

# I think my child might be autistic

## what is autism?

Autism is a naturally occurring genetic variation in human neurology. It is not a disease or a disorder and it doesn't need fixing.

## how do I know if my child is autistic?

Autistic people are all different but there are some broad areas of experience that they share. These include differences in social communication, patterns of behaviour, interests or activities and sensory sensitivities.

## social communication differences might involve:

- Use of behaviour to communicate rather than words
- Differences in understanding verbal instructions and information
- Differences in communication that may impact on initiating conversations, turn taking in conversation or making small talk
- Scripting and/or echolalia

## differences arising from patterns of behaviour, interests or activities, might include:

- A preference for routines, and discomfort when routines are interrupted
- Anxiety in unfamiliar situations
- All encompassing interests that can be followed to the detriment of other activities
- Difference from priorities and interests of typical peers
- Stimming (repetitive physical movements, sounds, or repetitive movement of objects)

## sensory processing implications might include:

- Distress/anxiety/avoidance in response to overwhelming stimuli
- Seeking sensory experiences that are positive or pleasurable (e.g. deep pressure, touch, sounds or smells)
- Seeking strong physical and proprioceptive input from their environment (including other people) through exercise, deep pressure and other movement.
- Strong reactions to certain smells, textures, light or sounds
- Differences in motor coordination which may include bumping into things, or an atypical gait

**remember that the lists above do not describe all autistic people.**

**continued on page 2...**

# I think my child might be autistic, continued

## should I seek a formal diagnosis for my child?

A diagnosis of autism will allow your child to be eligible for a range of supports that may assist them as well as the opportunity to enhance self awareness and connection with the autistic community.

## what is the process involved in finding out if my child is autistic?

The process may vary somewhat depending on your location. If you decide that you would like to pursue a formal diagnosis for your child, the first step is to arrange an appointment with your GP or paediatrician and ask for a referral to a developmental paediatrician who is experienced in working with autistic children. Be aware that not all GP's and paediatricians are knowledgeable about autism and you may need to be assertive in requesting a referral.

The developmental paediatrician may refer you to one or two other professionals, such as a Speech Therapist or Child Psychologist, and require that they assess your child and send their reports to the Paediatrician. After reviewing these reports, the Paediatrician may diagnose your child as autistic.

## what do I do next?

Please see our fact sheet titled 'My child is autistic - what now?'