

Iowa Regional Autism Assistance Program (RAP)

Learning About Autism Spectrum Disorder in Children

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a condition that affects how people talk, act, and learn. People with ASD may think and solve problems in different ways. Their abilities can range from gifted to severely challenged. People with ASD may need a lot of help or just a little.

Signs of ASD often show up when children are very young and are lifelong. Not everyone with these behaviors and actions has ASD, so it is important to talk to a health care provider. People with ASD have signs in 2 main areas:

1. Challenges with social communication and interaction skills
and
2. Restricted and repetitive behaviors

What are some communication issues in ASD?

- Delayed speech and language skills
- Repeating words or phrases
- Reversing pronouns (says "you" instead of "I")
- Not able to say what they want
- Does not point or wave goodbye
- Talking too loudly, too soft, or with a flat voice
- Does not like to pretend or imitate during play (like pretending to "feed" a doll)
- Not understanding jokes, sarcasm, or teasing

What are some social issues in ASD?

- Not responding to their name by 9 months of age
- Avoiding or not keeping eye contact
- Wanting to play alone
- Not sharing interests with others
- Does not show facial expressions
- Not understanding boundaries and personal space
- Does not like being touched
- Is not comforted by others when upset
- Has trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings

What are common differences in interests and behaviors in ASD?

- Lining up toys or other objects or putting them in a certain order
- Playing with toys in the same way each time
- Liking parts of objects, like wheels of cars
- Getting upset by small changes
- Having obsessive interests
- Needing to follow certain routines
- Flapping hands, rocking body, or spinning in circles

What are other signs should I know?

- Hyperactivity (very active)
- Impulsivity (acting without thinking)
- Short attention span
- Unusual eating and sleeping habits
- Unusual mood or emotional reactions
- Lack of fear or more fear than expected
- Excessive worry or stress
- Unusual reaction to the way things sound, smell, taste, look, or feel

What can I do if I think my child has ASD?

- Talk to your child's doctor or nurse.
- If your child is younger than 3 years old:
 - Call Early ACCESS at 888-425-4371. For more information about Early ACCESS visit: educateiowa.gov/pk-12/early-childhood/early-access.
- If your child is 3 years or older:
 - Call your local school or Area Education Agency (AEA). To find your AEA, visit: iowaaea.org.
- Contact the Iowa Regional Autism Assistance Program.
 - Address: 100 Hawkins Drive, Iowa City, IA 52242
 - Phone: 866-219-9119
 - Email: Iowa-RAP@uiowa.edu

How is ASD treated in children?

Speech language therapy

- Teaches children how to talk with and understand others.

Occupational therapy

- Teaches children how to use their muscles to move and do tasks.
- Helps children become more independent and learn self-care skills.

Physical therapy

- Helps with movement like sitting, walking, running, and jumping.
- Improves coordination, muscle tones, and balance for better movement.

Applied behavior analysis (ABA)

- Teaches skills in communication, building relationships, daily living, learning, emotional regulation, play and leisure, and behavior management based on the child's needs.
- Breaks down skills into small steps.
- Reinforces positive behaviors to encourage learning and skill development.
- Helps families integrate and teach goals within the child's daily life and routines.

Behavioral health services

- Given by social workers, psychologists, and mental health counselors.
- Helps children with conditions like attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), disruptive behavioral disorders, depression, or anxiety.
- Can help the child or the whole family learn and strengthen skills to address problem behaviors.

Iowa RAP contact information:**Phone:** 866-219-9119**Email:** Iowa-RAP@uiowa.edu**Website:** uihc.org/childrens/regional-autism-assistance-program