



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Screening Activity

Activity Name: “Where is the Balloon?”

Age Focus: 2–4 years



Purpose of the Activity

This simple observation game helps parents or examiners notice early signs of difficulty in joint attention — the ability to share focus on an object or event with another person. Joint attention is a key social skill that typically develops by age 2 and is often delayed in children with autism.



Materials Needed

- A bright, colorful balloon (red, yellow, or blue work best)
- A quiet, well-lit room with minimal distractions
- A parent or examiner sitting face-to-face with the child at eye level



Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Set the stage - Sit across from the child, ensuring they are comfortable and attentive. Hold the balloon in your hand but not yet inflated.

Say softly: “Look what I have!”

2. Gain the child’s attention - Inflate or show the balloon, then hold it up about 30–40 cm from your face.

- *Say clearly: “Look!”*
- *Use both verbal cues (“Look!”) and non-verbal cues (eye movement + pointing).*

3. Direct joint attention - Point toward the balloon and observe whether the child follows your pointing gesture with their eyes.
Repeat this three times, changing the balloon's position (left, right, or slightly above).

4. Call the child's name - While pointing, gently call their name:
"Ria, look at the balloon!"
Observe if they make eye contact with you and then look at the balloon.



Scoring & Interpretation

Observation	Typical Response ✓	Red Flag / Concern ⚠
Follows the examiner's gaze or pointing gesture	Child looks where you point in at least 2 of 3 trials	Child does not look at the object in at least 2 of 3 trials
Eye contact	Child makes eye contact when name is called	Child does not make eye contact when name is called

If the child repeatedly does not follow pointing or avoids eye contact, it may suggest reduced joint attention — an early indicator of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

✍ This is not a diagnosis. It simply indicates that further developmental screening by a pediatrician or psychologist is recommended.

Tips for Parents and Examiners

- Ensure the child is relaxed, not hungry or tired.
- Keep your tone gentle and playful, not instructional.
- Repeat the task on different days to confirm consistency.
- Encourage engagement by smiling or using praise (“Good looking!”).
- If using a balloon is too exciting, switch to a quieter toy.