



Family  
Outreach

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# Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS)

The CARS is a test intended for the diagnosis of children aged two and older. The CARS has a scale of 15 items to be observed and discussed with the primary care-giver, as well as other parties that are familiar with the child (e.g., therapists, teachers, child care providers). The 15 items include the following:

- relationship to people
- imitation
- emotional response
- body use
- object use
- adaptation to change
- visual response
- level and consistency of intellectual response
- taste-touch-smell response and use
- fear and nervousness
- verbal communication
- non-verbal communication
- activity level
- general impressions
- listening response

The child is observed, care-givers interviewed, and records are reviewed before a rating is given using a seven-point scale, which indicates the degree to which the child's behavior is different from that of a typically-developing child of the same age. Children who score above a given point are categorized as autistic. In addition, scores falling within the autistic range can be divided into two categories – mild to moderate, and severe autism.

Professionals (e.g., psychologists, special educators, speech pathologists) can easily be trained to use the CARS but only a Licensed Clinical Psychologist from CDC will be making the diagnosis. The CARS generally takes about two hours to administer and score.

CDC's Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) evaluation packets must be completed on all children referred prior to the day of the evaluation. Pre-staffing to review the information with the psychologist occurs 30 minutes prior to the evaluation. Timeliness by all is imperative. CDC's Intake Coordinator or Family Support Specialist is the evaluation facilitator and the liaison between the team and the family. Their role is integral because they have not only observed the child, but have reviewed all of the relevant information.

Diagnostic results are always discussed with the family directly following the evaluation. The Licensed Clinical Psychologist is responsible for the formal diagnosis. ASD evaluation reports are due two weeks following the evaluation date. They should be written in family-friendly terminology and recommendations should be brief and individualized, avoiding elaborate treatment options.

*Helping children with developmental delays reach their potential*