Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?
Autism Spectrum Disorder is a term commonly used to refer to the following diagnoses:

- Autistic Disorder
- Asperger’s Disorder
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)

These diagnoses describe a common set of developmental difficulties in relating to others and communicating as well as selective interests and repetitive behaviours. Autism Spectrum Disorders are developmental disorders which mean they are lifelong conditions; however children can still be supported to achieve positive gains in their development and participate in their communities.

How is it diagnosed?
Autism Spectrum Disorders may be diagnosed by the following professionals; paediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, speech pathologists, or occupational therapists (these professionals may diagnose as a team or provide an individual assessment). Diagnosis usually involves interviews with parents and other adults involved in the care of the child, observations and may include various assessment tools.

How can I support my child with Autism Spectrum Disorder?
Parents report that it can be very helpful to obtain a clear picture of their child’s developmental strengths, sensory preferences and areas of concern to assist in focusing on relevant goals to support their child. Families are encouraged to consult their Maternal Child Health Nurse, Paediatrician or Early Childhood Intervention Practitioner for more information on further supports.

Tuning in to your child’s interests and supporting them with exploring their world is a great way to build on your child’s ability to interact and engage with their others, and their environment.

Current research suggests that the best opportunities for promoting development for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders lies in early identification and behavioural based intervention incorporated into daily routines. Providing lots of opportunities for families and their children to have fun in everyday routines; sharing praise and encouragement, using visuals, communicating with children using simple language and instructions are some examples of strategies that have been shown to be effective in promoting learning and development. Providing sensory calming activities can also be used to support your child’s learning and promote positive behaviours. Some children may benefit from using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems.

Resources and acknowledgments:
Early Childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA): www.eciavic.org.au
Raising Children’s Network: www.raisingchildrensnetwork.net.au
Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre: http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/
Please find resources for supporting children’s development at the EPIC website: www.epic.edu.au

Prepared and Collated by the Education Program for Infants & Children Inc. Visit www.epic.edu.au for resources and training information.