

Understanding and Dealing with Autism

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Solutions and Explanations for Your Family

Doctors and Diagnosing Autism

When a doctor first suggests that your child has autism, your immediate reaction might be disbelief and the urge to seek a second, third, or even fourth opinion. Because autism is so different in every child, it is a tricky disorder to diagnose. However, there are a few key ways in which doctors can efficiently identify autism in children, and if your infant or toddler is showing any of these signs of autism, you should visit your pediatrician immediately to express your concerns.

Autism occurs at a young age, rather than being a disorder an older child might develop. It is usually detected before the age of three, and many times much earlier. The first signs of autism are usually delays or regression in speech communication. Another early sign is abnormal behavior in group play situations and other social situations. The first step to diagnosing autism is a thorough physical examination as well as a review of family history by a specialist. Although your regular pediatrician will be able to spot unusual behavior, you'll want your child to be examined by a professional who specializes in autism and other similar diseases to make sure your child is properly diagnosed.

The next step includes hearing tests. Since language and social skill delays could be due to inadequate auditory sensations. There are two types of auditory tests, one of which records the tones a child can hear and the other of which requires sedation and measures the brain response to certain tones. Of course, the first method is preferred, since it does not require any use of a sedative. After auditory testing, your doctor may encourage testing your child for Fragile X syndrome, which often times goes hand in hand with autism. Metabolism can also be evaluated. To do this, your doctor will need a blood or urine sample to analyze DNA.

An MRI or CAT scan can also be helpful in diagnosing autism. The important thing is to work with doctors you trust. Second opinions can be very helpful, but when your child has been diagnosed, stick with one doctor so that treatment is uniform and so that your child will get used to this person. Autism is difficult to diagnose and even more difficult to treat, so remember that you should begin to learn as much as possible about the disorder as soon as your doctor identifies it. If you have yet to speak with your doctor about abnormal behavior in your child, do so immediately. By detecting autism early, you give your child a better chance at becoming a high-functioning individual with much more opportunities in life.

Finding What Works: Dealing with Autism

When dealing with autism, just as in most other disorders, you will be faced with a number of treatment options for yourself or your child. These include treatments that are educational, behavioral, biomedical, nutritional, and sensory. Unfortunately, for patients who are not affluent or who do not have good medical insurance, the cost of these treatments can be pricier than what they can afford. One way to ensure that you or your child receives the best possible treatment for autism is to carefully monitor the effects a treatment has over time. By finding out which treatments work and which do not, you can stop paying for the ineffective methods and put more of your money into those which are creating a positive difference.

First, evaluate the abilities of the autistic individual before treatment begins. To do this, many services and organizations, including the Autism Research Institute, provide a checklist of evaluation points that focus on behavior and illnesses associated with autism. Autistic individuals tend to have increasing functionality as they mature, so remember that some of the positive effects in his or her life are simply due to the natural growth process. However, after two months fill out the checklist once again and compare it to the first. Are there any sharp positive increases in behavior characteristics? If so, this is more likely due to the treatment.

It is important to begin only one treatment method at a time. If you try everything at once instead, good and bad effects may cancel one another out, or even if the effect is totally positive, you will not know which treatment method is causing it and which are not doing anything. Of course, past studies can help you choose which methods to use, but because autism is an extremely complicated and individual disorder, these studies are not always helpful. Also, some treatments are so new that the studies done are only on short-term effects, which is usually unhelpful. Instead, it is a process of trial and error. Two months is a good amount of time to study the differences within an autistic individual trying a new treatment. After two months, if you do not see positive improvement, you can discontinue your use of that particular method and better invest your money in treatment options that work.

Remember that you do not always have to wait two months to make choices about whether to continue or discontinue a treatment method. If the side effects of a medication, for example, are interfering with the patient's life in an unbearable way, then you should discontinue the treatment. You can also make continual treatments based on immediate good reactions—just remember to continually monitor the various methods. Autistic individuals grow and mature just like everyone else, so treatments may stop working after time. Before trying anything new, consult your doctor to make sure you are being as safe and healthy as possible.

My Child is Autistic—and I don't Know what to Do...

Discovering your child has autism may be a distressing ordeal, and unfortunately, time is of the essence. As a parent, you do not have the time to consider why or how this happened, only what to do next. The most important thing to remember is that you are not alone in your struggle. By researching the disorder and finding others going through similar situations, you can help you child while still dealing with your own emotional response.

Join a support group for parents with autism. You can find these by contacting the national Autism Society of America. From there you can find local branches, many of which offer support groups for parents and families with an autistic child. Being in contact with other parents in a similar situation can not only help you feel less alone, but it can provide you with a myriad of resources. A parent support group will also help point you in the direction of the best doctors, intervention programs, and workshops for both your child and your family. Find a support group for any other children you have as well. Many parents forget that they are not the only ones who must learn to live and communicate with an autistic child. By locating a support group for your other children, you can help them from acting out or acting against the autistic child by teaching them about the illness. As a parent, you must create a supportive environment for the entire family in order to properly manage your child's illness.

Consider marriage counseling if you are married. An autistic child can put serious strain on a marriage, leading to escalating arguments, neglect of each other, and even perhaps blaming each other for the situation. Marriage counseling from the very beginning can help a couple through this discovery and rough transition, and help build a better supportive environment for your children. Your marriage should not end as a result of having an autistic child, but the sad fact is that many of them do. Prevent this by using one another for support and by understanding that you may need help to deal with one another now and in the future.

Most importantly, start on the path to becoming an expert. Many times pediatricians or psychiatrists are not experts on autism, which can lead to improper diagnoses or incorrect treatment options. As your child's best advocate, you must know everything you can about autism. Parents of Autistic Children can be a great resource; this organization offers training and workshops. The ASA has a newsletter and also offers a variety of information, from diagnosing to treating. As always, remember that a support group of parents with autistic children can always provide you with books and research that focus on the reality of the situation. Educate yourself and those around you to provide the most beneficial things for your child—love and guidance.

