

Autism in children – Identifying the signs and tips to manage

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- Dr.Sagar Sharma -

Watching the child grow is one of the beautiful experiences for parents. In this journey they discover many things about the baby. Parents feel happy when they see their child smile for the first time, when the baby starts crawling or even the first word it speaks. However, when any of these things get delayed or does not happen similar to other kids, the parents get worried. In such situations, they need to immediately consult the doctor and understand the problem faced by the child. These behavioural delays could be an indication of autism.

Autism is a complex developmental disability that affects social skills of a child like playing, learning, and communicating. Compared to normal children, autistic kids think, learn and experience the world differently. Although, there is considerable awareness among people about autism, they procrastinate their visit to the doctor due to their inhibitions.

Many babies with autism start to show initial signs from as young as 6 months of age. If the symptoms are mild they may go unnoticed for longer time. Therefore, it is advised to consult a doctor when the kids start exhibiting any behavioural changes. An early intervention will help the child achieve better functioning. While some children with autism require very minimal or no support, some might require support throughout their lifetime.

Identifying autism among kids

In each stage of a child's development they inculcate different habits, like communication and social

behaviour. These changes need to be monitored for the healthy development of the baby.

Listed below are the initial symptoms of autism in kids of different age groups.

Below the age of 1 year	1-2 years of age	Over the age of 2 years
Avoids eye contact	Kids being in its own imaginary world	Prefers to play alone
No facial expression or inappropriate expression	Delay in speech	The child will not share things with others
Doesn't respond to your smile	Doesn't respond when called by name	Difficulty in expressing his/her feelings
Doesn't look at objects which you show	Doesn't respond to questions appropriately	Does not make friends and share things
May not respond to sound	Extra sensitive to loud sounds, unusual smells	Hardly uses gestures or displays appropriate body language
Sticks to specific toys	Unresponsive to people	Tone of their speech can be either low pitched or high pitched
Difficult to comfort and soothe the child	Repetitive behaviour like tapping body parts, repeat words or noises	Sensitive to infections and can fall sick frequently

The signs of autism range from a spectrum of mild to severe among kids. The child might also face irregular eating and sleeping habits. Also, in some situations these symptoms are mistaken for antagonistic behaviour towards parents and frequent mood swings. They can also be mistaken for the shy temperament of the child.

Parent's guide to autism treatment and support:

Managing the child with autism and giving proper care to them is very crucial. There are many treatments that can help children acquire new skills and overcome a wide variety of developmental challenges. Listed below are the few tips that might help parents to manage kids with autism:

- Have a fixed schedule as autistic children tend to do best when they have a structured schedule. Be it for meals, therapy, school, playtime and bedtime, set up a schedule and try to minimize disruptions.
- Reward your child for their good behaviour. Never miss an opportunity to identify your child's talent like learning a new skill or responding to your questions.
- Look for non-verbal cues like the sounds they make, their gestures and facial expressions etc. Use these cues to understand what they want or willing to communicate.
- Parents should learn new ways to make their child happy and spare time for a fun activity with them. Playing is a crucial part of learning.
- Parents are advised to join autism support groups to share their feelings, get information and the desired emotional support when needed.

Behaviour therapy, speech-language therapy, play-based therapy, physical therapy, and nutritional therapy are common autism treatments. However what parents need to keep in mind is that, their participation is crucial to the success of every care plan.

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