



TURN AUTISM AROUND
WITH DR. MARY BARBERA

Transcript for Podcast Episode: 032

Is It ADHD, Speech Delay or Autism? | Signs of Autism

Hosted by: Dr. Mary Barbera

Welcome to this episode of the Turn Autism Around podcast. Today I'm going to be talking about how to tell if a child, whether that child is a child of yours, a grandchild, or a client, whether a child has autism or is it quote-unquote just a speech delay, or early signs of ADHD, or just typical toddler tantrums in the range of normal. So I am going to get that to that in a second.

But first I'd like to give a listener shout out to Cammy who gave us a five-star rating and review. She said, "This podcast gives such great information on a variety of topics. The podcast educates and gives tools that can be immediately applied in real life situations. As a parent, I have more peace and hope for the future of autism." That is great to hear. Thank you so much Cammie, and if you are listening and you love the podcast but haven't given me a rating and review, that really would be helpful wherever you're listening. So let's dive in to: is it autism or speech delay, ADHD or typical toddler tantrums?

Welcome to the Turn Autism Around podcast for both parents and professionals in the autism world who want to turn things around, be less stressed, and lead happier lives. And now your host, autism mom, behavior analyst, and bestselling author, Dr. Mary Barbera.

I started this podcast in January of 2019 after, well, I was really considering starting a podcast for years before that. I am a big podcast listener. I learn and continue to learn every day about how to get my message out more clearly; a lot about online marketing by listening to podcasts. But I decided to bite the bullet and start a podcast in January. I am on a mission to turn autism around for 2 million by 2020, and we are getting close to the beginning of 2020 already. And even if we consider my goal to be the end of 2020, we still have a lot of work to do.

So I do know there's a lot of confusion and I myself... I'm going to talk about how confused I was and how much in denial I was when my firstborn son Lucas started showing signs of autism. When he was not even two, he wasn't diagnosed until the day before he was three. And I'm going to get into that and then a little bit, but I do think there's still a lot of confusion. It is very difficult for parents to keep track of development. You know, kids have good days, bad days, they get sick. There are so many variables that you don't know if it's just a phase or if it's just a speech delay, or if it's just, you know, there's no such thing as Joe normal. And so there's a range of what is acceptable and then you add the, well, my child was a premie and so then that

gets confusing. My child is a twin, my child's older sister talks for him and just all those things that just add to the confusion. So I do want to let you know that I have other podcasts that cover similar topics like early detection and early diagnosis and some interviews with moms.

I would say if this is your very first episode you're listening to, then I would really go back to Marybarbera.com/one; [/two](http://Marybarbera.com/two); and [/three](http://Marybarbera.com/three) to listen to the first three podcasts, because number one episode was my journey and the 15 lessons I learned for both parents and professionals along the way. I've been in the autism world for two decades and I believe that I really... People can benefit from my story. Episode number two is all about early detection and early treatment. So there's going to be some overlapping stories potentially; some overlapping content.

And then episode number three is with Kelsey who is a single mom of two living in Canada. She is our community manager. I have online courses and communities and Kelsey now has gone from overwhelmed single mom of two kids on the spectrum to a real champion. She's a therapist to other kids. She's managing and navigating the system for her two boys. And um, she is now also managing our online community. So hers' is a great interview and I might touch on some of her stories because a lot of parents in my toddler preschooler course have walked the walk of being confused; being in denial, and waiting in insane lines for evaluations for treatment. And part of my podcast is really to teach parents and professionals... Really I'm teaching professionals how to teach parents to get the parent out of denial out of line, realizing that early autism is an emergency and we've got to deal with it.

So many of you may not know that in addition to weekly podcasts, I also have a weekly video blog that I've been doing since January of 2017 also called Turn Autism Around. And I provide weekly video blogs on a variety of topics. And my most popular... we have over 20,000 subscribers there. So if you haven't checked out my YouTube channel, you should go to Marybarbera.com/youtube. You can also go to [/Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/turnautismaround) and [/Twitter](https://twitter.com/turnautismaround) to get on my groups and my pages to get more information. But if you go to my YouTube channel, you will find that the most popular video blog is called: Is It Autism Or A Speech Delay... Or just a speech delay. And it's our most popular video blog so far. We have over a quarter of a million views on that, so it's very popular. We also have other video blogs. One is: Is It Autism or ADHD? And I did do a video also called, What To Do When Your Child Is Held Back Or Kicked Out Of Daycare Or Preschool.