Eliminating the Source: What Causes Autism

Many parents hope that in finding a source of autism, this disorder can be cured or prevented. Unfortunately, scientists have yet to find one single reason why children develop autism. It is possible that someday autism will be linked to a specific gene abnormality, but the more likely source is not one thing, but a number of factors in a child's world. Autism cannot be prevented or cured, so the best we can do to help autistic children and adults is be understanding and willing to compromise to make the world comfortable for them and ourselves.

First off, there are certain things that do not cause autism, and these myths should be laid to rest immediately. Most importantly, bad parenting does not cause autism. In the past, mothers were blamed for traumatizing their children with cold parenting techniques, which was thought to lead to autism. This is simply not true. Autism is also not caused by malnutrition, although food allergies occur in my autistic children and some autistic children do benefit from taking daily vitamins.

There are many links between autism and the brain. Most people with autism have larger brains and they are "wired" differently than a typical brain. Differences occur in many parts of the brain, so it cannot be targeted to one specific brain malfunction overall, but rather a brain malfunction in general. Autistic children also show signs of an immune deficiency. Evidence in this study is not yet strong, but research is still being done. Many autistic individuals have other health problems related to immune deficiencies. Overall, these things all seem to point to genetics. Although autism is not the parents' fault, it is most likely that autism was found elsewhere on your family tree, and it is not uncommon for parents to raise more than one autistic child. Autism may also be linked to vaccinations, although this is still being highly studied. The benefits of vaccinations greatly outweigh the risks of them causing autism, so you should not deprive your child simply because you are fearful. Talk to your doctor if you have concerns about vaccinations.

Nobody knows what causes autism. Therefore, we can do nothing to prevent and cure it, but rather we can simply treat the autistic people in our lives with the best of our ability. Becoming educated in autism is the key—the more you know about the disorder, the better you can help individuals who suffer from it. Autism is a complex problem, and as researchers develop new understandings of the way it affects the body, better treatment options will become available, with the hope that someday we will be able to cure this disease.

Bad Apples on the Family Tree

The news that a child in the family is autistic is most often met with a number of reactions. While all family members, even extended, would be supportive in an ideal world, the sad truth is that many are disgusted or disappointed. Does a family member scold the autistic child often? Does he or she look at your autistic child unfairly? Does this family member insist on treating your autistic child the same way he or she treats all the other children in your family, even when it is inappropriate? These are signs that this relative is not receptive to either your autistic child or the situation. This may often be the case when discovering a child is autistic, so as a parent, be aware and prepared for this to happen.

Often, unreceptive relatives simply do not understand what autism is or what it means for your child and your immediate family. Though many see autism as a mental retardation, many autistic children and adults are highly intelligent; they are just unable to communicate this in the same ways that others would. Try explaining what autism means to this family member, and have him or her spend some time with you and your autistic child. Allow them to see the effects of autism and the methods you can use to cope.

If the family member continues to be unsupportive or refuses your explanation, ask why this family member is so unreceptive to the situation. Are they scared of hurting the child? Are they worried about the added responsibility when spending time with the child? Perhaps they feel guilty or are embarrassed. If you can pinpoint why a family member is unreceptive, you can better address the issue and hopefully help him or her overcome their original perceptions.

Perhaps no amount of talking or spending time together will help this family member overcome their prejudice. If this person has stubbornly made up his or her mind, you will never be able to show him or her how beautiful your son or daughter is—autism and all. If this is the case, eliminating this person from your life may be difficult, but it will also rid you and your child of this family member's negative energy and personality. In this developing situation, you need the best positive support available. Remember that other family members have been supportive; that your children are adjusting well and are a source of strength for you. Strengthen your support network by participating in parent support groups for autistic children. And remember that you can surround yourself with those who do accept and love your child—family or not.

Busting the Autism Stereotypes

As with anyone with a physical or mental disorder, autistic people deal with a wide range of reactions from others, from full support to uncaring ignorance. Unfortunately, even those who support autistic family members, co-workers, and friends may not understand autism very well. This leads to stereotypes, which can result in hatred, embarrassment, or

other unhappy situations. By becoming educated about autism, you can help others in your community cope with this disorder.

It is most important to note that not all autistic people are the same. Other diseases and disorders have their own sets of rules, but autism is such a complex medical condition, that everyone reacts differently to it. Autistic people are usually rated on a functional scale, with high-functioning people being able to hold jobs and low-functioning people needing 24-hour-a-day care. Symptoms include behavioral challenges, uncontrollable movements, speech and communication difficulties, and emotional inadequacies. Some show all symptoms, while other show few, and still others may have most under control to the point where you cannot tell they have autism at all.

Because every person is different, no one thing can be said about autism and be true overall. However, most autistic people have trouble communicating emotions. This does not mean that an autistic person does not feel. He or she simply cannot express this feeling. It also does not mean strong relationship bonds are not possible. On the contrary, many autistic people are happily married and in love. Forming relationships is more difficult for most, but can be accomplished over time.

Many people believe that being autistic coincides with being a genius in some aspect. While it is true that some autistic individuals have extraordinary math, music, and art skills, this number is nowhere near the majority—in fact, relatively few autistic people function outside of the normal range in any skill. This stereotype is perpetuated in the movies and on television, because the story of a talented person fighting disadvantages (such as autism) makes a good plot. However, this is not the norm, so nothing more than the best they can personally do should be expected from an autistic person. However, it is important to note that autism is not a form of mental retardation. Some autistic people are mentally retarded as well, but most are not and should not be treated as such.

In the end, the most important lesson to take away from your studies on autism is one of tolerance. You will probably need to be patient when dealing with autistic people, but by understanding a little more about the disorder, perhaps this will be easier. Learn what you can and spread the knowledge to those you know to help create a more tolerant setting for autistic individuals in your community.

