



EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTION

MOVING LIVES FORWARD

INFANT MENTAL HEALTH: SIGNS OF AUTISM IN INFANTS

As a parent or caregiver of an infant, you have an up-close view of your baby's development. You can see the small changes in day-to-day behaviors that indicate a baby is building new skills and abilities. If you know what to look for, you may be able to detect early signs of developmental differences like autism. This is because the earliest signs of autism aren't the presence of unexpected behavior, but the absence of a skill or ability that usually develops by a certain age. The CDC reports that most parents with autistic children notice some signs within the first year, and 80 to 90 percent observe developmental differences by the time their child is 2 years old. Your observations and instincts are important because identifying developmental differences early gives the child in your care the advantage an early diagnosis. The earlier the better. Asking your pediatrician questions is OK, even if you think it's silly or small. Better to ask and be proactive.

So what is Autism? Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a set of developmental differences that affect the way people communicate, behave, and interact with others. The CDC estimates that 1 in every 54 children is autistic. Although more boys than girls are autistic, the condition occurs in all ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

Autism doesn't change a baby's physical appearance. The condition does affect how babies communicate and how they relate to the world around them. Autism is described as a "spectrum" condition because signs, symptoms, and abilities can vary widely. If you notice any of these developmental differences, it's important to talk with your child's doctor or healthcare professional about them.

What are some signs for babies?

Some signs of autism can appear during infancy, such as:

1) Limited or Declining eye contact: Babies typically make eye contact with other people from a very young age. By 2 months, infants can typically locate faces and make eye contact skillfully. Eye contact later becomes a way of building social relationships and gaining information about their surroundings. The limited or decline in eye contact may be an early indicator of autism.

2) Little or lack of pointing or gesturing: Babies usually learn to gesture before they learn to talk. In fact, gesturing is one of the earliest forms of communication. Autistic children generally point and gesture less than children with non-autistic development. Less pointing can sometimes indicate the possibility of a language delay.

3) Absence or lack of joint attention: Another indicator of a developmental difference is when an infant's gaze doesn't follow you when you're pointing at something. This skill is sometimes called "joint attention." Joint attention is often decreased in autistic children.

4) Limited no response to their name being called by 6 months: As most infants show an awareness of their own names, especially when it's spoken by their mother. Autistic infants show a developmental difference: By 9 months, many babies who later develop ASD don't orient to their own names. This usually appears as a pattern of nonresponse, rather than a single instance.

5) Muted emotion and Reduced Facial expressions: Facial expressions are a nonverbal way to communicate thoughts and feelings. Research on emotional expression in autistic infants is limited, but in involving school-age children, researchers have found that autistic children display less emotion through facial expressions than children with non-autistic development. That doesn't necessarily mean autistic children are feeling less emotion, just that less of it shows on their faces when they do.

6) Lack, Loss, or Delayed Language or Speech. Babies and toddlers start talking at different ages. Research shows that young autistic children often say and understand fewer words

Quote of the Week

"Our world is NOT divided by race, color, gender or religion. Our world is divided into wise people and fools. And the fools themselves by race, color, gender or religion."

than children with non-autistic development at 12 months. If a child isn't saying single words by 16 months or isn't using two-word phrases by age 2, it's a good idea to talk with a pediatrician.

7) Regression. When an infant or toddler loses skills and abilities that had begun to develop, it can be an indication of autism. It can also be a profoundly difficult experience for parents and caregivers to witness. Researchers don't know why regression happens. There are no known links to any childhood experiences, diseases, or medications.

As many as 1/3 of autistic children lose skills after infancy and before preschool. Around 94 percent of the time, it's language skills that

are lost. If your baby babbled, made eye contact, gestured, and displayed other social behaviors and stopped doing so as a toddler, it's something to discuss with your pediatrician. If you notice any of these developmental differences, it's important to talk with your child's pediatrician or healthcare professional. Early diagnosis and intervention are the keys to better health outcomes for autistic children.

Although there isn't a "cure" for autism, there are a number of well-researched, effective therapies that can enhance skills, reduce anxiety, and lead to greater well-being for your child.

MEET CENTENNIAL'S EARLY CHILDHOOD CONSULTATION TEAM



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Ages 0-5

Covers the following counties:
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LAUNCHING ZOOM SECURE TELEHEALTH SERVICES!

Our ECMH team is excited to announce that consultation services are now available using Zoom Secure Telehealth Services. These services are available to client families, schools, childcare centers and community partners with group and individual meetings available. All services will be provided using this private, secure video platform, and can be accessed using most electronic devices. For more information or to set up a consultation appointment, please contact our ECMH team or your local Centennial Mental Health Center office.



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assistance with any Early Childhood need.

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