Autism Quick Q&A with Dr. Barbara Firestone

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Vice Chair, California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism
Author, *Autism Heroes: Portraits of Families Meeting the Challenge*

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.

Why have we seen an increase in autism cases in recent years? There is a great deal of debate about why the rate of ASDs has increased so dramatically in recent years. Some attribute the increase to improved expertise in diagnosing autism, others believe that the expansion of the definition of autism accounts for the increases, and others look to possible biological and environmental risk-factors. Although the answer is unclear, and may be a combination of factors, the numbers of children diagnosed with autism cannot be ignored and the need for programs has never been greater.

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.

How can early identification and intervention help a child? Early identification and intervention are of paramount importance. Research has shown that many children with an autism spectrum disorder can make significant developmental progress when intensive intervention is started before three years of age.

AUTISM FAST FACTS

- Autism spectrum disorders, commonly referred to as autism, are brain based developmental disabilities characterized by language/communication problems, impaired social interaction, and repetitive, rigid behaviors and interests.
- The symptoms of autism vary widely from child to child and range from mild to severe.
- Once considered rare, autism is now estimated to affect 1 in every 150 children in the United States; every 20 minutes a child is diagnosed.
- Autism is four times more common in boys than in girls, and occurs in children of all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Look for The Help Group’s *Learn the Early Signs of Autism* brochures in your local:

Tune in to ABC7 Los Angeles for its re-broadcast of its one hour special based on, *Autism Heroes: Portraits of Families Meeting the Challenge*, by Dr. Barbara Firestone. **Saturday, April 25, 6:30-7:30pm**

To order the highly acclaimed and award winning book and free DVD online, please visit www.autismheroes.org

Attend The Help Group’s Distinguished Lecturer Series: *Interventions to Improve Social Communication in Young Children with Autism*, featuring Tony Charman, Ph.D., Professor, Institute of Education, London. **Thursday, April 30, 2:30-4:30pm**

Register online at www.thehelpgroup.org

To Learn More About Autism and the Early Signs, please visit

www.thehelpgroup.org

www.autismheroes.org