



Does my child have Autism?

What is autism?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how a person's brain works. It changes the way a person sees, thinks about and understands the world around them. Around 1 in 40 people are on the autism spectrum. Autism can be diagnosed in people of all ages and all cultural backgrounds.

Autism can affect how someone:

- Talks and listens
- Plays with others
- Understands feelings and rules

The Māori word for autism is takiwātanga, which translates to “in their own time and space”, which is how we like to describe autism here at Banksia Paediatrics.

Everyone with autism is different—some might talk a lot, while others might not talk much at all. But many kids with autism have skills or interests that make them unique.

How can I tell if my child might have autism?

It can be tricky. Autism presents on a spectrum, which means that it can look different in different children.

You might notice your child:

- Has trouble making eye contact
- Prefers to play alone
- Might not smile or show feelings in ways you expect
- Repeats certain actions (like flapping hands)
- Likes to do the same things over and over, like lining up toys or repeating words
- Doesn't talk or plays differently from other kids
- Gets upset with loud noises or changes in routine

Every child is different, so if you have questions or concerns, it's always a good idea to talk to your GP or one of the specialists at Banksia Paediatrics.



What causes autism?

No one knows exactly what causes autism — but here's what we *do* know:

- Autism is something you're born with
 - Autism is not something you catch, like a cold.
 - It starts before a baby is even born, while the brain is still growing.
- Genes (your DNA) play a big role
 - Autism can run in families. If someone in the family has autism, it's more likely (but not certain) another person might have it too.
 - Scientists believe lots of tiny differences in genes add up to cause autism.
- Environment might matter too
 - Things around a baby during pregnancy (like a parent's age or some rare health conditions) might increase the chances, but we're not sure what.
 - But there's no single cause — and no one thing makes it happen.
- Vaccines do *not* cause autism
 - This is very important.
 - Vaccines have been proven safe, many studies have shown they do not cause autism.

What should I do if I think my child has autism?

If you think your child might have autism, the best step is to talk to your child's GP about your concerns, and get a referral to a Paediatrician or child Psychologist.

The Paediatrician or Psychologist will use a range of tools to understand how your child thinks, plays, speaks, and reacts.

This might include:

- **Interviews** with parents or carers
- **Watching your child** play or do tasks
- **Questionnaires** about your child's behaviour
- **Speech and language tests**
- **Cognitive assessments** (thinking and learning skills)

Some of these things would be part of a regular consultation, however some parts of the assessment may take extra time and resources therefore have a separate fee attached. During your first consultation at Banksia Paediatrics you will discuss the assessment process. Reach out to the Admin team here at Banksia Paediatrics to find out more.

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Can I ask that???

Why does my child prefer being alone?

Socialising can be confusing or tiring for some kids with autism.

They may:

- Feel overwhelmed in noisy places
- Find it hard to know what others are thinking
- Feel more calm and safe when they are playing alone

It is important to remember that this doesn't mean they don't want friends. They still want connection, just in their own way.

Can kids with autism learn to talk and make friends?

Many children with autism:

- Learn to speak or use other ways to communicate
- Make friends, especially with support and practice
- Therapies can really help with these skills
 - Speech therapy and social skills groups are examples

Why do some autistic kids flap their hands or rock back and forth?

This is called **stimming** – short for “self-stimulating behaviour.”

- Kids do it to:
 - Feel calm
 - Show excitement
 - Deal with stress

It's kind of like how some people tap their fingers or bounce their legs when they're nervous or thinking hard. It's a natural way to handle feelings and isn't usually something to stop unless it's harmful.



What are kids with autism good at?

Every kid with autism has their own strengths and challenges- just like every kid without autism! Sometimes we all need a reminder to remember our child's strengths, especially when we are going through a tricky patch.

- You might notice that a lot of kids with autism are great at:
 - Remembering facts
 - Noticing tiny details
 - Solving puzzles or using technology
 - Talking about topics they love

Often, kids with autism become experts in subjects they love because they focus deeply and work hard. These strengths can be a great source of confidence and joy.

Can autism be “cured”?

Autism isn't an illness, so there's no cure. It's a different way of being.

The goal isn't to change your child, but to support them so they can:

- Learn new skills
- Feel happy
- Live a good life

Early help, like therapy or special learning programs, can make a big difference in how your child grows and develops.

How can I help my child?

Try to learn what makes your child feel good and what might upset them.

- Some kids like quiet places
- Some may have certain toys that calm them down

Kids with autism often do better when routines and expectations are clear.

- Clearly outline schedules and routines
- Use visual timetables or calendars when possible
- This helps reduce anxiety and provides a sense of security and predictability



Be patient and celebrate their progress, even small steps.

- Listening to your child and giving them space to be themselves will help build trust and happiness.

Learn about autism together as a family. Have a look at the rest of the resources on our website.

What if my child struggles at school or with friends?

Many kids with autism find school or social situations tricky. They might need extra help with learning or understanding how to play with other children.

Talk to their teacher about extra help. Ask about:

- Special learning plans (like IEPs)
- Behaviour support plans for the classroom
- Modifying the environment
 - Eg having a “chill out” zone, using noise cancelling headphones, etc
- Speech or social skills therapy in the school setting

How do I talk to my child about autism?

It depends on the age and developmental stage of your child.

One simple way to explain autism to a child is:

- “Some people’s brains work a different way — that’s called autism. It’s just part of who they are, like having brown eyes or being tall.”

Have a look at the Resources page on our website for other great educational resources.