



Understanding Autism: an overview

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex disorder associated with social, communication, and behavioral challenges. ASD is typically diagnosed in childhood, and children can show a wide range of symptoms.

Some common early signs of ASD include:

- Lack of eye contact
- Lack of pointing or following the direction of your gestures
- Lack of warm, joyful expressions
- Repetitive and unusual play skills
- Inflexibility around routines and rigid or restricted interests
- Repeating or echoing words or phrases

Basic Rights

- Children **under the age of 3** are eligible for two sets of related services through the Department of Public Health:
 - Early Intervention (EI) Services: family-centered program that includes therapies and services provided at home or at your childcare facility
 - Specialty Services: specialized services for children with an ASD diagnosis that are additional to the EI plan; up to 25 hours a week. Can include ABA or Floortime therapies.
- Children **over age 3** receive services outlined in an *Individualized Education Plan (IEP)* developed by the local school district. **It is important for parents to contact the special education department in their school district to ask for a TEAM evaluation and start the process.**

<http://www.fcsn.org/parentguide/pguide1.html>

Educational Supports

- **Applied behavioral analysis (ABA)**: a behavioral therapy centered around gaining the child's attention to work through new tasks and master skills
- **Speech and language therapy (SLP)**: emphasis on language development and strengthening a child's communication skills
- **Occupational therapy (OT)**: focuses on the child's fine motor (hand and finger), and gross motor skills, as well as sensory needs and daily living skills.
- **Social Skills Supports**: emphasis on promoting social awareness and social communication through various groups and activities.
- **Positive Behavioral Supports**: focuses on addressing and minimizing challenging behaviors, while rewarding and reinforcing positive behaviors, and task completion

Take-Home Messages

- **Every child is unique**—how they respond to therapies and services may vary and it can be helpful to keep your options open and to be receptive to new strategies.
- Therapy is most effective when it is provided **early and consistently**. You have a VOICE and it is your RIGHT to act as an advocate for your child to assure they receive the services they need and are entitled to.
- There is no specified cause of ASD, nor is there a "cure" at this point - It is important to embrace your child's individual needs and **celebrate each accomplishment and milestone**.





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ASD Support Centers

Autism Alliance of Metrowest

In Natick, Serves Metrowest and Middlesex West.
508-652-9900
www.autismalliance.org

Autism Resource Center

In West Boylston, Serves Worcester, North Central & South Valley areas
508-835-4278
www.autismresourcescentral.org/index.html

Autism Support Center

In Danvers, Serves Northeast region
978-777-9135
www.ne-arcautismsupportcenter.org

Family Autism Center

In Westwood, Serves Norfolk County
781-762-4001, ext. 310
www.arcsouthnorfolk.org/family-autism-center.html

Community Autism Resources

In Swansea, Serves Southeastern region, Cape Cod & Islands
508-379-0371
community-autism-resources.com

Community Resources for People with Autism

In Easthampton, Serves Western region
413-529-2428
communityresourcesforautism.org

TILL & Boston Families for Autism

In Dedham, Serves Greater Boston
781-302-4835
www.tillinc.org/autism_training.html

Helpful Resources

The Autism Consortium

www.autismconsortium.org
Extensive online resource database; information on scientific studies and participation in ongoing research.

Autism Speaks

www.autismspeaks.org
Includes 100 Day Toolkit, parent support information and tool kits for managing specific behavioral challenges.

Federation for Children with Special Needs

www.fcsn.org
A family-focused advocacy network with opportunities to attend educational planning workshops.

SPED Child Mass

www.spedchildmass.com
Lists family friendly events and activities occurring in the Boston area.

Our comprehensive resource library which includes visuals, social stories, safety resources, insurance information, and much more, can be accessed at:

www.bmcautismprogram.org/resource-library/

Next Steps:

For more information visit:
www.bmc.org/pediatrics-autism-program

Autism Program Line:
1-617-414-3842