Dealing with Asperger Syndrome

Asperger Syndrome is a relatively mild form of autism that effects people in different ways than regular autism. Because it usually does not affect language, many people with Asperger Syndrome go undiagnosed. This is the one form of autism that is usually not caught at an early age and is instead a disorder that develops later in life. Asperger Syndrome, however, can be a very difficult condition to have, so as soon as you suspect yourself or your child of having communication and social behavior problems, see your family doctor.

Many famous and successful people were diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome. Historians even suggest that Einstein and Mozart each suffered from this disorder. It is important to note that no form of autism is a form of mental retardation. In fact, most people with Asperger Syndrome are very intelligent. Asperger Syndrome does not dictate mental ability, but rather makes it difficult for people to communicate in social settings, much in the same way a typical autistic child has trouble with behavior in groups. When this disorder goes undiagnosed, children do not get the help they need, leading to problems in school such as bullying. Most children are relieved to find out they have Asperger Syndrome instead of just thinking they are less of a person. By getting diagnosed, not only can you or your child put a name to the problems, but it is then also possible to get treated to improve your overall situation.

Some symptoms to watch out for if you suspect Asperger Syndrome are some of the same symptoms that people with full-blown autism experience. This includes social confusion, first and foremost. Many people with Asperger Syndrome find it very difficult to deal with transition or change, wanting everything to stay the same. A quickly changing environment is especially confusing. People with Asperger Syndrome also may say rude or inappropriate things when they don't mean to do so, and may not be able to understand others' thought processes. Another common trait they share with autistic individuals is fixation, although people with Asperger Syndrome usually have more control over their fixations, which take the form of highly focused interests. If you suspect yourself or a loved one of this disorder, these are just a few of the signs for which you should be watching. Your doctor should be able to answer further questions and provide both reading material and treatment for this disorder.

Bottles of Pills: Medication Options for Autistic Patients

As with any illness, disease, or disorder, there are a number of medicine options available to help control these symptoms. It is important to remember that none of these medications will "cure" autism; they simply help control some of the effects of the disorder. There are advantages and disadvantages to each drug, as they all have side effects as well as benefits. When choosing medicines to effectively treat autism, your doctor can make recommendations, but since autism is a disorder which varies from person to person, you should use drugs very carefully, watching to see how the body reacts to the treatments.

First, consider the safety of the drug. Some cannot be used in children or in people under a certain weight. Make sure the dosage is easy to understand and before you choose one medicine or another find out how it is administered (pills, injections, liquid, etc). This is important if you are not comfortable with certain methods, such as injecting yourself or your child. Also find out how safe the drug is to individuals who do not suffer from autism. If you have small children in the house, you'll want to be sure that the drug is not

lethal if it gets into the wrong hands. Find out what to do in case this happens, just to be on the safe side.

Also consider the side effects of the drugs you are considering. While they may be very good at controlling aggression, responsiveness, hyperactivity, or other autistic tendencies, they may also cause sedation or other side effects such as nausea or dizziness. Weigh your options carefully before beginning one of these treatments, or you could find yourself with ten bottles of pills, each taken to counteract the side effects of another. Also remember that medications may have long-term effects. Will you or your child become dependent on the drug? Will you be tolerant? How else will it affect the body over time? These are all important questions to ask your doctor before beginning any medication.

You can research the many studies on these drugs at your local library or on the Internet. Publications such as journals and healthcare magazines are probably most current and most reliable, whereas you may get some altered information on the World Wide Web, so be careful about following advice you find without first consulting your doctor. He or she may also be able to provide you with literature about the medication options available for autistic patients. Do your researching on the many choices before making any decisions, and you'll be able to better control your health.

Self-Injury: How to Stop this Dangerous Practice

Many wonder why anyone would practice self-injury, as it is painful and dangerous. However, with autistic children, self-injury occurs more often than not. There are several theories as to why this practice can be prevalent in autistic children, and there are some methods you can use to help ease this distressing practice.

Because autistic children are unable to communicate through language the way that others can, they often feel frustrated at not being understood or at not getting what they need or want. Thus, autistic children may commit self-injury, by banging their heads or biting themselves (among other tactics), to release some of that frustration that cannot be communicated through words. Also, self-injury is a way of getting attention. An autistic child's frustration goes hand-in-hand with wanting attention. For instance, by scratching oneself until one bleeds, the autistic child will immediately get someone's attention, and this person will work to understand what the child wants or needs.

This theory of frustration and attention has been the sole thinking for quite some time. Recently, however, studies have shown that self-injury can have a biochemical component that relieves some of the pain and frustration one feels by releasing endorphins, or "happy hormones," into one's system. The endorphins also provide a release for the autistic child, allowing him or her to temporarily forget about his or her frustration and pain. Furthermore, it is believed that if one practices self-injury enough, the endorphins will begin to help mask any pain associated with such behavior, making it an addictive action.

While some professionals say that ignoring the autistic child's self-injurious behavior is an acceptable method of treating such practice, this can obviously be very difficult. Others have suggested that communication therapy and drugs may help an autistic child by providing him or her with another method of communication. There are drugs that will help stem the addictive behavior of releasing endorphins into the system, and thus help stop such behavior. There are also nutritional solutions available; vitamin B6 and calcium have been said to help many families with an autistic child.

For the family members involved, communication training to learn how to communicate with an autistic child is also extremely important. Because normal adults, and even children and teenagers, are so accustomed to communicating through easily recognizable words or body language, they have to learn that communicating with an autistic child requires a completely different process. By looking for solutions for both the family and the autistic child involved in self-injurious behavior, one may be able to overcome this distressing practice.

