum, children with autism spectrum disorders may be non-verbal and do not interact with other children or adults, as in the case of "classic" autism. On the other end

of the spectrum are children with a high-functioning form of autism called Asperger's Syndrome.

The good news is that acting early can make a difference, so it's important for parents to recognize the red flags early in a child's development. The most common treatment for ASDs is intensive structured teaching of skills, called behavioral intervention. Research shows that children who receive early help have better outcomes. It is difficult for parents to think something may be wrong, but children will benefit from early identification by a developmental expert.

Sources: [http://parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/age3\\_5/topicsAZ/PKDEV\\_000385](http://parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/age3_5/topicsAZ/PKDEV_000385) and [www.cdc.gov/actearly](http://www.cdc.gov/actearly)



Trusted parenting information, resources and activities to help your children grow, develop and learn from birth through high school at [www.MNParentsKnow.info](http://www.MNParentsKnow.info).

## Fussiness

Fussiness in a baby is something that parents may face any number of times each and every day. This frequency, however, does not reduce the stress produced each time a parent hears his or her baby cry. Babies fuss for any number of reasons. Babies can get too hot, chilly, itchy, over-stimulated and grumpy. Babies also come with their own temperament and a predisposition for just how it is that they like what they like.

In the early months of life, babies are completely dependent on adults to figure out what they need and when they need it. Babies use cues to let their parents know what they need. Learning to read the cues can help you figure out which cries are "I'm hungry," "I'm wet," or "I need to be held." Your baby's sense of well-being and comfort will feed your "knowing" what it is that your baby needs.

Babies fuss to let you know they need you. They need you to interpret how they cry and coo, move and reach out, and satisfy their most basic needs. All the while each baby and parent is learning the steps that make up a secure attachment and intimacy.

Your baby learns from you. By watching and responding to your baby's cues, you will not spoil your baby. Instead, you are learning your baby's signals and providing the comfort and secure attachment your baby needs.

Source: [http://www.parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/Newborn/toicsAZ/PKDEV\\_001240](http://www.parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/Newborn/toicsAZ/PKDEV_001240)

## Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)

Parents of preschoolers have opportunities every day to support their children's growth and learning. The Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program in Minnesota gives parents added tools to take advantage of those opportunities. Parents learn about their preschooler's needs, how a child's brain develops, and how to help them get ready for kindergarten. ECFE also helps parents and children connect with other families in the community for friendship and support.

ECFE is available to all Minnesota expectant parents, new parents and relatives of children from birth to kindergarten enrollment. Find the program in any neighborhood by contacting the school district's Community Education department.

ECFE programs include three main components:

- parent/child time with activities, songs, and stories
- parent-only discussion groups held at the same time as



- child-only time, which gives children experience socializing with other children and adults. Additional services may include special family events, home visiting and connections to other community resources.

Parents report many benefits from participating in ECFE programs, including a greater sense of control over one's life, higher self-esteem, better problem solving, increased knowledge of child development, recognition of a parent's role as the child's teacher, better techniques to manage children's behavior, and less use of restrictive behavior and severe punishment.

Source: [http://www.parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/age3\\_5/topicsAZ/PKDEV\\_000398](http://www.parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/age3_5/topicsAZ/PKDEV_000398).

Tufts University

## Child&FamilyWebGuide

Experts from Tufts University have systematically evaluated websites to ensure that the child development and health research presented is of the highest quality and is parent friendly. You can quickly access information on these sites through the Google Custom Search at [http://education.state.mn.us/ParentsKnow/acrossTheNet.jsf?ageGroup=age1\\_2](http://education.state.mn.us/ParentsKnow/acrossTheNet.jsf?ageGroup=age1_2).

## Test Your Knowledge of Autism Spectrum Disorders

- T F Children with autism often have trouble adapting when a routine changes.
- T F Asperger's Syndrome can only be diagnosed when a child reaches school-age.
- T F A child who is not talking at 16 months should be checked by a developmental expert.
- T F A child diagnosed with autism will probably not be able to live independently as an adult.

Answers: 1) T, 2) F, 3) T, 4) F



If you have concerns about your child's growth and development, please talk to your child's health care provider or call 1-866-693-GROW (4769), to talk to a professional and find out how you can get connected with various resources in Minnesota.



Working Family Resource Center delivers high quality family and wellness education to employees where they work, in order to strengthen individuals, families and communities. Visit us on the web at [www.workingfam.org](http://www.workingfam.org).



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