



Understanding Autism

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS & TODDLERS

TAF CARES

Table of Contents

- 01. Introduction
- 02. What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?
- 02. Myths vs Facts (Autism in African Community)
- 03. Early Signs (Social Communication)
- 04. Early Signs (Behavior and Interests)
- 05. Not Just About Delays
- 06. What if you suspect Autism?
- 07. Resources
- 08. A Journey, Not a Destination
- 09. Your Role as a Parent



INTRODUCTION

Dear Parent,

We understand the unique challenges you face as a parent of a special educational needs (SEN) toddler.

It can be overwhelming and filled with uncertainty. TAF Cares is committed to walking alongside you, providing guidance and support every step of the way.

Early awareness of autism signs and timely access to resources can unlock your child's full potential.

This e-book is a starting point in your journey of understanding and advocating for your little one.





WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition. It means that your child's brain develops differently, leading to distinct ways of interacting with the world, socializing, and thinking.

Remember: Autism is a spectrum, much like a rainbow! Every autistic child possesses unique strengths and challenges.

MYTHS VS. FACTS: AUTISM IN AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

Myth: Autism is caused by witchcraft or a curse.

Fact: Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition with a strong genetic basis. Environmental factors may play a role, but curses and witchcraft are not causes.

Myth: Children with autism are possessed or dangerous.

Fact: Autism impacts social and communication skills, and while this can sometimes lead to behavioral differences, children with autism are not dangerous and deserve compassion.

Myth: Autism is a Western disease that doesn't affect Africans.

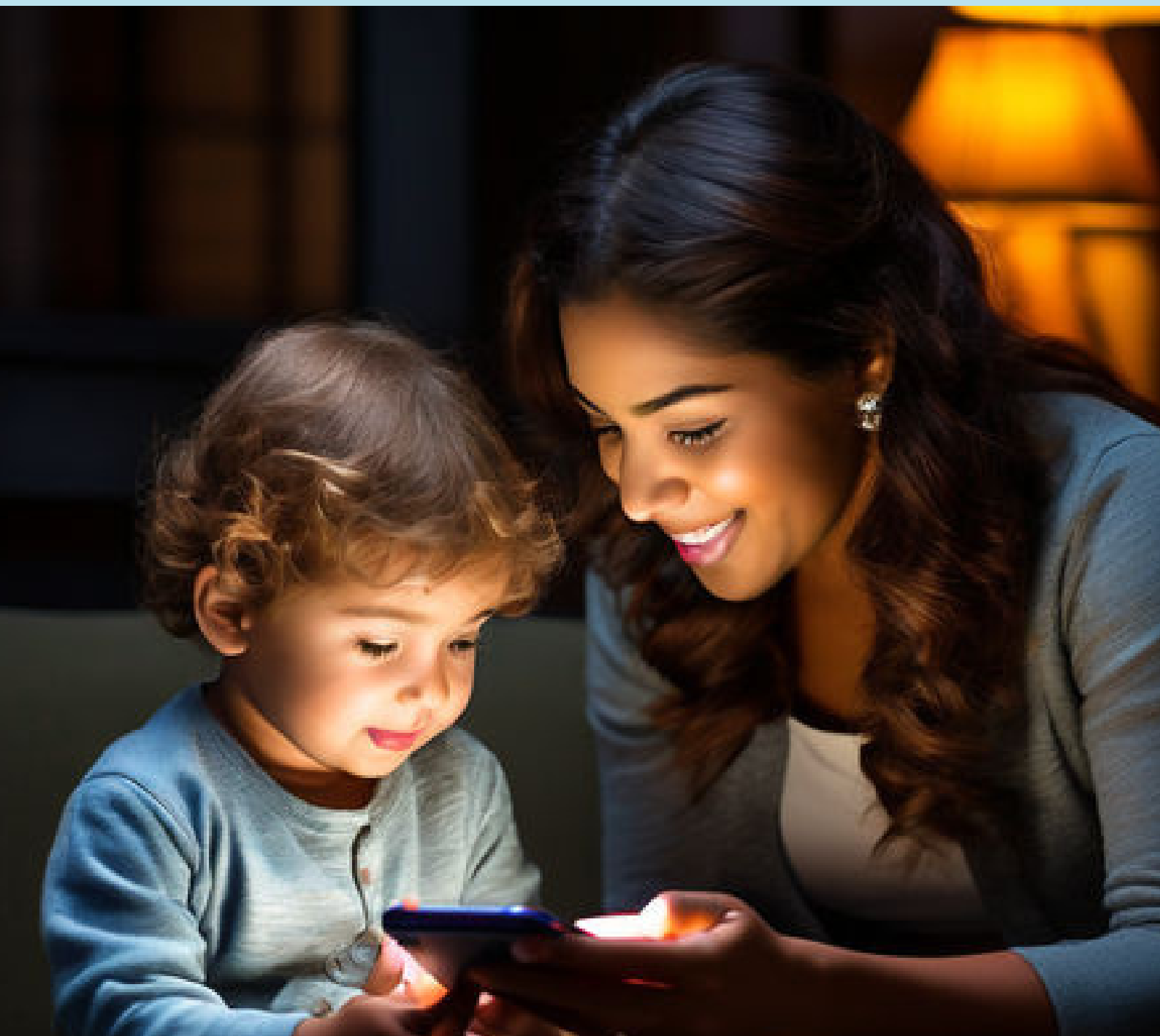
Fact: Autism occurs in people of all races, ethnicities, and cultures worldwide.

