Leading the Way for Young People with AUTISM

APRIL IS AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

Autism Quick Q&A with DR. BARBARA FIRESTONE

What advice would you give to parents who suspect their child is developing differently? Early detection and early intervention are parents’ best frontline offense in confronting the challenges associated with autism. When parents first suspect that the early signs of autism may be present, they should discuss these concerns with their pediatrician and ask for an autism screening or a referral to a qualified autism professional.

Why have we seen an increase in autism cases in recent years? There is a great deal of debate about why the rate of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) has increased so dramatically in recent years. Some attribute the increase to improved expertise in diagnosing autism, while others believe that the expansion of the definition of autism accounts for the increases and still others look to possible biological and environmental risk-factors. Although the answer is unclear, and may be a combination of factors, the demand has never been greater for ASD programs and services; the use of evidence-based best practices; the expansion of applied research endeavors; the development of well-trained professionals; the strengthening of parent support & engagement; and the sharing of current and updated information among all stakeholders.

How early can a child be diagnosed with autism? One of the most exciting and promising areas is that of early identification and early intervention. Current research reveals that autism can now be reliably diagnosed at 18 months and 24 months in many cases by an experienced clinician and that some of the early warning signs are recognizable within the first year of life.

Are there changes taking place today that hold promise for children and families? “The good news is that the momentum has never been greater than it is today. As science moves forward in both basic and applied research, greater focus is being placed on the use of best practices that are built on evidence-based recommendations in assessment and intervention, and advocacy groups continue to promote positive change. Public policies are being examined and reshaped to address the compelling need for services. The ongoing controversies and the quest for definitive answers stimulate important dialogue and debate. With the exposure of the issues of autism by the mainstream media and other public awareness efforts, the public is becoming better informed and eager for change.

The stigma of autism is in the process of being fully and forever lifted by the light of greater understanding and acceptance. Society is becoming more fully engaged in the agenda of ensuring brighter futures for all children with autism spectrum disorders."

-- Excerpted from Autism Heroes: Portraits of Families Meeting the Challenge by Dr. Barbara Firestone.

Available online at www.autismheroes.org

To Learn More About Autism and the Early Signs, please visit www.thehelpgroup.org

AUTISM FAST FACTS

- Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), commonly referred to as autism, are brain-based developmental disabilities characterized by language/communication problems, impaired social interaction, and repetitive, rigid behaviors and interests.
- Estimates of autism prevalence upward to one in every 110 births, with one in every 70 male births and one in every 315 female births resulting in an ASD diagnosis.
- The symptoms of ASD vary widely from child to child and range from mild to severe.
- Autism occurs across the entire range of intellectual and cognitive capacities and in children of all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

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