

## INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME FROM ASVC

### NEWLY DIAGNOSED, WHAT IS ASD?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disability; signs typically appear during early childhood and affect a person's ability to communicate and interact with others. ASD is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum condition" that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees. There is no known single cause of autism, but increased awareness and early diagnosis/intervention and access to appropriate services/supports lead to significantly improved outcomes. Some of the behaviors associated with autism include delayed learning of language; difficulty making eye contact or holding a conversation; difficulty with executive functioning, which relates to reasoning and planning; narrow, intense interests; poor motor skills and sensory sensitivities. Again, a person on the spectrum might follow many of these behaviors or just a few, or many others besides. The diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder is applied based on analysis of all behaviors and their severity.

### LEARN THE SIGNS: EARLY IDENTIFICATION CAN CHANGE LIVES

Autism is treatable. Individuals with autism do not "outgrow" autism, but studies show that early diagnosis and intervention lead to significantly improved outcomes. For more information on developmental milestones, visit the CDC's "Learn the Signs. Act Early" site. The characteristic behaviors of autism spectrum disorder may be apparent in infancy (18 to 24 months), but they usually become clearer during early childhood (24 months to 6 years).

As part of a well-baby or well-child visit, your child's doctor should perform a "developmental screening," asking specific questions about your baby's progress. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) lists five behaviors that warrant further evaluation:

- Does not babble or coo by 12 months
- Does not gesture (point, wave, grasp) by 12 months
- Does not say single words by 16 months
- Does not say two-word phrases on his or her own by 24 months
- Has any loss of any language or social skill at any age

Any of these five "red flags" does not mean your child has autism. But because the disorder's symptoms vary so widely, a child showing these behaviors should be evaluated by a multidisciplinary team. This team might include a neurologist, psychologist, developmental pediatrician, speech/language therapist, learning consultant or other professionals who are knowledgeable about autism.



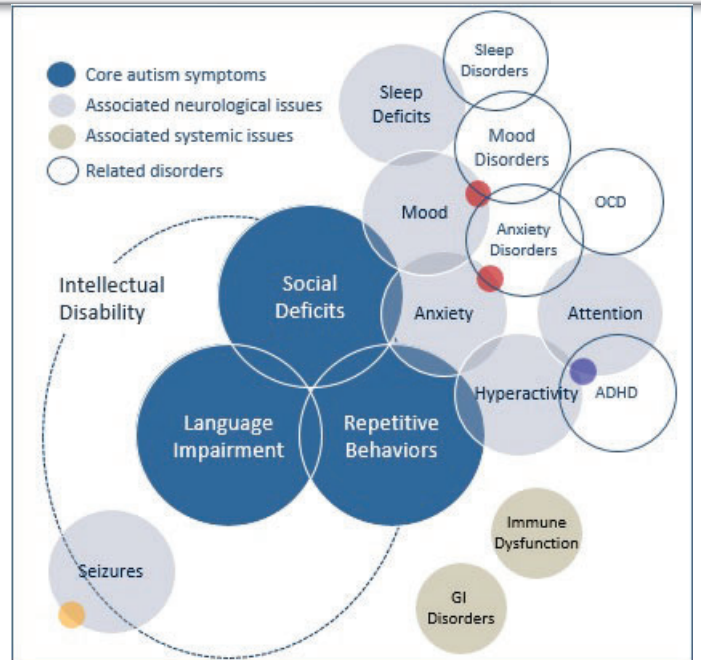
**Here are some signs to look for:**

- Lack of or delay in spoken language
- Repetitive use of language and/or motor mannerisms (e.g., hand-flapping, twirling objects)
- Little or no eye contact
- Lack of interest in peer relationships
- Lack of spontaneous or make-believe play
- Persistent fixation on parts of objects



After your child’s diagnosis, he or she is likely to undergo a series of formal and informal assessments for the rest of his or her life. Assessments are intended to provide information about your child in such areas as:

- Strengths and skill deficits
- Specific problem areas and/or needs
- Performance in relation to others
- Performance in relation to set standards or goals
- Effectiveness of instruction and/or intervention for your child
- Eligibility for services



*This ASVC Parent’s guide is intended to give parent and caregivers an overview of options and resources available in Ventura County and provide practical understanding of the assessment process, equip you with tools and information to help individuals and caretakers become a key participant in the process, and help you learn to use assessment outcomes to improve services and interventions for your child.*