



## Quick Tips for Providers: *Educating Families about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a brain-based disorder that effects around 1 in 36 United States children. The core symptoms of ASD are in two areas and require children to display at least 2 symptoms from each area:

### 1. **Social communication deficits**

- a. Social-emotional reciprocity (e.g., back-and-forth conversation)
- b. Nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, body language, gestures)
- c. Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships (e.g., changing behavior based on the environment, engaging in pretend play, showing interest in peers)

### 2. **Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities**

- a. Repetitive movements, use of objects, or speech (e.g., lining up toys, flipping objects)
- b. Insistence on sameness, inflexible to changes in routines, ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior (e.g., need to follow the same schedule every day)
- c. Highly restricted, fixated interests (e.g., concentrating/focusing on unusual objects)
- d. Hyper or hyposensitivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment (e.g., negative response to specific sounds)

There are many potential factors that increase the likelihood of ASD including: having a sibling with autism, advanced parent age, certain genetic conditions in the child (e.g., Down and Rett syndromes), very low birth weight or extreme prematurity, prenatal exposure to air pollution and certain pesticides, maternal obesity, diabetes, or immune system disorders, and periods of oxygen deprivation during birth.

Youth with ASD often struggle in school, with peers, and at home. Early identification and treatment are extremely important in preventing later problems in relationships, with work, at home, and with self-care tasks.

### **What to do if your child is experiencing ASD symptoms:**

There are several treatments available to help reduce symptoms that interfere with daily functioning and quality of life, including:

- **Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA):** ABA helps parents to understand how behavior works, is impacted by the environment, and learning takes place with the goal of creating a personalized program to build skills to improve independence.
- **Speech and language therapy:** promotes verbal skills and nonverbal communication through teaching communication supports (e.g., hand signals), how to make requests or explain feelings, turn-taking in conversation, and social skills (e.g., eye contact).
- **Occupational therapy (OT):** OT helps youth work on cognitive, physical, social and motor skills with the goal of improving everyday skills to increase independence.
- **Educational supports:** Many children with ASD benefit from having in-school accommodations and services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This may include a behavioral intervention plan or other program modifications and supports.