

RECOGNIZING EARLY SIGNS OF AUTISM:

A Parent's Guide

Every child grows in their own way. Here's how to notice developmental differences with care and confidence.



What You Might Notice

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) affects how a child interacts, communicates, and experiences their environment. Some early signs may appear between 18 months and 3 years of age:

Limited or no response to their name	Minimal eye contact or engagement	Delayed speech or gestures
Repetitive movements like hand-flapping or spinning objects	Strong reactions to sounds, lights, or textures	Intense focus on routines or specific objects

These signs alone don't confirm autism. Each child develops at their own pace. It's the combination, frequency, and impact of behaviours that matter most. (Sources: Autism Canada; Government of Canada, 2024)

Typical Differences or Signs to Watch

Might be Typical When...

Consider Screening When...

Your child babbles or uses gestures before age 2	Your child isn't using words by 18–24 months
They make eye contact in familiar settings	Eye contact is rare, even with loved ones
They prefer solo play but respond when approached	They show little interest in others
They repeat actions or phrases for fun	They become distressed if routines change

Observation over time helps reveal patterns.

Developmental screenings offer clarity—*not labels*.

(Sources: Autism Canada; Autism in Mind, 2024)

Why Early Screening Matters

Screening helps families understand how a child perceives and engages with the world.

Early screening doesn't determine a child's future; it provides access to personalized support and guidance. Early intervention can improve communication, emotional regulation, and social skills. (Sources: Government of Canada; Autism in Mind, 2024)

Screening involves:

- 1 Observing communication and social interaction
- 2 Asking caregivers about milestones
- 3 Using validated tools to highlight differences in language or play

What You Can Do

If you're noticing consistent signs that raise concern, here are some steps to take:

- 1 Talk to your family doctor or pediatrician
- 2 Keep brief notes on what you've observed
- 3 Ask about developmental screenings or referrals
- 4 Reach out to autism-specialized centres for support

You don't need to wait for a diagnosis to start seeking insight or connection. (Source: Autism Canada, 2024)

Support in Toronto

Families can access autism and developmental support through public health services, pediatric clinics, and organizations like The Redpath Centre.

At The Redpath Centre, we believe understanding is the first step to support. Our clinicians partner with families to explore each child's strengths, needs, and story through evidence-based, compassionate care.

<https://redpathcentre.ca/>
(416) 920-4999

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only and should not be used as a substitute for a medical evaluation.

