



# Newsletter

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## Could It Be Autism?

The word autism when mentioned in connection with your child can send an emotional torrent through the most steadfast parent. In the past few years the word has taken on new meanings and has been brought forth into the public interest with the recognition of an increasing rate of both identification and prevalence of autism and autism spectrum disorders. As rate of identification rises, services for those diagnosed with autism should rise correspondingly.

Who can make that diagnosis? According to the National Academy of Sciences, "the diagnosis of autism can be made reliably in two-year-olds by professionals experienced in the diagnostic assessment of young children". Early diagnosis is crucial because the earlier treatment starts, the better.

What exactly does autism mean? In the diagnostic manual used to classify disabilities, the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), "autistic disorder" is listed as a category under the heading of "Pervasive Developmental Disorders" Autism and PDD-NOS are neurological disorders that affect a child's ability to communicate, understand language, play, and relate to others and

adversely affects a child's educational performance. Characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences."

A diagnosis of autistic disorder is made when an individual displays six or more symptoms listed across three major areas: social interaction, communication, and behavior. When children display similar behaviors but do not meet the criteria for autistic disorder, they may receive a diagnosis of PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder-not otherwise specified). Currently, researchers are investigating areas such as neurological damage and biochemical imbalance in the brain. Emotional neglect or psychological factors do not cause these disorders.

What specialists are involved with treatment for this disorder? Speech - language/learning Pathologists, Occupational therapists, and physicians create the ideal team to support the child with autism.

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