

# SEED Study to Explore Early Development

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## Sprouting SEEDs: Young Children’s Special Interests and Repetitive Behaviors

Many parents can tell you about the favorite stuffed animal their preschool son must take everywhere, or how their 3-year-old daughter insists that she wear a specific set of pajamas to bed every night. Young children commonly develop interests in certain objects or activities or like to play out specific routines. For most children, these interests or behaviors go away or change within a few months without interrupting everyday activities.

However, for some children, these interests or behaviors are much more intense and last longer than just a few months. It may be a sign of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) if children develop unusually intense interests that take up a lot of their time, behaviors that seem uncommonly repetitive, or behaviors that are so inflexible that the child cannot be calmed if a routine is changed.

For a child to be diagnosed with ASD, at least two of the following behaviors must be present:

- Evidence of intense and specific interests;
- Unusually strict routines or rituals;
- Unusual body movements, repetitive speech or behaviors, or both; and
- Atypical response to the sound, taste, touch, smell, or feel of objects.

Children with other types of disabilities might have these interests or behaviors as well, but do not have the social and communication challenges seen among those with ASD.

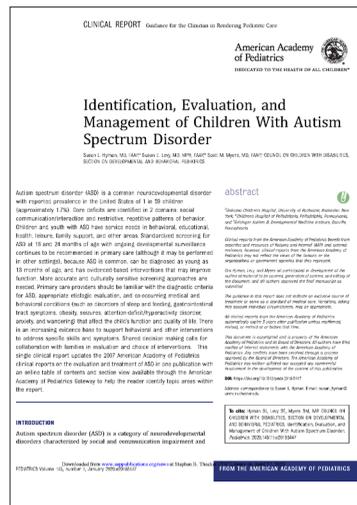
Some examples of intense interests, strict routines, unusual body movements, or repetitive behaviors include

- Having to watch a certain show at the same time every day or else the child has a meltdown;
- Needing to close all the doors before leaving the house;
- Becoming overly upset if a parent drives a different way to or from school; and
- Flapping hands, echoing words, or repeatedly lining up objects in the same way.

All children develop their own interests and have individualized behaviors—this is what makes each child unique.

However, if these interests and behaviors are so intense and inflexible that they affect social growth and other areas of development, it may help to discuss these concerns with your child’s healthcare provider.

## New Autism Guidance Targets Transitions and Early Detection



Dr. Susan Levy (Co-Investigator at the PA SEED site) and her co-authors realized that the focus over the past 2 decades has centered more on what causes autism and less on the family-focused reality that “children with autism grow up to be adults with autism.”<sup>1</sup> This focus on transition to adulthood is one of the five major changes in the AAP’s new guidance for autism spectrum disorder, published in the journal *Pediatrics* in December 2019. This was a

major undertaking that reflects a massive amount of research and discoveries on autism since 2007. Another primary focus of the guidance is on early detection.

To read more about the updated guidelines, visit <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2019/12/16/autism121619>.

1- Accessed on 3/19/2020 from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette published on 12/16/19: <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/health/2019/12/16/Autism-recommendations-target-transitions-early-detection-American-Academy-Pediatrics/stories/201912150191>





## Learning Through Everyday Activities: Cooking With Children

Cooking is not only a great way for you to spend time with your child, but it also gives you many opportunities to foster your child's development. It provides many chances for a child to talk with others, follow step-by-step directions, learn new vocabulary and ideas, and develop better fine motor skills. Plus, it is great fun for both the adults and kiddos!

Below is a fun and easy recipe for no-cook applesauce you can make with your child, along with tips on how to target specific skills that your child may be working on during each step of the recipe.

### Instructions for No-Cook Applesauce (for ages 3 and older):

#### Step 1: Gather ingredients.

You will need one apple and two teaspoons of honey for each serving. During this step, you can work on:

1. Counting: Encourage your child to count the apples and teaspoons of honey.
2. Vocabulary: Label each ingredient and describe it as you prepare it, such as "big apple" or "yellow honey."

#### Step 2: Prepare the applesauce.

Peel, core, and cut the apples into chunks. Place the apples and honey in a blender and mix until smooth. While making the applesauce, you can target skills such as:

1. Following directions: Narrate what you are doing or ask your child to tell you which order to do things in, such as, "First, we peel the apples, then we cut them," or prompt them to carry out certain steps, such as, "Put apples in the blender."
2. Motor skills: Try using an apple slicer so that your child can safely participate, without using a knife.

#### Step 3: Serving and eating.

Spoon the applesauce into cups for serving and sprinkle with cinnamon, if desired. This step provides opportunities to target skills such as:

1. Social skills: Engage your child in the social aspects of snack time by talking about their favorite aspects of making the recipe or by encouraging them to share the snack with others.
2. Vocabulary: Parents can describe the applesauce with words like "creamy" or "sweet" and can also work on relative concepts such as, "This cup has more applesauce and that one has less."

## Results Corner

Please refer to the "Research Findings" section of the SEED website ([www.cdc.gov/seedresearch](http://www.cdc.gov/seedresearch)) to read summaries of all publications using SEED data.



## COVID-19 Resources for Families

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Coping with stress during a COVID-19 outbreak will make you, your loved ones, and your community stronger. [Learn more.](#)

## Highlights of SEED Progress



### SEED 3 is growing!

The families joining SEED 3 are adding to the knowledge gathered in SEED 1 and SEED 2! More than 5,100 families finished the first two phases of the Study to Explore Early Development. The data from new families who finish SEED 3 will help us get a better idea of what puts children at risk of developing autism spectrum disorder.

1 leaf = 100 families who finished

Watch for future newsletters to see how SEED grows and visit [www.cdc.gov/seed](http://www.cdc.gov/seed) to see all the editions of the SEED newsletter.