

16 Early Signs of Autism by 16 Months



Babies are Natural Explorers

Babies are natural explorers — motivated to learn from birth. Their drive for learning comes from their fascination with everything that captures their attention.



Babies are Drawn to Look at People and Interact

Babies are drawn to look at faces by 1-2 months and then eager to seek social attention and interaction.

Their enthusiasm to share their interests, experiences, and accomplishments is contagious.

The Early Signs of Autism Unfold From 9 to 16 Months

The early signs of autism are easy to miss. Autism can be diagnosed by 18-24 months but . . .

. . . it's not usually diagnosed until 4-5 years.



By catching autism early, you can access intervention earlier and guide your child's success.



Diagnosing autism can be difficult because there are no medical or blood tests. The diagnosis is based on behavioral symptoms or features.



The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children be screened for autism at 18 and 24 months. Autism can be diagnosed by 18-24 months, but it's not usually diagnosed until 4-5 years.

The early signs of autism can have a cascading effect on brain development and lead to significant social, language, and cognitive deficits, as well as challenging behaviors, if they're not caught early.



Families and others can learn the 16 early signs of autism that unfold from 9 to 16 months — to help you detect autism before it's usually diagnosed.

1. HARD TO GET YOUR BABY TO LOOK AT YOU

It should be easy for you to get your baby to look at you. Babies are motivated to be near you, look at your face, and linger on your eyes.



If it's hard to get your baby to look at you, this can be an early sign of autism.

2. RARELY SHARES ENJOYMENT WITH YOU

Babies readily share enjoyment with you by smiling or laughing and looking at you.



Some children with autism smile to show they're happy but don't share their enjoyment.



Others show little facial expression or have flat affect and rarely smile so you may not know when they're happy.



If your baby rarely shares enjoyment with you, especially when you're available to interact, this can be an early sign of autism.

3. RARELY SHARES THEIR INTERESTS WITH YOU

Babies are eager to share their interests with you, first with gestures like showing and pointing, and then with sounds and words.



Notice what your baby is paying attention to — to figure out what they're interested in.

If your baby rarely shares their interests with you, this can be an early sign of autism.

4. RARELY RESPONDS TO THEIR NAME OR OTHER BIDS

Babies are tuned to listen to your voice — when you call their name, they respond by looking toward you.



Babies readily respond to other social bids, like “come here” with your arms reaching out . . .



. . . wave “bye-bye” as you’re leaving . . .



. . . touch your nose . . . or look where you’re pointing.

Some children with autism don’t respond by looking where you’re pointing . . .

. . . but instead look at your hand.



If your baby rarely responds to their name or other bids for social interaction, this can be an early sign of autism.

5. LIMITED USE OF GESTURES SUCH AS SHOW AND POINT

Babies are eager to draw your attention to things they’re interested in using gestures such as showing . . .



. . . and pointing by 12-14 months of age.

These early gestures propel the development of words.

An early sign of autism is limited use of gestures, especially showing and pointing.

6. HARD TO LOOK AT YOU AND USE A GESTURE AND SOUND

Babies learn to use gestures and sounds from 9-16 months to let you know what they want or don't want, and what they're interested in.



It should be easy for your baby to use a gesture and sound while they're looking at you.

If it's hard for your baby to look at you and use a gesture and sound, all at the same time, this can be an early sign of autism.

7. LITTLE OR NO IMITATING OTHER PEOPLE OR PRETENDING

By 13 months, children begin to learn by observing others and copying what they do and say.



They use a variety of functional actions — like putting a sippy cup in their mouth to drink . . .

. . . and a spoon in their mouth to eat.

From this, they learn to pretend in play — they may offer you a sip with a cup or bottle, give Teddy bear a hug and cover him with a blanket . . .

. . . or jiggle a pan with invisible stuff inside to pretend to cook.

Children with autism usually have strengths in using objects in solitary play.

If your child is showing little or no imitating of others, and is not beginning to pretend in play, it can be an early sign of autism.

8. USES YOUR HAND AS A TOOL

Babies learn to use a variety of gestures from 9-16 months, like giving, reaching, raising arms . . .



. . . showing, waving, and pointing.

Because children with autism may have limited use of these early gestures, they may develop unusual ways to communicate, like using your hand as a tool.



If your baby is moving or pulling your hand or body part as if it's a tool, this can be an early sign of autism, particularly if they are not looking at you.

9. MORE INTERESTED IN OBJECTS THAN PEOPLE

Babies are eager to interact with people . . .



. . . and use objects as a way to get your attention.

If your baby is more interested in objects than people, this can be an early sign of autism.

