"I Think My Child Has Autism. What Do I Do?"

by Thaashida L. Hutton, M.S., CCC-SLP

If you suspect your child has autism (a developmental disorder characterized by difficulty with social skills, communication, and behavior), you can find information from various resources and professionals. Following are tips to keep in mind when going through the process of a possible autism diagnosis.

Where Do I Start?

- Trust yourself. Know that as a parent you are concerned because you want to do what is best for your child.
- Talk to a professional. You may want to begin with the child's primary healthcare provider (family doctor or pediatrician). He or she may conduct a developmental screening and may refer you to a specialist for an evaluation.
- Write everything down, including questions, concerns, etc. You want to have information, such as examples of behavior or lack of communication, to support your concerns when talking with a professional (University of Pennsylvania, n.d., ¶ 5).
- Ask lots of questions. It's okay to ask questions. There is a lot of information on autism, and you are not expected to know it all. If a doctor tells you not to worry, ask if and when you should start to worry and why (UPenn, n.d., ¶ 5).
- Start early. Don't wait until it is too late to get help. If your child does have autism, you want to start intervention services as soon as possible. Early intervention services can help enhance a child's development (UPenn, n.d., ¶ 6).

What if I Don't Know Exactly What to Look For?

Remember that every child develops emotional, cognitive (thinking), and physical skills at different rates. However, here are some signs to look for if you think that your child may have autism (UPenn, n.d., ¶ 4):

- No or few expressions of emotion by six months (i.e. not smiling when smiled at)
- No/minimal eye contact

© 2009 Super Duper® Publications • www.superduperinc.com

- Insistence on routines; apprehensive to change
- Dislike of being touched
- Abnormal obsession/attachment to specific objects
- "Any loss of speech, babbling, or social skills at any age"

Who Can Diagnose Autism?

Your child's doctor will do a developmental screening, and then may refer you to a (multidisciplinary) team for evaluations. Following is a list of professionals who can give the actual diagnosis of autism (UPenn, n.d., ¶ 7):

- **Child psychiatrist** – doctor who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders in children
- **Child psychologist** – professional who assesses mental health problems and provides psychological care and intervention for children
- **Developmental pediatrician** – doctor who assesses suspected developmental delays in language, cognitive, and motor areas
- **Pediatric Neurologist** – doctor who diagnoses and treats disorders related to seizures, muscular weakness, head injury, and development

Other professionals who may help assess a child's skills and abilities and share findings with the team are:

- **Speech-Language Pathologist** – assesses and treats verbal and nonverbal communication and pragmatics (social skills)
- **Occupational Therapist** – focuses on sensory issues, fine motor skills, play, and social and personal skills required for independent living
- **Physical Therapist** – focuses on gross motor skills

My Child Has Autism. Now What?

Remember to enjoy every day with your child. It's easy to get caught up in a diagnosis and forget about the important things in life. Every child is unique and has special gifts. Most importantly, know that you are not alone. Take advantage of resources and seek out professionals who can guide you.

© 2009 Super Duper® Publications • www.superduperinc.com

Where Can I Find Additional Information?

Autism Network International (ANI)
P.O. Box 35448
Syracuse, NY 13235-5448
jisincla@mailbox.syr.edu
http://ani.autistics.org

Autism Speaks
Family Services
familyservices@autismspeaks.org
888-AUTISM2 (288-4762)

Parents of Autistic Children (POAC)
732-785-1099
http://www.poac.net/

Resource

University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine (n.d.). *My child may have autism*… Retrieved December 15, 2008, from http://www.paautism.org/common_concerns.html

© 2009 Super Duper® Publications • www.superduperinc.com

Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below may be helpful when working with children who have special needs. Visit www.superduperinc.com or call 1-800-277-8737. Click the links below to see the product description.

Autism: A Guide for Educators, Clinicians, and Parents
Ask for Item #TP-297 http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=TP297

"I Have Autism" Complete Set
Ask for Item #BK-329 http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=BK329

Social Emotional Evaluation™ (SEE™)
Ask for Item #SEE-22 http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=SEE22

© 2009 Super Duper® Publications • www.superduperinc.com