

Autism

There is something we can do!

Autism is on the rise!

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are the fastest growing developmental disability. Recent studies indicate that they may affect as many as 1 out of every 110 American children. Because less than half of these children are diagnosed before starting school, it's likely that a child you know has a spectrum disorder that hasn't yet been diagnosed. ASDs affect people's ability to socialize and to communicate, and often cause a child to display unusual or repetitive behaviors or interests. ASDs are a lifelong condition. Their effects on one's ability to learn and interact can vary from mild to severe. Early treatment and support are crucial to minimize limitations and maximize success.

Does a child you know -

- Avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- Have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings
- Have delayed speech and language skills
- Repeat certain words or phrases over and over or repeat what others say
- Give unrelated answers to questions
- Get upset by minor changes or have to follow certain routines
- Have obsessive interests
- Engage in repetitive movements (hand-flapping, rocking, or spinning)
- Have unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look, or feel
- Not share interests with others, only interact to achieve a desired goal
- Have flat or inappropriate facial expressions
- Not understand personal space or boundaries
- Avoid or resist physical contact
- Use few or no gestures (e.g., does not point or wave goodbye)
- Talk in a flat, robot-like, or sing-song voice
- Not engage in pretend play (e.g., does not pretend to "feed" a doll)

- Fail to understand jokes, sarcasm, or teasing
- Line up toys or other objects, or play with toys the same way every time
- Focus on parts of objects (e.g., wheels)
- Have unusual eating and sleeping habits
- Have unusual mood or emotional reactions, exhibit aggression or self injury
- Lack fear or sense of danger, or have more fear than expected

(Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Take action!

If a child you know exhibits some of these signs of autism, take action now. Don't wait. Take

Three simple steps:

1. Discuss your concerns with the child's family. Advise the family to bring the child to their physician and ask for an appropriate screening for Autism Spectrum Disorders. Encourage the family to follow-up on any referrals to specialists made by their child's doctor.
2. Visit New York State's online autism resource (www.nyacts.com) to learn more about autism and New York State services and supports for individuals with ASDs.
3. Advise the child's family to request an evaluation by the school district.

April is Autism Awareness Month. This message is sponsored by the New York State Education Department and the New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.