

Autism spectrum disorders are not rare; many primary care pediatricians care for several children with **autism** spectrum disorders. Pediatricians play an important role in early recognition of **autism** spectrum disorders, because they usually are the first point of contact for parents. Parents are now much more aware of the early signs of **autism** spectrum disorders because of frequent coverage in the media; if their child demonstrates any of the published signs. Parents please raise your concerns to your child's pediatrician. It is important that pediatricians be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of **autism** spectrum disorders and have a strategy for assessing them systematically. Pediatricians also must be aware of local resources that can assist in making a definitive diagnosis of, and in managing, **autism** spectrum disorders. The pediatrician must be familiar with developmental, educational, and community resources as well as medical subspecialty clinics.

- The "**Autism** A.L.A.R.M."¹²: a flyer that highlights the prevalence of **autism**, the importance of screening and listening to parents' concerns, and the urgency of making simultaneous referrals to specialists in ASDs and early intervention programs to promote improved outcomes.
- "*Is Your One-Year-Old Communicating With You?*"¹³: a brochure that focuses on early identification of social communication deficits and behavior problems that may be associated with developmental disorders, primarily ASDs. This brochure is intended for distribution to all parents of infants at the 9- or 12-month well-child visit. It encourages parents to share any concerns they have about their infant's language development and social skills with the pediatrician as early as possible.
- "*Understanding **Autism** Spectrum Disorders*"¹⁴: a 48-page introductory booklet for parents of children in whom an ASD has been diagnosed recently or is suspected strongly.
- **Firstsign.org** : resource web site for concerned parents.

I will highlight today the pre-speech deficits often exist that, if detected, could facilitate earlier diagnosis.*
These deficits include:

- lack of appropriate gaze;
- lack of warm, joyful expressions with gaze;
- lack of the alternating to-and-fro pattern of vocalizations between infant and parent that usually occurs at approximately 6 months of age (i.e., infants with ASDs usually continue vocalizing without regard for the parent's speech);
- lack of recognition of mother's (or father's or consistent caregiver's) voice;
- disregard for vocalizations (i.e., lack of response to name), yet keen awareness for environmental sounds;
- delayed onset of babbling past 9 months of age;
- decreased or absent use of pre-speech gestures (waving, pointing, showing);
- lack of expressions such as "oh oh" or "huh";
- lack of interest or response of any kind to neutral statements (e.g., "Oh no, it's raining again!")

Please do not hesitate to call me at (904) 273-6533 or (904) 743-2100 if you have any questions. We love your children to grow healthy!

Dr. O