

Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Autism, a devastating developmental disorder which typically appears during the first three years of life, seems to be on the rise in society today. Autism is the result of a neurological disorder. The challenges of research, diagnosis, and treatment have been baffling, many of which have created controversy and frustrations worldwide.

Current research links autism to biological or neurological differences in the brain. MRI and PET scans show abnormalities in the structure of the brain, with significant differences within the cerebellum, including the size and number of purkinje cells. In some families there appears to be a pattern of autism or related disabilities, which suggests there may be a genetic basis to the disorder, although at this time no one gene has been directly linked to autism. Other theories have been proven wrong and psychological factors have nothing to do with the development of autism.



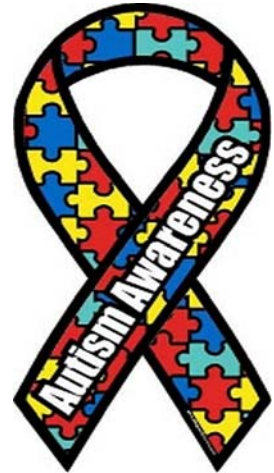
Amazingly, 1 out of every 166 children is now diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. It is 4 times more prevalent in boys than girls. Early identification of these children is crucial and a chance for a productive and emotionally connected life. Most parents do not even realize their child is autistic until it is too late. So many physicians want parents to “take time for your child to grow and develop” approach. Many parents take this advice, but realize later the entire loss of time for treatment opportunities. To find out if your child has autism spectrum disorder, have your child assessed by a speech pathologist. Most children do not get diagnosed or identified until 3 years of age or older. Researchers are trying to find ways to diagnose at birth so we can support and nurture this developmental disorder at an early stage. Most children do not start showing signs of autism until 18-24 months. Currently, there is no single test to diagnose autism spectrum disorders. Diagnosis is made on the basis of observable characteristics of the child.

The Top 20 Observable Characteristics to Look For:

1. Does not crawl.
2. Does not gesture by a point, wave, grasp by 12 months of age.
3. Does not babble or coo by 12 months of age.
4. Does not have single words by 16 months of age and two word phrases by 24 months of age.
5. Language that once was observed has mysteriously been lost.
6. Child does not respond to his/her name.
7. Child has difficulty communicating wants and needs.



8. Language skills delayed and distorted.
9. Child has difficulty following directions.
10. Child may appear deaf.
11. Little or no interest playing with others or toys.
12. Temper tantrums displayed when overwhelmed and frustrated.
13. The child is hyperactive, uncooperative and defiant.
14. The child doesn't respond to smiles from others and has poor eye contact.
15. The child is resistant to change.
16. The child seems self-centered and not interested in others.
17. The child walks on his/her toes.
18. The child has unusual "addictive" behaviors to toys, schedules, objects, and appears "obsessive".
19. Child repetitively makes hand flopping movement.
20. Child spends a lot of time putting things in a certain order and gets upset if not orderly.

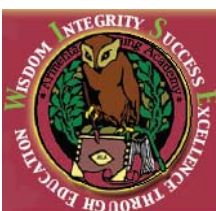


Activities for the Autistic

Activities that focus on improving the child's coordination, strength, and stamina while working on listening skills and proper techniques are important. One that we do at ALA is sensory integration, which improves the child's ability to cope with his/her environment. Sensory integration helps the autistic child focus and creates a learning environment by using the five senses and body awareness and balance. Some favorite activities we use are the therapy balls, obstacle courses, trampolines and ball pits to name a few.

A second activity I recommend to do at home as an extended activity and we also do here at ALA, is integrating music to movement which encourages individual thinking, creativity and group activity enhancing social skills and interest. Some autistic children are unable to speak; but through music, speech can be enhanced through vocal activities with simple words, and repetitive phrases to develop the autistic child's language and expression.

Autistic children have an excellent memory and high level of intelligence. Assistance from an "early start" program at the local Regional center, occupational therapist, speech pathologist, or a team of educational experts such as myself, can be crucial and highly beneficial to meet the academic and social needs of your autistic child. Inquire within to meet the needs of your autistic child or for more information contact the Autism Society of America at 1-800-3AUTISM.



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