Early Signs of Autism

Pre-reading
Questions: What is autism? What are some early signs of autism?
Definitions: Peer – someone who is the equal of someone else (e.g. in age or social class)
Intervention – action taken on a situation in order to influence outcomes
Spectrum – a scale with a range of values, having opposites for limits on each end

Reading
Sam is a toddler that is not developing at the same rate as his peers. At age two, his parents noticed that his language was delayed. He did not respond to his name when called. Sam also did not like interacting with other children or playing “peek-a-boo” with his parents. After his parents discussed their concerns with their pediatrician, they had Sam assessed. Once Sam was tested, they learned that he had Autism.

Autism is a brain disorder that affects the development of children starting at a young age. The causes of Autism are unknown and it is not easily detected until about age two or three. There are different degrees of Autism which are rated on a spectrum scale. A mild case is on one end of the spectrum and often referred to as Asperger’s Syndrome. Children with Aspergers are usually fairly high functioning and intelligent. Their disability is in the ability to relate to others. On the other end of the spectrum, severe cases of Autism can occur. Some of these cases include the inability to communicate entirely.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 150 children have Autism. It is thought to be on the rise, and it is three to four times more likely to occur in boys than in girls. Siblings of a child with Autism are also more at risk for having Autism. All races, social classes and ethnicities are affected by Autism. Because early intervention is so important, it is essential for parents to know the signs that may indicate the need to be screened by a doctor.

First Signs, Inc. (www.firstsigns.org) lists the following as early signs of Autism:
• Little or no eye contact
• Does not respond to name, acts deaf
• Language delay
• Does not meet developmental milestones (i.e. crawling, walking)
• Uses repetitive actions or words
• Displays hand flapping and/or toe walking
• Regression or loss of skills
• Demonstrates inappropriate play or behavior
• Prefers to be alone
• Over or under-reactive sensory input (i.e. touch, sound, taste, sight, hearing)
• Rocks or bangs head, likes spinning

If you have a child or you know a child that demonstrates some of these signs, and you are concerned that he or she might have Autism, talk to the child’s doctor. The sooner a child with Autism is diagnosed, the sooner he or she can start receiving special services and help that will lead to greater success for the child and family.
Understanding

1. Why were Sam’s parents concerned about his development? ___________________________________________
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   ________________________________________________________________________________________

2. What causes Autism? _________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Sam was “assessed” for Autism. What does assess mean? _______________________________________
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   ________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Define the words mild and severe. ___________________________________________________________
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   ________________________________________________________________________________________

5. What are some signs of Autism? (List at least three.) _________________________________________
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   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________

6. Why is early intervention important? _________________________________________________________
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   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________

7. What should you do if you suspect your child has Autism? ______________________________________
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   ________________________________________________________________________________________
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Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: Write about a young child you know. Write about his development. How does she play? What are some of his behaviors? Does she display any signs Autism? If so, which ones?

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