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Autism Spectrum Disorders - Issues to be considered

- 1) Complications in diagnosis:
  - Developmental delays can become apparent gradually, and may be difficult to differentiate from adjustment to change, temperament issues, suboptimal parenting, or normal variation
  - Denial of severe developmental delays is common, even among healthy parents; symptoms may be minimized
  - Parents may be aware of differences between their child and other children, but blame each other or minimize
  - Increasing rates of diagnoses, changing criteria, more available intervention
- 2) Early assessment and intervention may be critical to long-term progress and adjustment
- 3) Speech and language delay may be a key sign, but other developmental markers may also be delayed. If a child still isn't talking, months after the age at which your own children learned to talk, send the parents to the pediatrician. If in doubt, refer.
- 4) Covered services are often available -
  - Medical insurance for assessment
  - Regional Centers, funded by the state Department of Developmental Services. [http://www.dds.cahwnet.gov/rc/RCsvs\\_home.cfm](http://www.dds.cahwnet.gov/rc/RCsvs_home.cfm)
  - School-based early intervention programs
  - Regional center contract agencies, community groups

Special Needs Children in Family Law Cases  
Autism Spectrum Disorders  
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5) Integrate specialized and custody evaluation

- Autism specialists may not be sophisticated in family law issues, but able to provide developmental assessment
- Custody evaluator can integrate information from specialists
- If sequencing and timing is appropriate, costs can be contained

6) Beware web site generalities

- Consistency can have multiple meanings
- Single parenting extremely stressful
- Shared parenting/resources may be beneficial, if plan is coordinated
- Parents may need to demonstrate commitment to parent education participating in child's education/care plan