Myth: There's no hope for children with autism.

Fact: Early diagnosis and appropriate therapies like speech therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioral interventions can significantly improve a child's development and quality of life.

EARLY SIGNS IN SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

- **Missing Social Milestones:** Limited or unusual eye contact, infrequent smiles, struggles responding to their name.
- **Struggling with Gestures:** Difficulties pointing, waving or showing objects meaningfully.
- **Different Play Patterns:** Limited pretend or imaginative play, difficulty playing with others in typical social ways.



EARLY SIGNS IN BEHAVIOR AND INTERESTS

- **Repetitive Actions:** Unusual body movements like rocking, spinning, or hand-flapping.
- **Fixated Interests:** Intense focus on specific toys, objects, or topics for extended periods.
- **Change is Hard:** Strong reactions, even distress, when experiencing shifts in routines.
- **Sensory Differences:** Being overly sensitive to noise, light, textures, or seeking more sensory input than





NOT JUST ABOUT DELAYS

- Not just absent skills: ASD isn't just about what your child can't do, but how they develop differently
- Examples: Your child may learn to talk, but use language in unusual ways or have difficulty with back-and-forth conversations.
- Your Child's Baseline: Focus on your child's progress compared to where they started, not just whether they meet age-expected milestones.





WHAT IF YOU SUSPECT AUTISM?

Trust Your Gut: You know your child best. If you sense something is different, don't hesitate to seek help.

Steps to take:

- Talk to your pediatrician and express your concerns.
- Request a specialist referral for a comprehensive autism evaluation.

Resources:

We offer speech and language therapy. Our mission is to empower African families of autistic children with support, resources, and a sense of community.

Autism South Africa (ASA): ASA offers information, support groups, advocacy, and guidance for those affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder.
(<https://www.aut2know.co.za/>)

Autism Speaks Africa: Find resources, toolkits, and a focus on increasing understanding and acceptance of autism across the African continent.
(<https://www.autismspeaks.org/>)

Els for Autism Foundation (South Africa): This foundation promotes autism research, and resources for families, and works to create autism-friendly spaces.
(<https://elsforautism.org/>)



A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION

Support Network: You are not alone! Find support groups, connect with families facing similar experiences, and learn from each other.

See the Strengths: Never lose sight of your child's unique abilities and talents. Focus on growing them!

The Power of Early Intervention: Speech therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioral interventions can make significant differences in your child's development.



YOUR ROLE AS A PARENT

Support Network: You are not alone! Find support groups, connect with families facing similar experiences, and learn from each other.

See the Strengths: Never lose sight of your child's unique abilities and talents. Focus on growing them!

The Power of Early Intervention: Speech therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioral interventions can make significant differences in your child's development.



Autism is not a disability,
it's a different ability.

Stuart Duncan

MESSAGE TO AFRICAN PARENTS

Your love, determination, and advocacy will make all the difference in your child's life.

Remember, you are not alone.

We are here to support you at every step.