



# Supporting a Child with Autism

Autism, also known as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a condition that affects the way children behave and their ability to communicate.

Children with ASD tend to act differently than other children. Parents are often the first to notice the signs. Early treatment may reduce symptoms and help your child reach his or her full potential.

## Signs and Symptoms

Many children with ASD start to show signs before they are two years old. Symptoms can vary from mild to severe and interfere with daily life. Children with ASD may:

- Not smile or express normal emotions
- Talk less than normal or lose speech or social skills they once had
- Have a hard time making friends or connecting with others
- Repeat words or movements, such as rocking, spinning or hand-flapping
- Have a hard time dealing with change or accepting variety in food or daily routines
- Have an unusual and intense interest in certain objects or subjects
- Be overly sensitive to lights, sounds, smells or touch

## Treatment

Autism is often treated through Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). ABA therapy is widely accepted by health care experts. Programs teach a variety of skills, including:

- Communication
- Socially appropriate behaviors
- Self-help methods
- Play and leisure skills

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## If You Suspect Your Child Has Autism

Getting care from qualified providers can help your child better relate to others and the world around them. Follow these steps to learn what your health plan covers and seek the right care for your child:

### 1. Talk to your doctor.

If you think your child has signs of ASD, make an appointment with your pediatrician or primary care provider. They can help decide if your child needs to be evaluated further.

### 2. Check your benefits.

Which services are covered and your cost can differ from plan to plan. Call Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas (BCBSTX) to find out if your benefits cover ABA and if preauthorization is needed. We can also help you find an in-network ABA specialist.

### 3. Schedule an evaluation.

If your child's doctor recommends formal testing, a qualified specialist can confirm whether your child has ASD and could benefit from ABA therapy. To be covered by your health plan, a pediatrician, neurologist or licensed psychologist with a doctoral degree must complete this step.

### 4. Be an active part of your child's care plan.

Your child and family members all need to learn and practice skills to help manage ASD symptoms. If ABA therapy is recommended and approved, you will need to attend family training. Your autism specialist will also need to update the treatment plan every six months for the therapy to be covered.

If your doctor suggests other services, like speech, occupational or physical therapy, call us to find out if these need additional review to be covered.

## Learn More

Dealing with an ASD diagnosis can be challenging. The groups below can help you learn more about autism, find local resources and connect with other families affected by ASD.

**Autism Society:** [www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)

**Autism Speaks:** [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**  
[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism)

**National Institute on Mental Health:** [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)



## Caleb's Story

Ben and Alyssa began to have questions about their son Caleb's behavior when he was just a toddler. Caleb tended to avoid eye contact, and he didn't seem to recognize his own name. More than once, a friend or family member had said "Caleb is such a quiet kid".

In fact, by the time he was 18 months old, Caleb had still not spoken a single word. Ben and Alyssa tried everything they could think of, but Caleb didn't smile when they smiled at him.

**Read the steps to the left to learn what Ben and Alyssa should do next.**



**For help finding a qualified provider or understanding your benefits, call the Customer Service number on the back of your member ID card.**