

Autism Spectrum Disorders

By Diane Trautman

Autism is frightening to many of us. For years, the media has concentrated on images of non-communicative children who are lost in their own worlds. In the 1990s autism affected one in 10,000 children. Today, that ratio is an alarming one in 150, making autism America's fastest growing developmental disability. The good news, though, is that many people with developmental and neurobiological disorders are able to live happy, productive, successful lives with early diagnosis and intensive intervention, which are the keys to reducing symptoms, improving long-term development, and reducing costs of lifelong care.

Accurate diagnosis can be made as early as 18 months of age, but parents, relatives and other caregivers need to be on the lookout for the signs. For 6-12 month olds, these include infrequent eye contact, failure to respond to their name (or smile, when smiled at by others), and social or emotional passivity. If the child is not babbling and gesturing at 12 months, pointing to objects of interest by 16 months or speaking two-word phrases by 24 months, an evaluation is in order.

Emily Iland, M.A., is an educational consultant well known in our community as a strong advocate for those with autism. She and her sister Barbara Thompson Doyle, a special education professional, are authors of the book "Autism Spectrum Disorders from A to Z" (available in both English and Spanish), which provides essential information regarding assessment and diagnosis to guide to parents, teachers and other professionals working together to help those with autism. In addition to serving on the board of the Santa Clarita Autism Asperger Network (SCAAN), Emily is working to make early evaluation the standard in California.

Chances are that someone in your family, in your classroom, or among your friends will be affected by autism spectrum disorders. We can help these individuals reach their full potential by educating ourselves and offering our informed support.

For more information, you can visit Emily and Barbara's website at www.asdatoz.com and the SCAAN website www.scaan.org

Diane Trautman can be reached at StudyPros In-Home Tutoring, 661-296-9206, or www.studypros.com