When Lying isn't a Problem: Theory of Mind Difficulties

There are many symptoms that an individual with autism may experience; however, one of the most frustrating and hard to understand is what has recently been named Theory of Mind. Within the last few decades, this problem has been more thoroughly discussed and studied, but it is still largely a mystery. Because of Theory of Mind problems, social interactions are even more strenuous for autistic individuals.

Theory of Mind causes these social behavior difficulties in almost every aspect, from playgroups as children to the social world as adults. The concept behind Theory of Mind is that autistic people fail to recognize that other people in the world have different ways of looking at things. Although an autistic person may not be egocentric, he or she probably inherently assumes that everyone thinks, feels, and knows the same things he or she thinks, feels, and knows. Most autistic people have an inability to lie, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but is clearly unnatural. They don't even consider lying an option because they assume everyone knows the truth as they know it.

Because autistic individuals have an inability to lie, they also do not realize that other people do so. In fact, it is a rude awakening for autistic people to find out that others lie or are bad in general. This is especially unnerving when first experienced in the business world, and many autistic individuals do not know how to cope with this. Because they believe that everyone sees the world as they do, it is difficult for them to put themselves in others' shoes. Of course, this can be taught, but it is unfortunately a hard process that those with autism have to constantly remember to do.

Even children have trouble with Theory of Mind—they find it difficult to play games with other children that require keeping a secret. They also often must be reminded of

sharing and releasing aggression in ways that are not harmful. Some of an autistic person's frustration may stem from this inability to understand why another is not reacting in a situation in the "correct" way. Autistic children also have a hard time understanding why people don't know certain facts—if they know it, so should everyone else.

Theory of Mind still needs to be studied in order to be able to better understand and treat this symptom of autism. Currently, the best teaching method is continuous social interaction, along with role-playing and other games that require autistic children to see things from many angles. Until modern medicine finds a better answer to Theory of Mind problems, the best thing to do is be patient with autistic individuals and be willing to explain your thought process to them.

Robotic Hugs: How a Hug Can Help Your Autistic Child

Autistic children and adults often seek pressure in a variety of ways to calm themselves and cope with sensory overload. Oftentimes, hugs and squeezes from other people can cause more distress because autistic children or adults are often unable to communicate their needs by indicating a particular amount or length of pressure. This is both frustrating and ineffective for both the autistic person and whoever is hugging or squeezing them.

The hug machine was created to help relieve this frustration, putting autistic individuals in control of their situation. Both children and adults who suffer from autism sometimes crave pressure to help calm anxiety. Because of this, one woman with autism developed the hug machine, also known as a hug box or a squeeze machine. The hug machine has two padded sideboards connected near the bottom of the boards to form a V-shape. A lever helps push the sideboards together to create pressure; the lever also allows the autistic child or adult the ability to control the amount and length of pressure.

Studies are still being conducted to find out why those with autism respond to pressure and how it can produce a calming effect. The hug machine may affect the heightened sensory perceptions of those with autism who often feels disruptive or distressing behavior. By applying pressure, perhaps the autistic child or adult moves his or her focus to a single feeling—the pressure—which in turn produces a calming effect. For many autistic children and adults, anxiety can be completely incapacitating. Not being able to function with the anxiety is frustrating, and so appropriate social behavior is even more difficult. Sometimes, the only release from such anxiety is through pressure. To this day, the hug machine is used by several programs and researchers studying autism as well as therapy programs.

Remember that hugging or squeezing an autistic child may not help him or her. You may, in fact, increase their senses and cause more anxiety. Though you may not be able to purchase a hug machine, you may be able to create a similar object. Try wrapping the

autistic child or adult in a blanket, where they can control how much pressure to apply. You can also look into buying padded boards that more closely simulate the hug machine's side-boards and perhaps tie or tape some heavy-duty yarn to each side to allow the autistic child or adult control over how much pressure to apply and for how long. Contact your child's school to see if there has been any interest in purchasing a community hug-machine. This may not be a cure to all your child's problems, but it works well to help many autistic individuals cope with the world.

Dietary Concerns: Glutton and Casein

Autism is a disorder that must be treated with a variety of methods since there is no effective way to completely cure it. One of the ways you can help keep the symptoms of autism under control is by studying diet. Parents of children with autism have reported that by controlling diet, they see a significant difference in their child's behavior. Two of the main dietary concerns are glutton and casein.

Glutton is a substance found in many common food products, with wheat, rye, and oaks being the main culprits. Casein is found in dairy products, such as milk. If you or your child with autism eats many foods with these products in them, such as breads or cheeses, you may be able to better control autistic behavior by decreasing consumption of such foods.

The difficulty in digesting both glutton and casein comes from an inability to digestively handle the peptides in these substances. Since they are not broken down as in a normal body, these extra peptides are absorbed into the blood stream. Elevated levels of peptides disrupt major brain functions, contributing to the effects of autism. By cutting foods containing glutton and casein out of you or your child's diet, you can help the body with the process of breaking down the peptides present in the body. To see if you or your child has a high absorption rate of these peptides, your doctor can administer a simple urine test.

Speak to a nutritionist or doctor before making any major changes in your diet. When you decide to cut glutton and casein from your diet, do not attempt to do this all at once. Cutting anything from your diet suddenly is unhealthy, and your body could go into withdrawal. Instead, slowly begin reducing the amounts of breads, grains, and milk products until you are eating none. Your doctor can provide you with a complete list of all the foods containing glutton and casein if you truly want to cut them all from your diet. However, it may be necessary to get the nutrients that you find in glutton and casein products in another way, such as with dietary supplements. Again, your doctor can help in this decision. Overall, maintaining a balanced diet is the healthiest thing to do. Leaving glutton and casein products out of your or your child's diet may help control autistic behavior, so it is an option that should be considered, but eating a healthy diet altogether is the best way to keep you and your family healthy.

