



April is National Autism Awareness Month

Autistic Spectrum Disorder, or Autism as it is most commonly referred, is a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain, influencing a person's ability to communicate and interact with others. It typically appears during the first three years of life, and is characterized by a certain set of behaviors. Autism is a "spectrum" disorder, meaning a range of linked conditions, each individual may exhibit any combination of these behaviors in any degree of severity.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, as many as 1.5 million Americans have some form of Autism, affecting one child in every 110 born in the United States. Persons with Autism come from every part of the world – every race, socioeconomic background, income level, lifestyle choice, and educational level. While incidence of Autism is consistent around the world, it is four times more prevalent in boys than in girls.

Learn the Signs – Early Diagnosis is Key

While there is currently no cure for Autism, it is treatable and many of those affected progress to living full and productive lives. Studies have shown that early diagnosis and intervention are vital to improving chances for success. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends all children be screened for Autism by their family pediatrician twice by the age of two – at 18 months and again at 24

months. There are no medical tests available to diagnose Autism; accurate diagnosis is based on observation of the child's communication, behavior and development levels. Parental (or caregiver) input and developmental history are key components to make an accurate diagnosis.

Here are some of the signs to look for in young children:

- Does not babble or coo by 12 months
- Does not gesture (point, wave, grasp) by 12 months
- Does not say single words by 16 months
- Does not say two-word phrases on own by 24 months
- Has any loss of language or social skill at any age

If a child exhibits any of these signs, it does not necessarily mean he or she has Autism because the disorder's characteristics vary from person to person. However, a child showing these behaviors should have further evaluations from a qualified specialist, as Autism can often be mistaken for other conditions. Research indicates that early identification is associated with dramatically better outcomes. Many children with Autism can learn and function normally and show marked improvement with appropriate treatment and education. Many children grow up to live – and excel – while living with Autism. Find more information about Autism at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism>.