So, you know, this is what parents are facing. They're facing, your child has a speech delay, your child can't progress up to daycare room B because he's not potty trained. Or he is... We can't have him at this preschool anymore because he has bitten other kids more than once. So parents are feeling stressed and then they're being told, okay, it might be autism, maybe it's ADHD, maybe it's an oppositional defiant disorder, bipolar. I mean all these potential diagnoses when a child exhibits major problem behavior or is developmentally delayed. So they're not drinking out of an open cup, like their same age peers, they're not sharing, they're not participating in circle time, they're not talking.

And the other issue is maybe your child is actually a baby. Maybe you're worried about a baby because you have an older child or the family has an older child with autism. So you're watching the baby like a hawk and you're wondering are there ways to engage the baby that might help just their general engagement level; might help get them talking quicker, get them not tantruming and yes, the rate of autism for siblings, if you already have one child with autism, the rate of having a second child is almost 20%. It's 19% from the study that I know of done several years ago. And so that's one in five odds that your child is going to have autism... the second child. I did a podcast episode with a former client's mom, Jen, and she talked about, she went on to have, well, she had a baby, she was pregnant when she found out Cody had autism and then she went and had another baby and both her girls do not have autism. But in addition to having one in five chance of having autism, they also have a higher rate of having a speech delay or ADHD or some other issues.

So it's good not stick your head in the sand if you have another child, or maybe you have a nephew with autism and you're worried about your baby. So my thought is: watch any baby or toddler closely. And there is a lot you can do to start turning things around on your own without a diagnosis, without a full team of professionals. I developed a guide called, *Is It Autism, ADHD or Typical Toddler Tantrums, Three Steps You Can Take Today Instead of Worrying*. And the three steps, and actually my toddler preschooler course can help you regardless if your child never gets a diagnosis of autism. If your child is just a little bit behind if you're worried about a sibling, and you want to put techniques in place when they're one and two that will really give them the best odds of talking and not tantruming and all these things.

So in a lot of ways you can't afford to stand in line and be in the queue waiting for an evaluation. A lot of times you do need to take action. And I have found my resources really can help people. So if you are a parent or grandparent or concerned neighbor or a friend or professional, anyone can download my free guide at marybarbera.com/toddler. And I'm going to talk about the three steps you can take today instead of worrying when you're not sure if it's autism. So the first step, which is in the guide, which I would recommend even if your baby is four months old and you don't know anybody with autism, which I find that hard to believe because it seems these days everyone knows someone with autism.

But... I didn't know back two decades ago that it was my job to keep track of my child's development. But that is step number one, is go and find your developmental milestones at every age: four months of age, eight months, 12 months, 18 months. When should your child be able to drink out of an open cup? When should they be pointing? When should they be touching body parts? When should they be talking? When should they be sharing? When should they be doing pretend play? Also, I'm not just talking in social behavior, but also motor wise: when should they be rolling over, standing up? All those things. Not to make you paranoid, but I would just keep a close eye. And there is a range of normal. So say your child is a premie and they're 18 months old, but they were premature by three months. Okay. So they maybe, you know, at a 15-month-old level. I maybe not concerned about that because they were three months premature and now they're, you know, they're 18 months chronological age, but the child is pretty much on track for a 15-month-old level. That's probably fine.

I mean, I'm not saying it's always completely fine, but just, in general, you can, you know, there's a range of normal. However, if the child that is 18 months old was three months premature but not doing some of the things that a 12-month-old should do, then you've got a bigger discrepancy and probably more reason to warrant early intervention professionals coming in, meeting with your child's pediatrician, maybe getting on a wait list for a developmental pediatrician evaluation. So learning more about the next two steps from the guide. So step number one is know developmental milestones for each level. Then compare it to where your child is at. Remember, don't be paranoid if they have most of the 18 month old level or most of the 15-month-old level, okay, just keep an eye on things. But if they are falling, you know, six months, even consistently, three or four months behind, then it might warrant, especially if they've scattered skills if they start to lose skills that they had, those are all red flags and the child should be evaluated for autism.

