

# Pointers For Parents

## Could Your Child Have Autism?

(NAPSA)—Once considered a rare disorder, autism is now diagnosed in one in every 150 children, with boys nearly four times more likely than girls to receive a diagnosis. For parents who believe their child may have autism, it is important to ask questions, get answers and seek appropriate treatment.

### What Is Autism?

Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and affects a person's ability to communicate and interact with others. Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum disorder," which means that it manifests itself differently for every individual, varying in the severity and type of symptoms.

While there are strong and consistent commonalities, there is no single behavior that is always typical of autism and no behavior that would automatically exclude an individual from receiving a diagnosis.

A basic rule for treating autism is the earlier the intervention, the better. Getting the right help at the earliest stage of life can help a child gain the skills he or she needs to be successful. If you're worried your child may have autism—or feel something just isn't quite right—you should:

1. First and foremost, follow your instincts. Don't assume that your child will catch up.

2. Share your concerns with your pediatrician. Consider seeing a doctor who is familiar with autism. The American Academy of Pediatrics offers an online pediatrician referral service, searchable by specialty and location.

3. Utilize early intervention services available in every state. The government provides free services for children with disabilities. Con-



**Early intervention, diagnosis and treatment are crucial for children with autism.**

sult the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities at [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org) and your local early intervention lead agency at [www.nectac.org/search/mapfinder.asp](http://www.nectac.org/search/mapfinder.asp). The lead agency is required to provide a timely evaluation, typically within 45 days of being contacted. If your child is experiencing significant developmental delays in one or more of the following areas, you're eligible for free early intervention services: cognitive, physical, communication, social, emotional or adaptive skills.

4. Get a diagnosis. Autism can be diagnosed as early as 18 months old. Many children are diagnosed before age 5, although many children get misdiagnosed or not diagnosed until later in life.

5. Seek help from community service and treatment providers like Easter Seals. Start by visiting [autism.easterseals.com](http://autism.easterseals.com).

To learn more about autism, find services at an Easter Seals near you or help Easter Seals change the lives of people living with autism by becoming a donor or volunteer, visit [autism.easterseals.com](http://autism.easterseals.com).