

## OSF creates faster path to autism evaluation

Families with concerns about autism spectrum disorder now have access to earlier evaluations and support. This comes through the Embedded Autism Screening & Evaluation (EASE) Program at OSF HealthCare.

"What the program entails, is evaluation for children 2-6 years of age who have a high concern for autism. Whether that's parent concerns or provider concerns, or high scores on screenings completed in the pediatric office," says Amy Zimmerman, advanced practice provider with OSF HealthCare and project manager for OSF EASE. "They're then able to see me, get that evaluation and screening, then get some answers and recommendations into therapies and services faster."

The program is primarily offered throughout the OSF Ministry but also collaborates with neighborhood partners through local health care clinics and pediatric offices.

Zimmerman and her team serve patients across the OSF Ministry, not just in Peoria, provided the child has an OSF pediatrician or neighborhood partner pediatrician.

The goal of EASE is to connect families with an evaluation option, help them find answers and access services sooner, while ensuring families feel supported throughout the process.

"If a family member or caregiver has a concern for that child having autism, speak with their primary care provider as a first step. That will ensure they're involved in services and supports, if they qualify for the EASE program. Helping us decide how to help make sure the child gets what they need," Zimmerman adds.

Zimmerman says awareness and understanding of autism have continued to grow in recent years. The focus is shifting beyond awareness and toward acceptance and support for children and their families.

"This is a safe space for families to discuss concerns," Zimmerman says. "This is a space where I want to know those concerns and challenges you're having, so that we can put those supports in place."

A key part of the EASE program is identifying and building on each child's strengths. Zimmerman encourages caregivers to think about at least two things their child does well, helping create a more complete picture of the child's development and abilities.

### **Additional services through EASE**

EASE follows a two-part process:

- Evaluation
- Recommendations and next steps

Even when a child does not receive an autism diagnosis, the evaluation may identify other concerns, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or developmental delays.

Those findings are shared with the child's primary care provider to help develop a plan for ongoing care and support.

To get connected to OSF EASE, speak with your child's pediatrician. You can also visit the OSF EASE [website](#).