A Family's Journey: Understanding Your Child's Communication, Social Development and Early Signs of Autism

For more information scan this QR code or go to myhealth.alberta.ca/autism-family-and-caregiver-pathway

The information in this guide applies to infants and young children who show early signs related to autism. Autism is a condition that affects how a person's brain develops and works. Children with autism may face difficulty with communication, social interactions, and behaviours.
You are your child's most important support and a key part of their healthcare team. This guide will help you understand what to expect as you work with your child's healthcare team to care for and support your child. If you have any questions along the way, please ask your child's healthcare team.

Getting Help Early

All children with developmental delays or concerns can benefit from early support and resources.
- Contact Pediatric Rehabilitation to explore options–self referral is available.
- Consider other available community supports and your natural support network (e.g., playgroups).
- Apply early for Program Unit Funding (PUF) to access early intervention support through Alberta Education.
- Apply for the Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) to access family support services and, if applicable, child focused services.

Before your child's appointment with their healthcare provider

- Consider keeping a journal about your child. Write down or record video of things like daily routines, sleep, eating, changes in communication, activity and place transitions, likes and dislikes, bowel movements, and sensory triggers.
- Collect reports or assessments that have been done and keep them with your journal. Share these with your child's healthcare providers such as your family doctor or the Pediatric Rehabilitation team.
- Write down any changes, questions or concerns about your child's growth and development.
- Consider bringing other caregivers, a family member or friend to support you and your child during your appointment.
- When booking your appointment, you can ask for things that might make the appointment easier for you and your child (e.g., appointment time, quiet room, virtual options etc.)

Visit your child's healthcare provider

Your child's health includes physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, social, and environmental elements. In order to better support your child, healthcare providers need to hear from you and understand your family.
- Share what is important to your child and family, what their strengths and needs are, their support system, and what makes your child unique.
- Consider sharing the information collected in your journal, and any other reports and assessments.
- Your healthcare provider will ask you questions and assess your child. This may include:
  - o Questions about your family history with autism.
  - o Measurements of height, weight, head circumference, and reflexes.
  - o Questions about your child's development.
  - o Observing how your child plays or communicates.

Other assessments your child may have

- If your primary care provider or pediatric rehabilitation provider think your child would benefit from more evaluation, they may suggest vision, hearing and/or speech and language assessments. In many cases, you can self refer for these assessments, but a referral may still be needed for certain services.
- You may be asked to take information from other appointments back to your healthcare team. You can use your journal to help keep all the information in one place.
- Information from additional assessments will help you and your healthcare team decide what to do next to best support your child.

Review your child's support options

- Your healthcare provider might send your child to a clinic that offers therapy and other supports.
- Your healthcare provider may recommend that your child be seen by a pediatrician, a developmental pediatrician or a clinic that specializes in autism assessment.
- Ask who your child is being sent to and what they do.
- Ask how long it will take to be seen and what you should do if you don't hear back in the time you expect.

Keep taking care of yourself and your child

- It is important that you take care of yourself and your family while you care for your child.
- Talk with your support network and your healthcare team about your health and support needs.
- Look for or ask your healthcare team for local or online resources and supports.

Important Tips:

Need a clinic, family doctor or nurse practitioner?
https://albertafindaprovider.ca

Need a translator or interpreter?
Let your healthcare provider know.

Need health advice?
Call Health Link at 811
Rehabilitation Advice Line at 1-833-379-0563

Need culturally appropriate care?
Indigenous Support Line at 811

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