



I suspect my child has autism/asperger's, what should I do?

There is a lot of focus on autism in the news these days and new awareness about autism is leading to more and more children and adults obtaining an autism diagnosis. While there is a growing awareness about autism, many family doctors are still unaware of the early signs of autism. Parents can get frustrated when doctors say things like, "just wait and see" or "he will likely grow out of _____" when parents *know* there is something else going on. Fortunately, there are kits available to family doctor's now to explain autism and how to determine if a referral for further testing is warranted. In Canada, you can order a Physician's Toolkit from the Miriam Foundation at (514) 345-1300 or email bestpractices@miriamfoundation.ca. They are also available at the Provincial Autism Centre.

The first clue for many parents that their child has autism is that their child doesn't start talking. There are other factors in communication that will be considered other than verbal communication. Does the child look at mom when he discovers something new, is he babbling, taking turns when playing, point at things that are interesting to him? These are all aspects of communication that will also be considered in assessing a child. If verbal communication is the only concern then other things may be considered by a doctor, like hearing testing.

A tool that is widely used to determine if further testing for autism is warranted is the M-CHAT (The Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers) This is not a diagnostic tool but just a simple checklist and many children who fail this test will still not be diagnosed with autism. The M-Chat is a copyrighted tool that can be found online at www.firstsigns.org

Another tool to see early signs of autism is the ASD Video Glossary, a project by Autism Speaks that has several videos online that show various children displaying both typical signs of development and signs of autism. You have to create an account to access the video glossary. <http://www.autismspeaks.org/video/glossary.php>

If you suspect your child has an Autism Spectrum Disorder you can get a referral from your family doctor for screening at the developmental clinic for your local health district. In Halifax, this testing is done through the IWK. Some families may have difficulty obtaining a referral if their doctor doesn't understand autism or think that testing is warranted. In Halifax, families can self-refer to the IWK Health Centre. Contact the clinic at 902-470-8483 or 902-470-8951 for more information.

See other side for more information



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The length of time spent on a waiting list for obtaining a diagnosis through the IWK will vary but are generally only a few months. Some may consider obtaining a private diagnosis. This can cost around \$700.00 and is not covered by many private insurance companies. One has to be cautious that the psychologist providing the diagnosis isn't also marketing their own intervention approaches after the diagnosis is provided. To find a psychologist in your area visit the website: www.apns.ca and search for autism.

There are two tools commonly used to diagnose autism, the ADI-R and the ADOS. The ADI-R (Autism Diagnostic Interview- Revised) is an interview conducted with the child's parents and the ADOS (Autism Diagnostic Observational Scale) is a standardized protocol for assessing social and communication behavior in children. Examiners observe the children performing various tasks that are compared to the typical development of children. A revised scale, the ADOS-2, is scheduled to be released in 2010.

It is important to remember that there are many many different types of challenges in childhood and many different developmental and neurological challenges that individuals can encounter- autism is just one. Parents should be cautious to not over educate themselves about autism before going for their child's diagnostic meeting; learning too much about autism beforehand will make it difficult for you to remain neutral and open-minded during the testing.