



Understanding Autism

Tips for parents and caregivers on identifying early warning signs

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Currently, one in 110 children in the United States has autism, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Autism is a developmental disability that occurs when the brain has trouble functioning properly. It affects a child's ability to speak, learn, and communicate with others. At this time, there is no cure for autism, but kids who are screened and diagnosed at a young age and visit a doctor regularly for treatment show significant improvement in learning and communication skills.

In recognition of April being Autism Awareness Month, First 5 Yuba wants parents and caregivers to be aware of the following early signs of autism to help families identify a need for early intervention and treatment.

Early Warning Signs

Not all children develop at the same rate, but some may need further evaluation and special services to help them grow up healthy. Autism, in particular, can be difficult to diagnose because it affects each child differently. Pay attention to certain signs in your child's behavior. See a health care provider for further screenings if you notice your child exhibits any of these indicators:

- Does not coo or smile by 6 months old
- Has trouble sitting, standing up, or reaching for objects by 1 year old
- Does not say simple words like "mama" or "dada" by 1 year old
- Does not turn his or her head to follow sounds or voices
- Does not react to loud noises
- Repeats certain behaviors, including some that are harmful like banging his or her head
- Makes little or no eye contact and wants to be alone
- Does not play games like peek-a-boo or "pretend" (e.g., pretending to feed a doll)
- Any loss of speech or social skills

Early Intervention and Treatment

By getting help at an early age when the brain is still developing – from birth to age 3 – parents can help children reduce the effects of autism by the time they start kindergarten. Some of the most common treatment options include speech therapy, diet, and therapies focused on improving relationships.

For more information, contact First 5 Yuba at (530) 749-4877 or www.first5yuba.org and www.first5california.com/parents.

About First 5 Yuba

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child's growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to support programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. First 5 Yuba distributes Prop. 10 revenues to programs and services that meet local needs.