

Developmental Delays

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Recently the topic of autism and autism spectrum disorders has been featured on many news programs. Autism spectrum disorders, developmental delays, learning disabilities, and other disabilities often have a big effect on the lives of children and those who care for them. In many cases, early intervention can help these children and families with struggles they may face.

Autism spectrum disorders consist of a group that includes autism, Asperger syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified. Each disorder and each person have differences in what symptoms they experience and how severe they might be. However, there are symptoms that are common in autism spectrum disorders which include language delays, difficulties with communication and social interactions, unusual behaviors, and sometimes intellectual disabilities.

Autism spectrum disorders are not the only concern that can affect children. Some children face learning disabilities, or challenges understanding math, reading and other school work. Some children may have developmental delays that mean that they may not learn new skills at the same time as other children their age. Children may also experience delays in speech and language that make it hard for them to succeed in school and interact with friends.

Treating children with these conditions can help to improve school performance and social interaction. The group Autism Speaks has put together a list of “red flags” that parents, teachers, and caregivers can watch for. If a child has these red flags, it’s a good idea to visit a professional for an assessment.

- No big smiles by six months

- No back-and-forth sharing of sounds or smiles by nine months

- No babbling by 12 months

- No back-and-forth gestures, such as pointing, showing, reaching, or waving by 12 months

- No words by 16 months

- No two-word meaningful phrases (without imitating or repeating) by 24 months

- Any loss of speech or babbling or social skills at any age

If you are concerned about your child's development, your pediatrician is a good resource to start an evaluation process. The pediatrician can do a developmental assessment and may refer your child to a specialist who can do more evaluations or work with you and your child to address any concerns. There are also state-based organizations that offer assistance. For children under age three, contact your local early intervention organization. For children over three, contact your local school district. You can learn how to find both of these through National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY). These groups can help with assessing your child and finding services to support your child and your family.

Resources and references:

Autism Speaks at <http://www.autismspeaks.org>

National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities at
<http://cdc.gov/ncbddd/index.html>

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities at
<http://www.nichcy.org/Pages/Home.aspx>

*This article is not meant to be a substitute for medical advice or care.
Please seek medical care from your own health care provider.*