

How is autism/ASD diagnosed?

It is important to remember that children develop at different rates. However, because autism is a "spectrum" disorder, meaning that difficulties range from mild to severe and vary with each individual, sometimes it may be difficult to diagnose.

ASD can only be formally diagnosed by a trained clinician after conducting formal diagnostic tests. The clinician may be a developmental pediatrician, psychiatrist, psychologist, or other trained and experienced professional.

Tools created for the purpose of diagnosing autism rely on observing the individual with suspected autism in structured and/or unstructured settings and asking questions of caregivers on the individual's history and behavior. A clinician may also suggest a neurological evaluation or genetic, metabolic, and electrophysiologic testing. There is no definitive medical test for a diagnosis. Instead, a medical diagnosis of autism will be based on whether the individual meets the criteria set forth in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition (DSM-IV)*.

The American Psychiatric Association has proposed changes to the DSM-IV, which will impact how autism is diagnosed. [Click here](#) to read a summary of these changes.