

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

TIPS AND RESOURCES



What is autism?

Autism is part of a group of complex neurodevelopmental disorders called autism spectrum disorders (ASD). ASD includes:

- Autistic Disorder
- Asperger's Disorder
- Rett's Disorder
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)

Autism spectrum disorders are present early in life and are characterized by varying degrees of impairment in:

- Communication/language
- Social abilities
- Restricted/unusual patterns of activities and interests

The characteristics of ASD can be present in different combinations and at different levels of severity. Often specific behaviors vary widely from person to person. ASD occurs in as many as 1 in 150 individuals, is about 3 times more common in boys than in girls, and occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups.

What causes ASD?

The specific causes are not yet known, although there is consensus that genetic vulnerability and unidentified environmental factors cause atypical brain development related to core features. While scientists are looking into possible environmental origins, there is no current established scientific link to proposed causes such as vaccines, diet, or toxin/environmental exposure.

How can I tell if a child has an ASD?

There are at present no medical or genetic tests specific to ASD. Diagnosis is dependent on assessing and observing a child's behavior. No two children with autism are alike, but common features may be identifiable as early as 18 months, or even sooner. Early red flags include delayed language, deficits in nonverbal communication (e.g., pointing, eye contact), inconsistent response to sounds, failure to direct parent's attention, underdeveloped imitation, lack of interest in other children, and repetitive toy play. Not every child with ASD will have all these behaviors. The isolated presence of one of these behaviors does not warrant an ASD diagnosis. It is the collection of these behavior patterns that leads to a diagnosis.

What should I do if I am concerned about my child?

Parents and other caregivers are typically the first to notice unusual behaviors. Some parents describe children whose development has been atypical since birth, while others describe children who were developing typically and then seemed to lose skills. Early identification and early intervention are key to optimizing outcomes. If you have concerns, talk to your pediatrician or a behavioral professional immediately about getting your child screened for ASD.

How is autism treated?

At present, there is no cure for autism; however, research indicates that extensive and intensive behavioral intervention can dramatically improve the lives of children with ASD and their families. There is no single treatment protocol for all children with ASD, but many different structured behavioral and educational programs have demonstrated positive effects. Some of the most common interventions are applied behavior analysis (ABA), speech therapy, occupational therapy, structured parenting programs, and structured teaching methods.

Please see reverse for information about Vanderbilt Kennedy Center programs.



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HOW WE CAN HELP

Who We Are and Who We Serve

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC) works with and for people with disabilities and family members, service providers and advocates, researchers and policy makers. It is among only a few centers nationwide to be both a **University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service** and a national *Eunice Kennedy Shriver Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center*. In 2008, Autism Speaks named Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC) as 1 of only 15 **Autism Treatment Network (ATN)** sites – a new and prestigious designation in the field of autism treatment and research. Services for individuals with autism and their families provided by VUMC and VKC professionals are coordinated by the **Vanderbilt Autism Clinic**. The following are some of the ways the Center's programs and staff can assist families, educators, and other service providers.

Vanderbilt Autism Clinic

The Vanderbilt Autism Clinic (VAC) is a free intake and referral service for a broad range of Vanderbilt clinical and research programs and resources, as well as those in the community, state, and region. Available resources include autism-specialized diagnostic, medical, early intervention, educational, behavioral, and counseling services for children, adolescents, and adults with ASDs. For information and referral to Vanderbilt clinical and research services contact (615) 322-7565, or toll-free 1-877-ASD-VUMC (273-8862), or by email autismclinic@vanderbilt.edu.

TRIAD

The Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD) is a VKC program dedicated to improving assessment and treatment services for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families while advancing knowledge and training. <http://TRIAD.vanderbilt.edu>

TRIAD Clinical Services

TRIAD offers clinical services to families with children who have, or are suspected of having, an autism spectrum disorder. Services include diagnostic assessment and behavioral consultation for families of infants, adolescents, and school-age children through the **Infant and Toddler Screening Clinic**, the **Parent Support and Education Program**, the **Autism School-Age Clinic**, as well as clinical services that often are part of TRIAD's cutting-edge research programs. For information on and referral to Vanderbilt clinical services see listing on Vanderbilt Autism Clinic.

TRIAD Outreach & Training

TRIAD is committed to providing exemplary training and consultation services to parents, service providers, school personnel, and future professionals. School-based services include trainings, in-services, as well as programs and student-focused consultations throughout the state and region. TRIAD also offers a summer **Social Skills Camp** for children and adolescents as well as workshops for parents, educators, and other professionals. For information on TRIAD training programs contact: (615) 936-1705, or by email TRIAD@vanderbilt.edu.

Ann and Monroe Carell Jr. Families First Program

Through this free monthly training series, TRIAD provides parents of children with autism (ages 2-5) with techniques to enhance social and communication skills and to manage challenging behaviors. (615) 343-4275, familiesfirst@vanderbilt.edu.

TRIAD Research

TRIAD-directed research programs and affiliated research partnerships examine the causes and treatment of autism. These include projects

related to the development of siblings of children with autism, the identification of genetic and core behavioral features of autism, the nature and treatment of sleep disturbance in children with autism, the diagnosis of autism itself, early intervention, and understanding the health and well-being of parents of children with autism. TRIAD is a partner with the University of Miami in the Marino Autism Research Institute (MARI), which was developed to accelerate discoveries in the treatment and prevention of autism. For information on and referral to TRIAD research projects see listing on Vanderbilt Autism Clinic.

Two Ways to Take Part in Research

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center serves families through research studies. **StudyFinder** is a searchable database that lists current VKC studies, including ASD research. Studies seek people of all ages with and without developmental disabilities. See kc.vanderbilt.edu/studyfinder, (615) 936-0448. **Research Family Partners** allows families with and without disabilities to register with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and to be contacted when a study begins for which the family might be eligible. See kc.vanderbilt.edu/rfp, (615) 936-0448.

Family Outreach Center

This center provides families with a single point of entry into the many services and supports of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, Vanderbilt University, and the community, including research projects, clinics, social work services, recreational and arts programs, and **SibSaturdays** (fun supportive activities for siblings). Contact familyoutreach@vanderbilt.edu, (615) 936-5118.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Pathfinder provides telephone helpline, web, and print resources in English and Spanish that connect the Tennessee disability community with service providers and resources. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC and the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. See www.familypathfinder.org, (615) 322-8529, toll-free (1-800) 640-4636.

Other National and Local Resources

Autism Society of America

www.autism-society.org

Autism Society of Middle Tennessee

www.tnautism.org

Autism Speaks

www.autismspeaks.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Autism Information

Center www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.htm

KidsHealth for kids, teens, and parents

www.kidshealth.org

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

www.nichd.nih.gov/autism/

Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network

www.tennddnetwork.org

Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS)

www.state.tn.us/education/speced/TEIS/

Please see reverse for facts about autism spectrum disorders.

Contact the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

Nashville (615) 322-8240

Toll-Free (866) 936-VUKC [8852]

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VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER
FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES