

Autism Spectrum Disorder: Parent Factsheet

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- ASD is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges
- ASD affects everyone differently: the ways that individuals with ASD learn, think, and problem-solve can vary.



How do I know if my child has ASD?

ASD can sometimes be detected at 18 months or younger. By age 2, a diagnosis by an experienced professional can be considered very reliable

Individuals with ASD may display early signs such as:

- Little or no eye contact
- A delay in talking or no talking at all
- Does not point at objects to show interest or look at objects when someone points at them
- Does not respond to their name
- Echoes words or phrases said to them, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language
- Repeating actions (e.g., hand flapping, twirling objects)
- Does not play “pretend” games (for example, not pretend to “feed” a doll)
- Focusing on parts of objects
- Has trouble adapting when there is a routine change



What are treatments for ASD?

Early intervention is important for ASD treatment and can improve a child's development.

Intervention service can include different types of therapy (speech therapy, occupational therapy, behavior therapy, etc). This is to help the child talk, walk, and interact with others.

The intervention, care and treatment usually focus on the following areas:

- Social interaction
- Behavior management
- Communication
- Motor skills
- Structured play
- Area of interest
- Acquired skills
- Self esteem



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What are some ASD service options in Maryland and DC?

- **Maryland State Department of Education/DC State Department of Education**- Each school system has family support staff, whose goal is to increase parental information, knowledge, and involvement in the special education decision-making process. These centers may also offer a lending library, IEP (Individualized Education Program) support, special education resources, and newsletters. Contact your local school system to find out more.
 - **Infants and Toddlers Program MD/Strong Start DC**- The Infants and Toddlers/Strong Start Program/Preschool Services Branch provides oversight and support to local early intervention systems and local school system preschool special education programs for young children with delays or disabilities. Infants & Toddlers/Strong Start serves children from birth to age 3, and a similar program serves children ages 3 to 5, to help with a child's transition from early intervention to his or her local school system.
 - **Special Education Services**- Like early intervention, special education services are provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). State education agencies are responsible for ensuring a free, appropriate public education for all eligible children with disabilities from birth to 21.
 - **Division of Rehabilitative Services (DORS)**- DORS provides personalized support and employment services.
- **Developmental Disabilities Administration**- The mission of the Developmental Disabilities Administration is to provide leadership to assure the full participation of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in all aspects of community life. In addition, DDA's goal is to promote their empowerment to access quality supports and services necessary to foster personal growth, independence and productivity.
 - **Transitioning Youth** - The MD Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) within the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene currently administers the Governor's Transitioning Youth Initiative to fund supported employment and other day services for eligible students from their 21st birthday, or upon exiting school following their 21st birthday, for one full year.
 - **Community Pathways** - The Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) administers the Home and Community Based Services Community Pathways waiver. This program is funded by Medicaid and State funds. Individuals are eligible based on their diagnosis of a developmental disability and income. The funds can be used to support community-based services such as employment or vocational supports, behavioral supports, respite, assistive technology, environmental modifications or residential in the person's home or community.
- **Autism Waiver MD/ Home and Community Based Services Waiver DC** -Funded by Medical Assistance (Medicaid) and State funds. These waivers allow eligible children with ASD to receive specific waiver services to support them in their homes and communities. It is important to get on the list as soon as possible.

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Support Groups and Local Information

These are just a few local support and advocacy groups. They can be a starting place to find a group in your area that meets your family's needs.

- Autism Speaks: <https://www.autismspeaks.org>
- Autism Society of America:
 - DC Chapter:
 - <https://www.autism-society.org/chapter130/>
 - Montgomery County Chapter:
 - www.Autismmontgomerycounty.org
 - Baltimore-Chesapeake Chapter:
 - www.Baltimoreautismsociety.org
 - Frederick County Chapter:
 - www.Asafrederickmd.org
 - Howard County Chapter:
 - www.Howard-autism.org
- Pathfinders for Autism: <https://pathfindersforautism.org>
- One World Center for Autism (Prince Georges County):
<http://www.worldforautism.org/>
- DC Autism Parents: <http://dcautismparents.org/>
- Kennedy Krieger Institute (KKI)-Center for Autism and Related Disorder (CARD):
www.kennedykrieger.org
- Maryland Family Network: www.Marylandfamilynetwork.org
- The Arc: <https://thearc.org/>
 - DC Chapter: <https://arcdc.net/>
 - Montgomery County: www.arcofmontgomerycounty.org



Education Advocacy in Montgomery County

- Guiding Exceptional Parents: <https://www.guidingexceptionalparents.com/>
- Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County: 301-652-0717; <http://crcmc.org/mediation/>
- Disability Rights Maryland: <https://disabilityrightsmd.org/services/>

Recreation for Youth with Disabilities in Montgomery County

- Art Stream: www.art-stream.org
- Kids Enjoy Exercise Now (KEEN): www.KeengreaterDC.org
- Montgomery Special Hockey: www.montgomerycheetahs.org
- MoCo Movement Center: <http://www.MOCOMc.com>
- Imagination Stage Access Classes: <https://www.imaginationstage.org/searchclasses/access-and-inclusion>

Respite Services

- Montgomery County Dept. of Health and Human Services: 301-816-9647

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Parenting:

Parenting a child on the autism spectrum can be very rewarding, however, it also comes with unique challenges. Stress is a very common reaction when parenting all children, not just those who have Autism.

- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Muscles aches
- Heart palpitations
- Increased sugar, coffee or alcohol use
- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Depression
- Crying spells
- Feeling like no-one cares
- Apathy
- Lacking purpose
- Boredom
- Confusion
- Whirling mind
- Forgetfulness
- Negative self-talk
- Lashing out

Tips to deal with stress

- **Forget the "should":** the beliefs of what we "should" be doing or what our life "should" like are the causes for most of our stress.
- **Stimulate your brain:** Engaging in activities that you enjoy or are challenging, releases positive endorphins into your body which may relieve stress.
- **Stop Tension NOW!** Chronic stress affects your health, yet it doesn't happen overnight. It is brought about by the accumulation of many stressful incidents that never allow the body to rebalance itself back to a relaxation response. Practicing short relaxation exercises throughout your day will reduce this build up. Try: taking five deep slow breaths whenever you feel stressed.
- **Create Community:** We can become isolated if our children exhibit anti-social behavior. Add that to the fact that when we are under extra stress, our tendency is to retreat. Although we often need this time to nurture ourselves be mindful of balance. Connection and companionship are essential. Create community that supports you even if it isn't close to home. Attend workshops with like-minded people; find support groups where other parents gather, invite people over for coffee. Choose to stay connected!

Awareness is key to reducing stress and increasing well-being. As the Dalai Lama says, it is important to be "Wisely Selfish."

Make space for yourself, breathe deeply, take time to relax and be gentle on yourself.