



Di'Marco's Gifts
Embracing Neurodiversity One Gift At A Time

Early Signs of Autism

Guiding Your Family With Care

A parent guide for noticing concerns, celebrating strengths, and choosing a next step.

A supportive resource for families

Practical information, trusted links, and next steps—without judgment or pressure.

A Caring Starting Point

Every child develops in their own way. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition involving differences in social communication and interaction, along with restricted or repetitive behaviors or interests. Signs vary widely, and one sign—or several—does not diagnose autism. A qualified health professional uses a comprehensive developmental evaluation to make a diagnosis.

If you have noticed a change, a delay, or a pattern that concerns you, your observations matter. You do not need to wait until you have every answer to ask for help.

Possible Signs to Notice

The examples below are conversation starters, not a checklist for diagnosing a child. A child may show some traits without being autistic, and autistic children do not all show the same traits.

Communication and connection

- Limited back-and-forth interaction, such as rarely sharing interests or responding to a name consistently.
- Differences in eye contact, facial expression, gestures, or understanding and using nonverbal communication.
- Speech or language differences, including delayed speech, repeating words or phrases, or difficulty with conversation.

Play, routines, and interests

- Preferring predictable routines or becoming very upset by unexpected changes.
- Repeating movements or actions, such as hand flapping, rocking, lining up objects, or repeating certain play patterns.
- Very focused interests or a strong need to discuss, watch, or play with a particular topic or object.

Sensory and daily-life differences

- Being unusually sensitive to—or actively seeking—sounds, textures, lights, smells, movement, or food textures.
- Differences in sleep, eating, transitions, self-care, or emotional regulation that make everyday routines difficult.

Developmental Regression

Some children lose words, social engagement, play skills, or other abilities they previously used. Loss of skills at any age is a reason to contact a health-care professional promptly.

Signs Can Look Different at Different Ages

Infants and toddlers

Families may notice differences in shared attention, gestures such as pointing or waving, response to name, imitation, communication, play, or sensory responses. Georgia's Babies Can't Wait program is an early-intervention entry point for eligible children from birth until their third birthday.

Preschool-age children

Concerns may become clearer in social play, pretend play, peer interaction, language use, transitions, repetitive behaviors, and sensory experiences. A child may have strong skills in some areas and need more support in others.

School-age children and teens

Some children and teens may find social rules, group work, changing routines, friendships, conversation, organization, sensory environments, or emotional regulation especially challenging. Some may mask or camouflage their difficulties, so concerns can be less obvious. Talk with a pediatrician, primary-care provider, school team, or qualified clinician if you are concerned.

Your Starting Point

- Write down specific concerns, when you notice them, and what helps your child.
- Complete a developmental milestone checklist for your child's age.
- Schedule a visit with your child's pediatrician or primary-care provider and bring your notes.
- Ask about developmental screening and autism-specific screening when appropriate.
- For children ages 3 and older, ask the local public school district in writing for an evaluation if you suspect a disability may affect education.
- Explore supports while you wait for an evaluation; services may be available based on developmental needs.

Screening is not diagnosis

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends autism-specific screening at 18 and 24 months, as well as screening whenever a parent or clinician has concerns. Screening helps identify whether more evaluation may be useful; it does not itself diagnose autism.

Parent Concern Tracker

What I noticed	
When it started or changed	
Where it happens	
Specific examples	
My child's strengths and interests	

Questions for our provider or school team	
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Georgia: Where to Begin

Birth to age 3: Babies Can't Wait

Georgia's Babies Can't Wait (BCW) is the statewide early-intervention program for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities and their families. A referral may be made by phone, email, fax, letter, or in person. Families can call 1-800-GEORGIA or contact their local BCW office.

Birth through age 21: Autism Access & Innovation

Georgia Department of Public Health Autism Access & Innovation (AAI) helps children, youth, and families navigate early identification, screening, diagnosis, intervention, services, and transition planning.

School-age support

Public schools have responsibilities to identify, locate, and evaluate children suspected of having a disability that may require special education. Contact your local school district's special education office in writing to request an evaluation.

A final reminder

Your child is more than a list of traits. Begin with curiosity, document what you see, celebrate strengths, and ask for support when you need it. You are not alone, and you do not have to solve everything today.

Sources and trusted links

CDC, "Signs and Symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorder": <https://www.cdc.gov/autism/signs-symptoms/>

CDC, "Concerned About Your Child's Development?": <https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/families/concerned.html>

CDC, "Screening for Autism Spectrum Disorder": <https://www.cdc.gov/autism/diagnosis/>

Georgia DPH, "Babies Can't Wait": <https://dph.georgia.gov/babies-cant-wait>

Georgia DPH, "Autism Access & Innovation": <https://dph.georgia.gov/child-health/autism-access-innovation>

Educational resource only; not medical, diagnostic, legal, or insurance advice. Verify current program details directly with the listed organizations.