Autism Spectrum Disorders - Early Identification

> **The early identification of Autism and other Pervasive Developmental Disorders (Autism Spectrum Disorders) is the first step in designing effective interventions to support successful participation in home, school and community environments.**

Are there any behaviors that signal a need to evaluate a child for an autism spectrum disorder?

A doctor should evaluate a child for autism if he or she displays any two of the following after his/her first birthday:

> Does not gesture (point, wave, etc.)
> Does not respond to his/her name when called
> Does not show an interest in other children
> Does not bring objects to show to an adult
> Does not look at a toy pointed out across the room
> Does not imitate facial expressions or actions
> Does not babble or coo by 12 months of age
> Does not say single words by 16 months of age
> Does not say two-word phrases on his/her own (rather than just repeating what someone says to him/her) by 24 months of age
> Has *any* loss of *any* language or social skill at *any* age

Where should parents go for an evaluation?

Each school district is responsible to evaluate children ages 3 through 21 who are suspected of having a disability. Contact the local school for the name and number of the Special Education Administrator.

Children from birth to 3 years of age are served through Vermont's Family, Infant & Toddler Project (FITP): (800) 870-6758 or (800) 660-4427.

What will happen during the evaluation process?

With the family, a professional from the school or FITP will gather information about the child. In addition to parent input, information sources may include the child's pediatrician and teachers, as well as standardized or other assessments. The results of the evaluation will indicate whether the child is eligible for and in need of special education or early intervention services. If the child is eligible for special education, the parents will meet with a team to develop an individualized plan to support the child's continued development.

Where can I get further information about autism and autism spectrum disorders?

- Vermont Department of Education
   http://www.state.vt.us/educ/cses or (802) 828-2755
- Vermont Autism Information Center and Autism Society of Vermont
   http://www.autism-info.org/index.html or   (800) 559-7398
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)
   http://nichd.nih.gov/autism
- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
   http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/autism.cfm

Autism Spectrum Disorders:

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (DSM IV)* defines autism under the category of "pervasive developmental disorder" (PDD). These disorders are commonly referred to as "Autism Spectrum Disorders". Pervasive developmental disorders include:

> Autism / Autistic Disorder
> PDD-NOS (not otherwise specified)/Atypical Autism
> Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD)
> Rett Syndrome
> Asperger Syndrome

Autism/Autistic Disorder

Autism is a disability category defined in Vermont State regulations as:

> *… a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3 that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences… A child who manifests the characteristics of autism after age 3 could be diagnosed as having autism if the criteria in [the above] subsection are satisfied.*

A child diagnosed with autism may be eligible for special education or specific accommodations (504 plan) as part of his/her educational plan.