

Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

How is ASD diagnosed?



Diagnosing a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is complex. One of the problems is that we cannot tell, just by looking, if a child has autism. The characteristics of ASD can change over time as your child develops. Best practices for determining whether a child has autism include observing the child, talking to the parents, and using assessment tools to measure development and behaviour.

The characteristics of ASD in children are clearest in their communication and social behaviour. Other characteristics, such as limited interests, ways of playing, and repetitive behaviours, may appear over time.

These are some of the other characteristics of ASD your child may have:

- shows little response when you call her name, especially if she is in preschool
- may not respond when other people try to talk or play with her

- shows little interest in getting attention from others
- does not point with her index finger to show what she is interested in
- shows a lack of interest in toys or plays with toys in an unusual way
- may seem moody or irritable or very passive, and she may suddenly change from being very passive to very irritable in a short period of time
- may have difficulty using eye gaze appropriately in social situations

Remember, your child may have some or many of these characteristics. Children with ASD vary greatly in the number and severity of the characteristics of autism they may have.

There are no laboratory tests for diagnosing ASD. Since the characteristics of ASD can be so varied, making a diagnosis may be difficult for a doctor who does not have experience working with children with ASD. The doctor needs to be able to tell the difference between ASD and other conditions. So it is best if the doctor, along with a team of specially trained health care workers, make a diagnosis for your child.

This team may be made up of some of these health care professionals:

- developmental paediatrician
- psychologist
- psychiatrist
- speech-language pathologist
- neurologist
- social worker

- special education teacher
- occupational therapist
- others who know about ASD

You can help the team members better understand your child by providing them with a detailed history of your child's development including samples of photos and videos.

Many of the behaviours seen in children with ASD can be similar to behaviours seen in children with other conditions. Therefore medical tests may be ordered to make sure there are no other reasons for your child's difficulties.