Autistic Forms of Teaching and Tolerance

Understanding how autistic children learn is key to teaching them with the same intensity as you teach other children. This may seem like a straightforward idea, but autistic children learn so differently that understanding autism itself is a must when you teach autistic children. By becoming educated in the disorder, teachers can effectively learn to deal with autistic children and adults both in and out of the classroom, creating a more understanding world for everyone

Autistic children are often visual thinkers. Thus teaching by speaking will not be entirely effective. Teachers should combine pictures with words for the autistic child to fully comprehend the lesson. For instance, if you are teaching about the animals of the world, you should have a flash card with the word “mouse,” say the word aloud slowly and clearly, and show the child a picture of a mouse. Perhaps even bring a live mouse in for show and tell. Nouns may be easier to teach autistic children since verbs require action and can be more difficult in illustrating. If you are teaching autistic children words such as “sit” or “stand,” you should complete these actions when you teach the word. Also, because of the tendency to be visual, autistic children are often unable to follow long sentences. They cannot decipher the sequence and become confused. Thus, writing instructions can be very helpful when proctoring tests or quizzes.

As visual thinkers, autistic children can often fixate on a particular object or picture. If this is the case, try incorporating that object or picture into lesson plans. If the child likes planes, try using planes for visuals wherever you can in the lesson. For example, when teaching math, create word problems about planes to interest the child. Autistic children also tend to be artistic or musical, producing highly original drawings and showing above average abilities with instruments or voice. Set aside time in the day for the arts and encourage activities that the children enjoy.

Autistic children may also have trouble writing because of the control over their hands and movement. This is frustrating for both the child and the teacher. To reduce frustration, allow the child to use a computer. If you can do this, make sure that the keyboard and monitor are close together as the child may have difficulty remembering what he or she has typed recently.

By being open to teaching an autistic child to the best of your ability, you are not only giving him or her the best opportunities in life, but you are also being a good role model to the other children in the class. Do not allow an autistic child to ruin the learning experience for others, but rather incorporate his or her oddities into your lessons as much as possible. Creating a more prejudice-free classroom is the best gift you can give this child.

A Gift of Sight: Visual Perception Treatment for Autistic Children

Autism effects every child differently, so it is difficult to find the exact treatments your child needs to cope with his or her symptoms. One thing that effects some autistic children (though, not all) is problems with visual perception. By using some standardized methods to help improve visual perception, you can give your child the ability to see the world more clearly, making learning and comprehension easier and possibly curbing some behavior problems as well.

Autistic children mainly have problems with sensory overload and distortion. These are some of the same problems many people not suffering from the disorder develop, and so many treatment options have become available. Individuals with autism often find, however, that the sensory overload of the world due to light, colors, contrast, shapes, and patterns, is too much to handle, causing them to act out or shut down in general. This is sometimes a genetic condition that is simply enhanced by the autism, so if the child's parents have trouble with reading or have been otherwise treated for visual perceptive problems, there is a good chance that the child needs help as well.

The Irene Method is one effective way to treat visual perception disorders. This method uses color to create a more harmonized world. You may have heard of these methods if anyone has ever suggested using a color filter over the page when reading to be able to read better and more quickly. This method is proven to work, and if your autistic child is at the maturity level of reading, you may want to try these color filters to see if there is a difference in speed and comprehension. However, it is more likely that your autistic child will benefit from color filters during the entire day, not just when reading. Special glasses have been made using colored lenses to conquer this problem. Not every child responds the same way to every color, so it is a process of trial and error to find out which color is the one blocking the harmful light. You can also choose to use colored light bulbs in your home to help autistic individuals with their visual perception problems.

This method mainly helps children in 4 areas: depth perception, social interaction, learning, and physical well being. The colors help the child determine how far he or she is from an object, and the world becomes more three-dimensional, helping depth perception. Social interaction also improves because the child feels as though he or she is in a calmer world and can more clearly see and interpret facial expressions. The colors make it possible to learn, especially when reading, and overall, the child will feel better, because it helps reduce headaches and dizziness. By testing this technique and others to help visual perception problems, you can help your child better cope with the world and his or her autism.

Sounding Off: How Auditory Stimulation Helps an Hurts and Autistic Child

Sounds are a part of our everyday life, and so when dealing with an autistic child who has sensory problems, sound is one of the first things you should learn to control, especially in a learning environment. Sound can both be hurtful and helpful for an autistic child. Because each autistic individual is different, you must closely observe him or her to find out what types of reactions you can expect from auditory sensory stimulation.

Loud or frightening sounds may be the most difficult type of sensory stimulation in an autistic child's life. Many of our routine daily activities include such sounds, hurting the growth process. Autistic children can not and will not learn if they are frightened. For example, parents often find that they have a difficult time toilet training their autistic children. This may be due to the scary sound of the toilet flushing; which could be overpowering to an autistic child. Instead, try using a potty seat away from the actual toilet until they get used to the idea. Another example is loud or crunchy foods. If your autistic child is a picky eater, try to notice specifically which foods he or she blatantly refuses to eat. Sometimes, food simply sounds too loud when crunching in an autistic child's mouth, and these loud noises can hurt his or her ears. If this is the case with your child, provide alternative soft foods instead of crunchy carrots, apples, or potato chips. Other loud sounds, such as a vacuum cleaner, may hurt your child's ears. Try to do these activities when he or she is not in the room, or consider providing your child with earplugs that he or she can use if the world gets too loud.

Sounds can also cause fixation. Some children, for example, constantly hum and seem fixated on the sights and sounds of lawn mowers. Use this fixation to be beneficial. For example, read stories about lawn mowers or use the humming in conjunction with a song. Music is a great way in which autistic individuals can learn, because sound is a form of nonverbal communication. Teachers and parents should use this tool in learning environments. The key is to make sound work for you and your child. Autism is a difficult disorder to handle, so by being sensitive to your child's specific needs, you can help him or her learn to deal with the sounds of everyday life.