So this second step after you know your developmental milestones and compare it to your child's, the second step is to make an appointment with your child's pediatrician. You can make a sick appointment. Most people don't think of that. They only think of sick appointments for like colds and earaches and stomach flu and those sorts of things. But a lot of times there's no well visit between the ages of two and three years of age. And a lot of times there's a lot of concerns about development. So you want to make sure you call your pediatrician, tell them you're concerned about your child's development. You'd like to bring them in for a checkup. Sometimes that can be an extended checkup. Sometimes when you call up for a developmental checklist, that can be a longer checkup than simply an air check or a sick visit for a cold.

And you can also self-refer your child to the early intervention program if you are in the United States. That would be fine. So you can, you can call an early intervention. Now if you're not in the United States I'm not sure how that would work, but if you are in the United States, you could just simply Google early intervention birth to three, and then your city and state and county, and it would probably pop up who's in charge. If you really don't know and you can't find it online, you can always contact your school district and tell them you have a two-year-old. And if you have a three to five-year-old child, that's another agency. So it is really complicated. But early intervention should provide a free or low-cost evaluation to see if what you're seeing is a big discrepancy between where this child should be.

Okay. So that's the second step is to get more evaluations, get standardized screenings, and that those standardized screenings will actually help you when you're trying to get to make an appointment with a developmental pediatrician. The fact that we had early intervention standard scores for Lucas showing that he was really delayed on standardized tests. So even though he was two and a half, for instance, when we had the developmental test, he was functioning at a nine-month-old level for expressive language, a 12-month-old level for receptive language. And you might think like, oh gosh, that's depressing. I don't want to know that. But knowledge is power, and so we have to know where they're at so that we can take them to the next level. So let's talk a little bit about denial.

I did do a video blog on denial and denial is a real thing. Usually, in two parent homes, somebody is in more denial than the other, someone is more pessimistic, optimistic. In my case, my husband, who's a physician, mentioned the possibility of autism when Lucas was just 21 months old. And I told him on that day, I was shocked. I had never thought that Lucas was even delayed. I told him I never ever wanted to hear the word autism again. He didn't bring it up for like another year. I stuck my head in the sand until it was really undeniable that Lucas... There was something wrong. We got speech therapy, went to typical preschool, but all the while my husband planted that seed and I was thinking more and more about autism.

I didn't realize that a classic study had been done in the late 1980s by Dr. Lovaas from UCLA who has... The research shows that 47% of those kids three years of age even with moderate-severe autism, they were treated aggressively, intensively with 40 hours per week of ABA Services. 47% of them, almost half, became indistinguishable from their peers by first grade. And I didn't know that. So this was a decade later. Now we're talking, this is three decades later and nobody knows about the Lovaas study unless you have been in the field for a long time and you've read the book called, *Let Me Hear Your Voice* by Catherine Maurice. And this was the book written in 1993 that showed that two kids that Catherine Maurice had both become indistinguishable with intensive ABA treatment as outlined by Dr. Lovaas.

So what's happening a lot now is people are not reading that book. And what this... One of the reasons I wrote my book in 2007 was nobody was reading the Maurice book, well, some people were still reading it, but the Maurice book talked about the Lovaas approach I was using, and I was a behavior analyst working with the Verbal Behavior project in Pennsylvania. I was using a verbal behavior approach and I was seeing great, great things with young and older children. And so that's one of the reasons I wrote my book. And on the back of the book, Dr. Mark Sunberg wrote the forward for my book. The book is called *The Verbal Behavior Approach, How To Teach Children With Autism And Related Disorders*. It's now available in I think 13 languages, kind of losing track. But Dr. Sunberg also wrote a blurb for the back of the book and he wrote, "one of the most valuable books for parents of children with autism since, *Let Me Hear Your Voice* by Catherine Maurice", which I literally screamed when Dr. Sunberg wrote that because Catherine Maurice's book, *Let Me Hear Your Voice* had been my bible and had really given me the motivation that I was going to fight really hard to have Lucas become indistinguishable or recover.

