



Every Parents' Fear – Is It Autism?

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When your child isn't meeting his or her developmental milestones on time, it is natural to wonder if it could be autism.

Autism and problems with speech, language, communication, and social skills are interrelated; however, speech delays do not always indicate autism. Some children are simply "late talkers." Other speech deficits are related to medical conditions such as hearing loss, frequent ear infections, intellectual disorders, ADHD, brain injury, genetic syndromes, and a variety of other expressive (verbalizing) or receptive (comprehending) language disorders.

An important difference between speech deficits and autism is the presence of other autism symptoms. These include, but are not limited to:

- Echolalia or repeating words out of context
- Limited to no verbal speech
- Preference to play alone and decreased interest in making friends
- Does not like to be cuddled or may get upset with touch
- Needs strict routine and gets upset with change
- Repetitive and obsessive behaviors such as rocking, hand flapping, or licking objects
- No pretend play
- Difficulty understanding feelings
- May have sensory issues related to certain sounds, sights, sensations, or tastes (and refuse many foods)
- Talks with a different tone or with no expression in their voice
- Unusual play such as fixating on certain items or parts of a toy, spinning objects, or lining up objects for hours at a time.

Autism can range from mild to severe. No two children are the same or have the same symptoms. They should not be treated the same.

If you are concerned about your child's speech and language or are worried about autism- talk to your child's doctor. They can screen for these delays and/or refer you to other professionals. If the child is under 3 years of age, early intervention specialists may come out to your home and work with your child. If the child is 3 years of age or older they can be evaluated at your local school district. The Speech Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, PT, Teachers, Social Worker, and others will work with you to set up a plan of treatment specific to your child. Sometimes parents seek additional services for therapy at a specialized autism centers or at clinics or hospitals.

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