The Power of Music - Musical Therapy to Treat Autism

Musical therapy is a relatively new treatment method for autism patients, but one that should not be overlooking when discussing options. Patients who receive musical therapy often should great improvement in temperament and learning skills. Music connects to the non-verbal part of our brains, making it a perfect therapy for disorders in which the patient has trouble communicating, such as autism. Research this innovative treatment method if you are looking for some help with autism and haven't had much luck in the past.

Musical therapy is effective because it can be used in conjunction with learning social skills. Music is a very non-threatening medium for patients, and many games can be played using music to help improve social and behavioral skills. By encouraging eye contact while singing or using instruments that need to get close to the face, musical therapy can help autistic individuals break social barriers.

The number one way that musical therapy can help children, as well as older autistic patients, is by helping with the development of speech skills. Music is a way to connect the verbal and non-verbal functions in the brain. Autistic individuals may have various forms of speech problems. Some can only hum, grunt, or make other non-word noises, while others babble nonsensical phrases or cries. Still others gain the capability to put together phrases and sentences to communicate with the world, although these usually lack emotion. Autistic people are known for monotone voices. However, no matter how skilled the individual is with speech, he or she can participate in musical therapy by clapping rhythms, humming along, or doing simple echoing songs.

Autistic individuals are commonly found to be particularly good at music. Some, for instance, have perfect pitch. Others can play a particular instrument very well, with little instruction. Even if he or she shows no genius musical ability by normal standards, you may find that a particularly hard to deal with autistic person has abilities in music that exceed his or her other abilities. A musical therapist can use music as a way to link this kind of learning with other kinds of learning, not only as speech development and social behavioral development as previously discussed, but also as a way to communicate emotions and develop memory.

By using all of these techniques in conjunction with one another, musical therapy can work wonders with people who are autistic. Trained professionals can use music to teach children and others how to communicate in nonverbal ways, making it easier for patients to learn. Research the musical therapy option to provide you or your child with another choice when treating autism.

Achieving Self-control with Autism

Self-discipline is a skill that most autistic children have trouble acquiring. This includes not only inappropriate outbursts, but also habits that can be potentially dangerous, such as being aggressive towards others or causing harm to themselves, such as banging their heads off walls. To prevent these and other behaviors, one technique parents and educators can use to control autistic tendencies is self-management. Giving the child power over him- or herself is often the key to keeping control over violent situations and may be a positive step towards learning other behaviors as well.

Self-management works because the child is no longer fully controlled by others. By teaching self-management during specific times of day, such as while the child is at school or therapy, the child will be more likely to continue to practicing self-control

during all times of the day. The key is to implement a program in which he or she monitors his or her own behavior and activities. Begin with short amounts of time, and continue to monitor the child from a more passive standpoint. Every ten to fifteen minutes remind the child that he or she is in control and needs to monitor and be aware of good and bad behavior.

This monitoring is a form of self-evaluation. When a child is in control, he or she may think more closely about behavior in the past and present. Set clear goals with the child—for example, an afternoon with no aggression towards others or a day at school with no self-injury. Every fifteen minutes ask the child how he or she is doing. Is the goal being met? If the answer is no, perhaps the child is not ready for self-management, or perhaps the goals are too unattainable. You want to make sure that the goals are easy to reach at first, and then move the child towards more difficult goals in the future. When a child is successful at self-monitoring, he or she will have a more positive attitude towards the experience.

Of course, an important part of self-management is a rewards system. Have the child come up with his or her own reward, depending on interest. Reinforcement will make these good behavior goals more clearly marked in the child's mind, and by choosing and rewarding him- or herself, the child will feel completely in control of the self-management system. Choose simple rewards to start, such as smiley faces for every goal met and sad faces for every goal not met, and work up to a larger goal, such as a special activity or new toy when a certain amount of smiley faces has been attained.

These types of programs do not develop overnight, so it is important that you and the child have enough time to devote to a self-management experience. By reinforcing good behavior with rewards, as determined by the child instead of by an adult, he or she will be more likely to carry this on even when not participating in the program. If your autistic child is mature enough, this could be a good treatment program to try.

Autistic Children and the Strain on Marriage

Unfortunately, in modern times, many marriages end in divorce or separation. This statistic rises even higher when you mix in an autistic child. No matter how loving and understanding you both may be towards your child, the truth is that autism is a very difficult matter, and strain on the marriage is not uncommon. By trying to stay positive about your situation, and by working to keep your marriage healthy, you and your spouse can avoid marital problems and hopefully survive the trying times of raising an autistic child.

Why did you marry your husband or wife? By asking yourself this question often, you can focus on the good things in your marriage. Raising a child with autism is stressful, and if you are stressed, you have a tendency to snap at another person for the smallest missteps. Instead of focusing on these bad qualities, take some time to enjoy one another

the way you did at the beginning of the relationship. This may include spending some time apart from your children. When you find out that your child is autistic, it is beneficial to make sure that you and your spouse are not the only two people with whom your child will respond. A grandparent, aunt or uncle, mature sibling, or nanny are good people to have in your child's life in the most intimate way possible. This way, alone time with your spouse is possible.

Work together with your spouse to help you child, instead of fighting with one another. It is very likely that you will have different ideas about what to do in certain situations, so be prepared to compromise and always seek professional consultations before making any medical decisions for your child. By working together, remember that you are giving your child the best opportunities. Try to set apart time every week to spend together as a family, especially if one parent or the other is the primary caregiver.

Lastly, seek help when you need it. Part of any successful marriage is spending some time apart to focus on individual needs, and it is no different when you have an autistic child. However, if you find that you and your spouse are not happy unless you are spending time alone, it is time to reevaluate the situation. A family or marriage counselor can help you and your spouse get back on the right track to a happy life together. It might also be beneficial to meet other couples raising autistic children. You are not alone, and it is never easy. By making an effort to keep your marriage happy, even when you are stressed with the task of raising an autistic child, you and your spouse can ensure that your marriage does not end in a messy divorce.