You know, when I post about recovery, which I've also done a video blog on recovery, I sometimes get a lot of backlash. Like autism isn't something that can be recovered. Well yeah, it actually was kind of proven that it can be recovered and I have some situations where I believe... I have pretty good data and pretty good videos and pretty good cause to believe that we've actually prevented the diagnosis of autism. So there is no study to show that we can prevent autism, but there are studies to show that we can get kids to become indistinguishable. Some of my clients are now old enough they're learning to drive and go to college. And my whole *Turn Autism Around* podcast and the name of my YouTube channel, *Turn Autism Around*. It's like, what do you mean by turn autism around? Well, for very young kids who you don't know if it's speech delay or autism, for kids that are newly diagnosed who are here listening,

the parents are here listening, you know, there is a chance. I don't know what percentage the chance is, I don't know if it's 4% or 47% because the studies really vary. But there is a chance that your child could become indistinguishable, could get all better, could avoid the diagnosis, could get, you know, totally past the diagnosis.

And then for other kids, they could end up still having, you know, pretty significant autism symptoms, but they could also be high enough language-wise and cognitively to drive and go to college and all those good things. And then even for kids like Lucas, my son who has not recovered from autism, we have used an ABA approach his whole life since the age of three and he is reaching his fullest potential and the bar has to keep going high. There's not a once and done you reach your fullest potential in your 20 or 25s and everything's fine. I am continuing to advocate for him, and I'm continuing to proceed. So turning autism around basically means that each child will reach his or her fullest potential.

So the first step, if you're worried if it's autism or something else, is know your milestones; compare it to where your child's at. The second step is to contact your child's pediatrician early intervention to get better screenings and to get potentially on a wait list for a developmental pediatrician. There are other physicians that can diagnose autism. Even psychologists, school psychologists can diagnose, but there is a medical diagnosis that is probably a little bit better by a developmental pediatrician, neurologist, psychiatrist, someone who is in the medical field should probably diagnose the autism. They are able to then write medical scripts for ABA services. And the third step after you do those two steps is to learn about ABA. Because it really doesn't matter if it's autism or a speech delay or early signs of ADHD or ODD or OCD. We need to intervene.

And I've shown with my free resources and definitely within my paid online course, toddler and preschooler course, that parents with kids with them without a diagnosis can learn step by step procedures to help them learn to talk more, tantrum less, start to point, start to answer questions, potty train, sleep in their own bed, be less picky, wean from pacifiers and bottles, all the things that are really bogging parents down from helping their children.

You know, the same techniques that parents have used for their older child may not be working for this child. So we take you from start to finish in terms of knowing what to do, but the basics of what to do are first to assess, be aware of where your child is at. If you're an early intervention professional trying to get parents to really look at where their child's at, where they're functioning, both good behaviors like language like we want, as well as pretend play or sharing or socializing, self-care, feeding themselves, drinking out of an open cup. All of these things that I swear... Even my online course for parents of toddlers and preschoolers with and without autism or with signs of autism, it would be great for parents of typically developing kids, grandparents, nannies. It is really just great step-by-step advice on how to increase the behaviors we want and decrease the behaviors that we don't want across all environments.

So this is a pretty short podcast, but I did want to just give you the basics. I'm sure even if you have a teen with autism, you probably know plenty of people that ask you about autism or

plenty of relatives and friends who... You concerned and you don't know what to do to help that family either get out of denial or start to look at really how far behind they are. And back in the day when I was in denial, I really thought autism was a death sentence. And I thought if I said it might be autism, that the curtain would ball and my life would be ruined. I don't believe that anymore. I believe that we shouldn't stick our head in the sand about anything. We need to identify delays as soon as they happen and really make as many gains as we can to get our children and our clients to their highest, fullest potential.

So I hope you enjoyed these tips from the free guide, Is it Autism, ADHD or Typical Toddler Tantrums? You can go to Marybarbera.com/toddler if you want to take the next step and learn more about getting into my toddler preschooler course, you'll find out more information as you download that toddler guide and you, if you have any questions, you can't find your way, you don't know what you need, you can always email us at Info@marybarbara.com. I hope you found these strategies valuable. If you did, I would love it if you would leave me a rating and review wherever you're listening to this podcast. And I hope you tune in next week and I will talk to you then.

Thanks for listening to the Turn Autism Around podcast with Dr. Mary Barbera. For more information, visit Marybarbera.com.