



What is Autism?

- 3rd most common developmental disability in the U.S.
- Affects communication, social interaction, play skills, and behavior
- Affects 1 in 150 nationwide
- Is a spectrum disorder - Individuals have a varied issues and require differing levels of assistance
- Affects the brain's functioning, the exact cause is unknown

Warning Signs for Autism: If you notice these signs, seek professional assessment.

- Children may not play with others or with toys in a typical manner, rather they may prefer to play alone or play with toys the same way all the time
- Verbal and nonverbal communication skills may be delayed in development, such as, eye contact and gestures to communicate needs, waving good-bye or pointing at a desired object.
- Children may have an extreme resistance to change of any kind, preferring to maintain a routine environment and rigid schedule.
- Children may have unpredictable behavior and hyperactivity (ie. staring at hands or flapping arms and hands, walking on tiptoe, rocking, tantrums, unusual postures)
- Children may have poor judgment and may be at risk for endangerment, such as running out into a busy park lot.

For a free assessment: For 0-2 yrs old, contact Help Me Grow 216-736-4300. For 3 and above, contact local school district.

How to Speak to a Person with Autism

- Make sure you have the person's attention (body language or fleeting eye contact)
- Make comments or directions clear and short. Write out directions for a reader or draw pictures for a non-reader.
- Give the person choices in the conversation (ex. "Would you like a sandwich or pizza?")
- Have the person repeat important information to confirm understanding (ex. Ask them "where are we going?" after you've shared that information)
- Use pictures or drawings to help them communicate (ex. pictures of food or activity choices)

Elements of a Behavioral Treatment Program

- Break down difficult tasks into teachable steps
- Provide clear instructions to the child
- Physically or verbally prompt or show child the way to perform specific behaviors
- Immediately give praise and rewards for doing those appropriate behaviors
- Shape a response by rewarding positive behaviors and slowly increasing the standard that you expect
- Teach when and when not to perform the learned behaviors
- Practice positive behaviors in various settings and with a variety of individuals

How to Adapt an Environment for Success

- Reduce distractions (less lighting, noise, uncluttered area...)
- Determine in advance what the child will earn as a reward for good behavior
- Provide a schedule for each activity with a clear beginning and end
- Teach how to request breaks and give them when requested
- Use pictures or written cards such as "quiet", "I need a break", or "I need help"
- Use timers to provide limits and closure

How to Address Inappropriate Behavior

- Prioritize and deal with behaviors that interfere most with child's learning
- Find socially acceptable replacements, such as clapping hands instead of flapping, saying "this is fun" instead of squealing
- Redirect child when they are doing inappropriate behavior - immediately reward positive behavior
- Be proactive...think before your child reacts, make a plan to catch the behavior before it gets out of hand
- Ignore attention seeking behavior- immediately reward positive behavior with attention
- Go back to something easier when your child becomes frustrated
- Give breaks to children trying to escape work . . . but try to have them come back and finish the task (even if it is for one more little bit)
- If your child is hurting themselves or others, seek a behavioral psychologist to help create a behavior plan.