

How to Seek an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Diagnosis

Understanding and managing the diagnosis process for Autism Spectrum Disorder can be challenging. This fact sheet covers basic information to help families get started.

Autism General Terms

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave. It typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person's social skills, communication, relationships, and self-regulation. The Autism experience is different for everyone. It is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is often referred to as a "spectrum" that affects people differently and to varying degrees.

If you think your child needs tested

If you have a concern about how your child is speaking, learning, playing, acting, moving, or with overall general development, talk to your child's healthcare provider. You know your child best; your concerns are important.

Developmental Screening

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends all children be screened for ASD. Children who display some early signs of ASD may be referred for further evaluation to figure out if a medical diagnosis is appropriate, and early intervention therapy. Screening and diagnosing are not the same thing. A screening for autism does not diagnosis a child with autism, rather it may indicate further evaluation is encouraged. At the time of a screening, parents should be sure to ask their provider any questions.

Medical Diagnosis

A medical diagnosis for ASD is made by a psychologist, developmental pediatrician, or other specialized medical professional. It can be a lengthy process, that is why if there is a concern, it is a good idea to act early. The process for medical diagnosis usually involves a few visits allowing providers to gather information, obtain medical history, and observe the child's behavior and interactions. Families should receive a copy of all findings and should request that a copy be sent to their child's primary care provider. If ASD is not diagnosed, families should still receive information on early intervention or other support services to help their child. A medical diagnosis for ASD allows families to apply for services covered by insurance or Medicaid. A medical diagnosis does not qualify an individual for support within the school setting.

Families should check with their insurance provider about specific coverage for ASD medical diagnosis testing. There are other options to help pay for testing if not covered by insurance, including applying for Children's Special Health Care Services. See [INF2F's Fact Sheet](#): "Children's Special Health Care (CSHCS)" for more information.

Educational Determination

An educational determination is an evaluation made by an evaluation team of school professionals. The results are reviewed by a team of professionals and the child's parents to determine if a student qualifies for special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

An educational determination can qualify an individual for support within a school setting, however this is not the same as a medical diagnosis. An educational determination will often not qualify an individual for services outside of the school that would typically be covered by insurance or Medicaid. Many families seeking both educational and medical services for their child will need both an educational and medical evaluation and diagnosis. This allows for a large range of support services for their child to be supported both in school and in the community.

What to do after receiving a diagnosis?

If a medical diagnosis is made, it is a good idea for the family to request copies of records, as well as keeping the name of the person who made the diagnosis, and the date of the diagnosis safe in a [care notebook](#). This information may be requested in the future as families seek out support and programs for their child. (See [INF2F's Fact Sheet](#): "Communicating with Providers" for more information) A medical diagnosis of autism can help qualify an individual for community and educational services.

- Typically, toddlers and preschool aged children will be eligible for early intervention/preschool services, direct therapy, and behavioral support based on the child's needs and the family's preferences.
- School-age children may qualify for community support resources, however, may also need an educational determination of autism to receive school-based services.
- Adolescents and adults who are diagnosed with autism may find support based on individual needs such as support with communication, mental health, and vocational needs.

Navigating educational and medical diagnoses can be a challenging time for both the individual and the family. Indiana Family to Family can help individuals and caregivers navigate through this time.

Resources to learn more

- Indiana Family to Family- <https://www.inf2f.org/>
- Indiana Resource Center for Autism- <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/index.html>
- Healthy Children from the American Academy of Pediatrics – Autism- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/Autism/Pages/default.aspx>

Programs and systems change often. It is important to ensure that you are using the most current information. This fact sheet was updated October 2024. Please check <https://www.inf2f.org/fact-sheets.html> for the most recent edition.

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