10. UNUSUAL WAYS OF MOVING THEIR FINGERS, HANDS, OR BODY

Babies with autism may show unusual stiffening or flaring of their fingers . . .



. . . or unusual ways of posturing or moving their hands or body.

11. REPEATS UNUSUAL MOVEMENTS WITH OBJECTS

Babies with autism may repeat unusual movements with objects such as spinning or wobbling . . .



. . . knocking over and rolling . . .



. . . and lining things up, or other repetitive actions that are unusual for their age.

12. DEVELOPS RITUALS AND MAY GET VERY UPSET OVER CHANGE

Babies learn morning and nighttime routines with your help. Making activities predictable can provide opportunities for learning.



Babies usually flow with changes in routines such as ending an activity early or adding a new step.



Children with autism may develop rituals and be unwilling to complete a series of behaviors a different way.

If your child insists on certain things being the same and gets very upset over unexpected change, this may be an early sign of autism.



13. EXCESSIVE INTEREST IN PARTICULAR OBJECTS OR ACTIVITIES

Babies readily shift their attention between people and objects creating opportunities to learn from social interaction.



Babies with autism may show excessive interest in particular objects or activities and can get stuck or overly focused on these.

This interest may be so intense that it's difficult to shift their attention away from an object of interest to something else.



An intense interest can lead to skills that are advanced for their age, such as building with blocks . . .

. . . or learning the shapes of letters and numbers, and can be missed as a sign of autism.

If your child shows excessive interest in particular objects or activities, this may be an early sign of autism.

14. VERY FOCUSED ON OR ATTACHED TO UNUSUAL OBJECTS

Babies with autism can be very focused on or attached to objects that are unusual for their age, such as long strips of cloth, utensils, chains . . .



. . . rocks, sticks, flowing water . . .

. . . or gadgets they can take apart and put together.

If your child is very focused on or attached to unusual objects, this may be an early sign of autism.

15. UNUSUAL REACTION TO SOUNDS, SIGHTS, OR TEXTURES

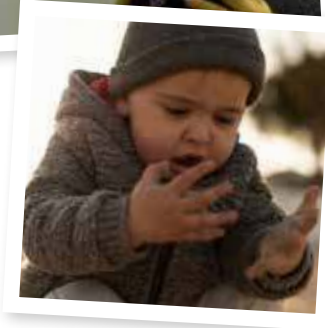
Babies with autism can show unusual reactions or be very sensitive to certain sounds, sights, or textures. They may get overly excited about a page in a book or hold their hands over their ears in response to loud sounds . . .



. . . squint or flap their hands to certain lights . . .



. . . gag when they eat food with certain textures . . .



. . . or get upset about a tag in a shirt or something sticky or gooey.

If your child shows unusual reactions to sounds, sights, or textures, this may be an early sign of autism.

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BABY NAVIGATOR — WHAT EVERY PARENT NEEDS TO KNOW

Go to www.BabyNavigator.com to find out what every parent needs to know about early learning. What you do and say can make all the difference.

16. STRONG INTEREST IN UNUSUAL SENSORY EXPERIENCES

Babies with autism can show very strong interest in unusual sensory experiences, such as excessive rubbing of certain textures . . .



. . . looking out the side of their eye or closely inspecting a block or toy train as it rolls by . . .

. . . or licking objects.



If your child shows strong interest in unusual sensory experiences, this may be an early sign of autism.

WHAT IF YOUR CHILD SHOWS SOME EARLY SIGNS OF AUTISM?

Any one of these signs may not be a problem. But in combination, they may signal a need to conduct a screening or diagnostic evaluation.

As a general guide . . . if your child shows any 4 of these early signs, use our free online [Social Communication CheckUp](http://www.babynavigator.com/SocialCommunicationCheckUp) found on the Baby Navigator web site (www.babynavigator.com) for children 9-18 months to screen your baby for autism.

If your child shows 8 or more of these early signs, ask for a referral for a diagnostic evaluation.

Talk to your child's doctor or teacher about any of these early signs or contact your local early intervention program.

Share this **Lookbook** with them. Go to <https://babynavigator.com/what-if/> to find tools and resources on what every parent needs to know about early learning.



CATCHING SIGNS OF AUTISM EARLY CAN HELP YOU GUIDE YOUR CHILD'S SUCCESS

Early detection and early intervention can have a lifetime impact for children with autism. This opportunity to catch signs of autism early can help you guide your child's success.



DON'T BE AFRAID — LEARN THE 16 EARLY SIGNS OF AUTISM

"It's going to be a problem eventually that you will have to deal with. Don't be afraid. Don't let that stop you from helping your child." — Jacobi's mom