Sibling Rivalry: How Brothers and Sisters can Cope with Autistic Family Members

When a family member is diagnosed with autism, there is a vast amount of information teaching parents how to cope with an autistic child, and there is also information for parents about dealing with an autistic child's different behaviors. However, there are fewer learning tools for those who have an autistic sibling, even though this is a very stressful situation for brothers and sisters of an autistic child. The following tips can help children cope with an autistic sibling.

Sometimes parents are so involved in preparing themselves and their autistic child for the transition ahead that they forget that their other children must also deal with the new situation. Often, siblings of an autistic child may feel the new situation acutely. They may feel neglected by parents or jealous of the autistic child who is now receiving more attention. Also, they may find their peers constantly teasing them about having an autistic sibling, which can lead to more stress. This may lead to behavioral issues, with the sibling acting out and becoming a "problem child" to receive attention. In some cases, the sibling may even try to hurt the autistic brother or sister in an attempt to remove him from the family environment.

However, this is not always the case. Sometimes, having an autistic sibling forces one to “grow up” and become responsible. There can be a strong emotional attachment to the autistic sibling and a keen desire to keep him or her safe in all situations. Furthermore, living with an autistic sibling can teach one to be more open about another person’s differences. In this way, having an autistic sibling is a life-enriching experience that pushes individuals to be emotionally and mentally stronger and to be more tolerant towards others in life.

One tip for siblings to cope with their autistic brother or sister is to find a support group. There should be resources available at the local chapter of the Autism Society of America. This is especially important in helping siblings feel that they are not alone and isolated in this unfolding situation—others are dealing with the same sorts of problems. Also, try to increase family interaction. Schedule a regular family day or family night each week, where all children can spend time with parents or other family members and share their day or week experiences and any problems. The best thing to remember is to be open about how you are feeling. If children feel that their parents are neglecting some aspect of their life, simply asking them for a moment of their time is often the best solution. It is important for parents to be understanding towards their children’s needs for attention, whether they are autistic or not. Communication is the key to helping the entire family run smoothly.

The Terrible Teens - Dealing with Autistic Teenagers

For most parents, one of the most trying times in their lives is during their child’s teenage years. When puberty hits, young adults go through serious changes in their bodies and minds, and parents have little or no control over many situations. In an autistic child, puberty is no different. Although your autistic child is not experiencing puberty in quite the same ways as others his or her age, major hormonal changes still occur in the body. This can lead to extreme results, and this can be either good or bad depending on how your child reacts to the new hormone levels.

One of the scariest side effects of changes in an autistic person’s body is the onset of seizures. Many autistic individuals experience seizures from birth to adulthood, but even if your child does not suffer from these episodes, he or she may begin to experience seizures during puberty and afterwards, due to the new levels of hormones in the body. Strange as it may sound, violent shaking seizures are not necessarily a bad thing. Almost a quarter of autistic children experience seizures, but many go undetected because they are not textbook versions of seizures. If you recognize that your child is experiencing a seizure, you can do something about it, and doctors will be able to better treat your child. However, if the seizures are subconsciously happening, you and your child may not realize it. The result of these small hidden seizures can be a loss in function, which can be devastating, especially if your child was improving before puberty. Regular check-ups during puberty, therefore, are extremely important.

The changes might not necessarily be a bad thing. New hormone levels in the body and the other changes associated with puberty might help your autistic child grow and succeed in areas in which he or she normally had no skill or interest. Many parents report that their child's behavior improved, and that learning in social settings was easier.

The important thing about puberty is to learn to monitor the changes in your child very carefully and to ask your doctor lots of questions. Remember that puberty is a difficult experience for any young adult, and so it will be even more difficult for someone with autism. Try to practice patience and understanding with your teen, and be careful to regulate his or her autism so that the transition from child to adult will go more smoothly.

Are We There Yet? Family Vacations with Autistic Children

Although planning a family vacation with children may make any parents pull out his or her hair, it can be a rewarding experience for everyone in the end. It is no different if you have an autistic child in the family. The important thing to remember is that you need to be prepared for whatever life throws your way. To an autistic child, vacations can be scary and confusing, or they can be a great learning experience, leaving behind wonderful memories the entire family can enjoy.

First, choose your location based on your autistic child's needs. For example, if he or she is sensitive to sound, an amusement park is probably not the best idea. Quieter vacations are possible at small beaches and by going camping. Overall, you should be able to find a location that everyone in the family enjoys. Once there, plan out your days accordingly. For example, you may want to see attractions very early or late in the day to avoid crowds. You also might want to consider taking your vacation during the off-season, if you children's school work will not be disrupted. These gives your autistic child more comfort if he or she is nervous in crowded situations, and provides you with piece of mind. When choosing a location, also note how far it is from you home. How will you get there? If you have to deal with an airport, remember that security may have to touch your child and be prepared for this.

Choose a location and activities that everyone can enjoy, but also that provide learning and social interaction opportunities for your autistic child. For example, a child that does not like touch sensations may enjoy the soft sands of a beach, and the waves can provide a very different kind of feeling for him or her. Being outside, a beach is also a great place for your child to yell without disrupting others. Children who are normally non-responsive may benefit from a museum , where they can ask questions and you can ask questions of them.

Remember that most people on vacation at the location you choose will have never dealt with autism before. Try to be understanding of their ignorance—but also stick up for your child if he or she is being treated unfairly. Know your child's constitutional laws, and

also be willing to compromise. For example, if a restaurant is reluctant to serve you after your child caused a scene there last night, explain the situation and ask if it would be possible to take your food to go, even if this is normally not done. Try not to be rude to people; staring often happens, but instead of snide comments or mean looks, ignore them as much as possible and focus on having a good time with your family

What is Leaky Gut Syndrome?

