

APRIL IS NATIONAL AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

Autism Has Many Faces

So, what does it look like?

Even for an expert, the answer is not always clear. That's because autism isn't just one disorder. Instead, it's a spectrum disorder, a set of issues that can be mild, severe or anywhere in between.



Autism is called a developmental disability because it starts during a child's developmental period - usually before age 3 - and causes delays or problems in the ways a child develops or grows.

Children with autism may have high or low IQs. They may be chatty or silent, outgoing or shy, good or bad students. They may or may not have unusual talents. Some are easygoing, while others have severe behavior issues. So, what do they have in common? Delays or disabilities with social skills and emotional understanding of others. Children with autism have difficulty with both verbal and unspoken communication.

DIAGNOSIS

Early intervention is key when treating autism. A child should be evaluated for autism if the child:

- Doesn't babble or coo by 12 months of age
- Doesn't point, wave, grasp or make other gestures by 12 months
- Doesn't say single words by 16 months
- Doesn't say two-word phrases on his or her own by 24 months
- Has any loss of any language or social skill at any age

Parents should rely on an evaluator with an extensive background in autism spectrum disorder – a child psychologist is best– who can perform an in-depth observation. Expect a lot of questions. A good evaluation is more than just a label.

TREATMENT

There is no standard treatment for autism, and no cure. But many therapies can help. Once parents place their child in a good education program, they often mix and match approaches to meet the child's needs. Some therapies include:

- Programs that focus on reducing behavior problems and teaching skills
- Programs that try to increase good behavior, reduce problem behavior and improve lifestyle

Your BHS plan may include coverage for certain conditions and behavioral symptoms associated with autism.

For more information about available resources and treatment options, call BHS at 800-245-1150.