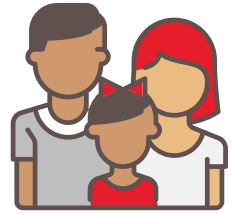


# Autism



## What is autism ?

Autism is a name for a brain-based pattern of differences in how a person experiences and interacts with their environment. Autistic people have differences in how they socialize and communicate ("social and communication differences") AND in the way they react to changes and deal with sensory experiences like loud noises and bright lights ("restricted and repetitive behaviors and interests").

Like all people, autistic people are individuals.

- Some autistic people are happy to spend more time alone, and some people are very sociable and outgoing.
- Some speak to communicate, and some use signs, or a device, or behavior to communicate.
- Some autistic people have passionate interests that become their life's work.
- Some move differently and find joy or relaxation in movements like flapping their hands or walking on their tiptoes.
- All autistic people experience the full range of emotions, but they may have a unique way of showing how they are feeling.

There is not just one way to be autistic, just like there is not just one way to be human.



## What does treatment look like?



An autism diagnosis means that a professional thinks that certain therapies, teaching strategies, and parenting techniques may help your child reach their full potential.



While there is no medication to target the core traits of autism, there are many kinds of autism **therapy** that can help autistic children learn new skills that will help them navigate the world and reach their goals. Some therapies are based on high quality scientific data, so they are more likely to help children learn.



Visit the website for the [Children's National Hospital Center for Autism](#) to learn more about different types of therapy and things to consider when choosing a therapy for your child.



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## What can I do?

- ✓ **Celebrate your child's neurodiversity** and continually build their self-esteem. Your child is still the same amazing and unique person no matter what labels they are given, and you can help them know that all the time.
- ✓ **Think about "can't" versus "won't":** When an autistic child is acting out or not following directions, think about how the brain-based differences of their autism might be behind their behavior. Often, autistic children have difficult behaviors because they *can't* behave in the way adults are expecting, not because they *won't* (or are refusing to) behave that way.
- ✓ **Use visual supports:** Consider using visual supports, like a visual schedule or social stories, to help your child know what to expect with daily routines or in new situations.
- ✓ **Trust your instincts when choosing therapies.** Parents are the experts on their children. If a parent is concerned that a therapy is not helpful or is harmful for their child, they should talk to their support system including the child's doctors and teachers.
- ✓ **Ask your child's therapist lots of questions.** High quality therapy should have clear, personalized, measurable goals that the family and therapist agree on together. This means that the therapist and family will talk about what the goals are, how to work on goals, and how to measure progress so that everyone can make adjustments as needed.



## How do I get help?

If you need more help, talk to your primary care provider or get support from a mental health provider. To find a mental health provider, call the phone number on the back of your child's insurance card and ask for a list of covered mental health providers in your area. You can also search for providers on your insurance company's website. For support finding resources for housing, food, and more, visit the [Children's National Hospital Community Resources website](#).

- ✓ Scan here for more information about how to find a mental health provider and how to get help in a crisis.



Pediatric **Health** Network

