

UNDERSTANDING AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

Autism Spectrum Disorder, or autism, is a disability that is often present early in life and can affect multiple aspects of a child's development. Individuals with autism do not look different, but they may show differences in the ways they behave, communicate and interact with others. *Spectrum* refers to the diverse strengths, challenges and needs of each person. There are many services to support individuals with autism throughout their lives.

Quick facts about autism from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- Approximately 1 in 59 children have autism.
- Autism occurs in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.
- Children who have a sibling with autism are at a higher risk of also having autism.
- There are many possible risk factors for autism, but no single cause. So far genes are the only factor supported by scientific research.

EARLY SIGNS OF AUTISM

There are developmental milestones that most children reach by certain ages. For example, babies usually take their first steps by 18 months of age. Each child develops at their own pace, but sometimes delayed milestones can be an early sign of autism.

According to the CDC, a child with autism may:

- ▶ Not respond to their name by 12 months of age
- ▶ Stop using skills they have already developed
- ▶ Not point at objects to show interest (like pointing at an airplane in the sky) by 14 months
- ▶ Have delayed speech and language skills
- ▶ Repeat words or phrases over and over (echolalia)
- ▶ Give unrelated answers to questions
- ▶ Get upset by minor changes
- ▶ Not play "pretend" games (like pretending to feed a doll) by 18 months
- ▶ Avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- ▶ Have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings
- ▶ Have highly focused interests
- ▶ Flap their hands, rock their body or spin in circles
- ▶ Have unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look or feel

Not all children who show these signs have autism. You know your child best. If you are concerned about your child's development, **don't wait to take action!** Talk to your child's doctor and act early on any concerns to improve development and outcomes.

Additional autism resource guides at:

delawareautismnetwork.org