

Starting the Autism Diagnosis Process: A Guide for Parents

If you're concerned your child may be showing signs of autism, you're not alone—and you're not overreacting. This one-pager is here to help you feel more confident and prepared when speaking with your pediatrician or seeking a diagnosis.

Quick Checklist Before You Talk to the Doctor

- Make a list of behaviors that concern you (e.g., doesn't respond to name, avoids eye contact, repetitive play).
- Note when the behaviors started or how long they've been happening.
- Gather input from others who know your child well (partner, daycare, grandparents).
- Write down specific questions you want answered.
- Bring video clips if you have examples of the behavior you're concerned about.

What to Say to the Pediatrician

Not sure how to bring it up? Use this script to start the conversation:

"I've noticed some things that are worrying me—like [insert behavior]. I know every child develops at their own pace, but this feels different. I'd really like to get a developmental evaluation or talk about whether this could be autism."

If the pediatrician downplays your concerns, you can say:

"I understand it may not seem urgent, but I'd rather check now than wait. I know early support makes a big difference, and I just want to be sure."

Questions to Ask Your Pediatrician About Autism

General Concerns

- I've noticed some behaviors that concern me. Can I walk you through them?
- Are these behaviors typical for their age, or should we explore further?
- Could these signs be related to autism, sensory issues, or something else?

Developmental Milestones

- How do my child's communication and social skills compare to typical milestones?
- Should I be concerned about lack of eye contact, speech delays, or limited social interaction?
- My child seems to have intense reactions to noise/textures/touch—could this be sensory-related?

Autism-Specific Screening

- Do you use a screening tool like the M-CHAT or another assessment for autism?
- Can we do a developmental or autism screening today?
- If you don't do formal evaluations, who do you recommend we see?

Next Steps & Referrals

- Should we get a referral to a developmental pediatrician, neuropsychologist, psychologist, or early interventionist?
- How long is the wait to get in with a specialist in our area?
- Can we start any services while we wait for a formal diagnosis?

Support & Services

- Can we access early intervention services before a diagnosis?
- What local resources or support groups do you recommend for families navigating autism?
- Do you know any occupational therapists, speech therapists, or ABA providers you trust?

Documentation

- What notes or documentation will I need for referrals or evaluations?
- Will you help coordinate with schools or early intervention services if needed?

Parent Support

- What advice do you have for us as parents during this process?
- Is there anything we should be doing at home while we wait?