



## Autism and the Importance of Early Screening

### A brief overview

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how a child communicates, interacts socially and responds to their environment. The term "spectrum" reflects the wide range of abilities and challenges seen in individuals with autism. Autism manifests itself differently in every child making early identification crucial as it can make a significant difference in the child's developmental journey.

### Understanding the condition

Autism usually appears in early childhood, often before the age of three. Some children may show signs within the first year of life, while others develop typically for a period and then show delays or regression. Common features include difficulties with eye contact, limited speech or delayed language development, repetitive behaviours, sensitivity to sounds or textures and challenges in social interaction.

What is imperative is to understand that autism is not a disease but a lifelong condition that requires understanding, support and appropriate interventions.

### Early Screening: What it entails

Early screening refers to the process of identifying developmental differences or delays at a young age, usually during routine paediatric check-ups. Screening tools are simple questionnaires or observations used by healthcare professionals to assess a child's communication, behaviour and social skills.

These screenings are extremely effective in helping identify children who may need further evaluation by specialists such as developmental paediatricians, psychologists or speech therapists.

### The significance of early screening

Early screening plays a crucial role in autism. It goes a long way in improving outcomes for children with autism. The brain develops rapidly in the first few years of life, making this a critical time for effective intervention. When autism is identified early, children can begin therapies that support communication, social skills and adaptive behaviours at a time when they are most effective.

Research has shown that early intervention can significantly improve language development, learning abilities and social interactions. It also reduces the severity of behavioural challenges over time. Children who receive timely support are often better equipped to cope with everyday situations.

### How families benefit

Early screening, apart from benefiting the child also provides much-needed clarity and support for families. Parents often sense that something may be different but may not know how to address their concerns. Screening provides answers and helps families access guidance, therapy and educational resources sooner. It also empowers parents with knowledge.

### How awareness helps

Promoting early screening also has the invaluable benefit of helping reduce stigma around autism. When autism is discussed openly and identified early, it fosters acceptance and understanding within families, schools and communities. Awareness encourages timely help-seeking and ensures that children are supported rather than labelled or misunderstood.

### Autism is not the end

Autism cannot be prevented, but early screening and intervention can greatly enhance a child's quality of life. Parents should trust their instincts and seek professional advice if they notice developmental delays or behavioural differences.