

DIAGNOSING AUTISM

There are no medical tests for diagnosing autism, but when parents become concerned about developmental delays in children, they should consult a physician. He or she can rule out various potential medical causes, such as hearing problems. Before a child can be diagnosed, that child should be evaluated by an autism specialist. Such a person may be a psychologist, psychiatrist, pediatric neurologist, or developmental pediatrician who specializes in diagnosing and treating children with ASD. Best practice guidelines identify the following six components of a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation for autism:

- Parent or caregiver interview
- Review of relevant medical, psychological, and/or school records
- Cognitive/developmental assessment
- Direct play observation
- Measurement of adaptive functioning
- Comprehensive medical examination

ASD diagnostic criteria are described by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in its Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V). Qualified professionals provide these diagnoses when symptoms of ASD (social interaction and social communication, and repetitive behaviors) are present in ranges that are inappropriate for the child's age and developmental level. ASD is diagnosed when all these symptoms are present to some degree. A diagnosis also includes a specification of severity. Specifically, qualified professionals will use information gathered during the diagnostic assessment to indicate the level of support an individual with ASD requires; Level 1 Requiring Support, Level 2 Requiring Substantial Support, Level 3 Requiring Very Substantial Support.