Leaky gut syndrome in conjunction with autism is still being researched; a number of studies and research are under way to better understand how the syndrome starts, why it can be prevalent in autistic children, and how to treat it. Simply, leaky gut syndrome is the inability of the intestinal wall to keep out large, unwanted molecules. This symptom of autism most often signifies that the intestinal wall has been altered to become permeable. Leaky gut syndrome in autistic children may occur because of increased sensitivity or allergies.

Leaky gut syndrome is problematic for one's health because it allows molecules and substances (such as proteins) that are normally filtered out of the intestinal tract into the intestines. Because these molecules are not usually allowed inside the gut, the body misinterprets these non-harmful substances as a virus or infection and begins to produce antibodies to attack them. In turn, this creates a process where one's body recognizes certain foods, as well as any of the body's regular molecules that are similar to these foods, as harmful, causing an auto-immune disease where the body attacks itself. These are merely two possible outcomes with leaky gut syndrome. Others include the transportation of bacteria normally found within the intestinal tract to move into the bloodstream and cause an infection anywhere in the body as well as a weakening of the liver, which causes more toxins to circulate throughout the body, leading to a number of medical problems.

What can cause leaky gut syndrome? Researchers are still working to more fully understand the causes, but current medical diagnoses suggest that a diet high in alcohol and caffeine intake, certain drugs like ibuprofen and antacids, or a diet high in carbohydrates can decrease the thickness of the intestinal wall as well as other possible reasons. These are just a few possible reasons, and ways to treat leaky gut syndrome are just as uncertain as the reasons. Because of the sensitivity of the digestive system with leaky gut syndrome, many parents of autistic children find that putting their child on gluten- and casein-free diets can help. Both gluten and casein are proteins, and a diet with these proteins may irritate and inflame a leaky gut syndrome – though at the moment, researchers are still studying this. You may also treat leaky gut syndrome by avoiding alcohol, caffeine, ibuprofen, or spicy foods – all of which can cause irritation in the intestines.

Understanding leaky gut syndrome is an ongoing process, for parents with autistic children, doctors, and researchers, but this does not mean that there is nothing you can do

to treat it. Simply being aware that your autistic child may have leaky gut syndrome will help you to better understand and improve his or her life.

Smooth Transitions: School to Work

One of the most major transitions in any person's life is that from school to work. In high school or college, many people lead a protected life and are still helped financially and otherwise by their parents. After school, these ties are often cut, leaving the recent graduate to fend for his- or herself. This transition is scary for anyone, but even more so for an individual with autism. Because school is a time to learn to live with peers in a controlled environment, the work force is a difficult concept for autistic people because one must often deal with new situations daily rather than have the comfort of a set living situation.

One of the main things autistic graduates need to learn is how to deal with people in a business world. This includes proper grooming, something that may not have been such a big deal in high school or college. Proper grooming, such as brushing your teeth, wearing appropriate clothing, using deodorant, and combing your hair probably comes natural for most people, but an autistic person needs help with these tasks—he or she may not realize that they are being inappropriate. By this stage in life, many autistic individuals who have gone through schooling are at a maturity level where they can do the task assigned with no problem and avoid outbursts in most situations. In fact, it has been shown that some autistic individuals are highly skilled at tasks involving things such as math or music. Learning a new job in the work force is not the problem—relating to others in a social situation is.

These relationship problems also, unfortunately, help people take advantage of autistic individuals. Most people who suffer from autism believe that all people are like themselves, and inherently good. In business, it is sadly very common to come across companies and business people who do not practice ethically. This often shocks autistic individuals, who may have no idea how to handle this sort of situation. Others in the work force may also not be skilled to deal with autism, leading to bad relationships among employees. By hiring an autistic individual, employers must not only teach them their new job, but also provide direction for others who have to work with him or her. Intolerance in the work force is common, and autistic individuals need to be prepared for this.

Overall, it is important for people with autism to realize that there will be a major change between life in high school or college and life in the work force. It is probably very beneficial for these individuals to seek help in the transition from therapists, family members, or mentors. Going from school to work is difficult, but with a little motivation and hard work anyone, autistic or not, can succeed.

Know Your Rights: Laws and Autism

If you or your child has autism, some of the most basic things you can study and learn are your rights. Every American citizen is protected under the constitution, and there are special laws that have been passed to help protect people with autism and other disabilities. By knowing the laws that protect you or your autistic loved ones, you can live in a world that provides better opportunities to everyone, regardless of not only disability, but also race, gender, and ethnicity. This is simply the first step to creating a more tolerant world in general.

The first law with which you should become acquainted is I.D.E.A., or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The I.D.E.A. covers children ages 3 to 21 and provides autistic children with the special educational programs they need. The I.D.E.A. gives parents the right to be involved with education decisions concerning their child made by the school. Your child first needs to be assessed to qualify under the I.D.E.A., and this is best done by a private professional. In the end, your child has the right by law to receive a free public education that is appropriate for his or her skill level. If your public school has no such program, they are required to find one or create one at no cost to you.

Also become familiar with and knowledgeable about the American Disabilities Act. Under this act, discrimination due to disability is prohibited in the workforce, as well as with state and local government, public accommodations, the United States Congress, public transportation, and telecommunications. For example, if you are autistic, but have the skills to do a certain job, you cannot be refused the job because of your autism.

Other laws provide rights for people with autism so that they are constitutionally equal to others. One such law says that people with autism have the right to vote, and accommodations must be made so that this is possible. Another says that autistic individuals cannot be refused housing based on disability. Others provide equal rights in all other aspects of life, and these should especially be studied if your loved one with autism is in a health care institution. By knowing the law and how it applies to yourself or others with autism, you can be sure that justice is upheld. If you have questions, local law officials should be ready and willing to answer you or provide you with material to answer your own questions. Remember that ignorance of the law is not a valid excuse for anyone, so be an advocate for yourself or others with autism to prevent mistreatment.