

# Look early for warning signs of autism disorders

**We know several families with children who have autism, Asperger syndrome, or a similar disorder. How common is this? Are there early signs to watch for?**

Autism and other disorders on the autism spectrum are more common than many people think. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that one in 150 children are diagnosed with autism or another disorder on the autism spectrum by the time a child is 8 years old. Boys are diagnosed more often than girls, but both are affected.

Autism spectrum disorders vary widely. Essentially they are developmental disabilities that affect social interaction and communication, also characterized by unusual behaviors and interests. According to the Autism Society of America, it is possible for children with the exact same diagnosis to act completely different from one another and exhibit varying capabilities.

Early warning signs may be subtle, but they're important to recognize. The earlier a child is diagnosed, the better chance an appropriate treatment can be prescribed. According to the organization, First Signs, Inc. (<http://www.firstsigns.org>), parents often begin noticing red flags when their child is about 15 to 18 months old.

Warning signs of autism have been detailed by The CDC on its Web site, <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/>. Children with an autism spectrum disorder might:

- Not play "pretend" games (pretend to



"feed" a doll).

- Not point at objects to show interest (point at an airplane flying over).
- Not look at objects when another person points at them.
- Have trouble relating to others or not have an interest in other people at all.
- Avoid eye contact and want to be alone.
- Have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings.
- Prefer not to be held or cuddled or might cuddle only when they want to.
- Appear to be unaware when other people talk to them but respond to other sounds.
- Be very interested in people, but not know how to talk to, play with, or relate to them.
- Repeat or echo words or phrases said to them, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language (echolalia).
- Have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions.
- Repeat actions over and over again.
- Have trouble adapting to changes in routine.
- Have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound.
- Lose skills they once had (for instance, stop saying words they were once using).

Parents who notice any of these behaviors should consult with their child's pediatrician.

*Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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**For the month of  
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By Martha Filipic  
(614) 292-9833  
[filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu)

**Dear Subscriber:** This column was reviewed by Pam Leong, family and consumer sciences educator for Ohio State University Extension in Shelby County.

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**Section of Communications  
and Technology  
News and Media Relations**  
2021 Coffey Road  
Columbus, OH 43210-1044  
(614) 292-2011

208 Research Services  
Building  
1680 Madison Ave.  
Wooster, OH 44691-4096  
(330) 263-3780

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