



# Nurturing Development: Early Play Behaviors in Infants at Risk for Autism Spectrum Disorder

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## INTRODUCTION

Understanding early play behaviors in infants at elevated likelihood for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is crucial for early identification and intervention. Research has shown that certain play patterns and interactions during infancy can serve as early indicators of developmental differences associated with ASD. By closely examining these behaviors, healthcare providers and caregivers can intervene early, providing support and resources to enhance developmental outcomes.

## DESCRIPTION

Infants at elevated likelihood for ASD often exhibit distinct play behaviors compared to typically developing infants. One notable aspect is the presence of repetitive or stereotyped behaviors during play. These may include repetitive actions with toys or objects, such as spinning, tapping, or lining up items in a particular order. While some level of repetitive play is common in infancy, excessive or rigid repetition can be indicative of underlying developmental differences. Another characteristic observed in infants at elevated likelihood for ASD is a preference for solitary play over social play. While all infants engage in solitary play at times, those at risk for ASD may demonstrate a consistent preference for playing alone rather than engaging with caregivers or peers. This preference may be accompanied by reduced interest in joint attention and social reciprocity, such as sharing toys or responding to social cues during play interactions. Additionally, infants at elevated likelihood for ASD may display atypical sensory responses during play. Sensory sensitivities, such as aversion to certain textures, sounds, or lights, can influence how infants engage with toys and their environment. Some infants may show heightened sensitivity to sensory stimuli, leading to distress or withdrawal during play activities. Understanding and addressing these sensory challenges are essential for creating supportive play environments for infants at risk for ASD. One of the key goals in

monitoring early play behaviors in infants at elevated likelihood for ASD is to identify red flags or developmental delays that may warrant further evaluation and intervention. Early intervention programs, such as early childhood developmental services or autism-specific interventions, can provide targeted support to address developmental differences and promote positive developmental outcomes. Parental involvement and caregiver support play a critical role in promoting healthy play behaviors and interactions for infants at risk for ASD. Educating parents and caregivers about the importance of early play interactions, responsive caregiving, and creating supportive play environments can empower them to facilitate their child's development effectively. Furthermore, play-based interventions can be highly beneficial for infants at elevated likelihood for ASD. These interventions focus on enhancing social communication, joint attention, sensory regulation, and play skills through structured and engaging activities. Incorporating evidence-based practices, such as applied behavior analysis techniques, into play interventions can further support positive developmental outcomes. It is important to note that while certain play behaviors may raise concerns about ASD risk, not all infants displaying these behaviors will go on to receive an ASD diagnosis.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, understanding and monitoring early play behaviors in infants at elevated likelihood for ASD is essential for early identification and intervention. By recognizing red flags, promoting supportive play environments, providing parent education and support, and implementing play-based interventions, healthcare providers and caregivers can play a pivotal role in enhancing developmental outcomes for infants at risk for ASD. Early intervention efforts can lead to improved social communication, sensory regulation, and play skills, laying a strong foundation for positive developmental trajectories.

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