Early intervention can make a difference for autistic children

Posted by Luc Lecavalier, Ohio State University April 23, 2008 03:58AM

Categories: Impact, Netwellness

Autism is much more common than originally thought. And the numbers are increasing.

The Centers for Disease Control recently found that one in 150 8-year-old children in several areas of the United States has some form of autism.

Several decades ago, if a child was diagnosed with autism, there was little hope for leading anything close to a "normal" life. Only the most severe and obvious cases, usually with intellectual disability, were diagnosed, and the prognosis was very poor.

In fact, professionals at the time encouraged many parents to place their child with autism into institutional care to spare the family the stress and heartache of attempting to raise the child.

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Due to a shift in the "spectrum" view of autism spectrum disorders, we now can identify and assist individuals who have less severe forms of the disorder. These individuals were most often left undiagnosed in the past and did not receive many appropriate services or supports, even though we now know they could have benefited greatly from them.

This increased rate of identification has moved the diagnostic category of autism disorders from being considered a low-incidence disorder to a relatively high-incidence disorder.

The benefits of early detection

Autism spectrum disorders can often be detected as early as 18 months. While all children should be watched to make sure they are reaching developmental milestones on time, children in high-risk groups -- such as children who have a parent or sibling with an disorder -- should be watched extra closely.

A health-care professional should check a child with any of the warning signs of autism disorders.

Research shows that early intervention can greatly improve a child's development. By providing the child with autism-appropriate services and supports at appropriate developmental levels, significant gains in most life areas can be achieved. Acting early can make a real difference.

Warning signs of Autism Spectrum Disorders

According to the Centers for Disease Control's Possible red flags for autism spectrum disorders, children and adults with an autism spectrum

For More Information

• Autism Information Center (CDC)
• Learn the Signs. Act Early.
disorder might:

• Not play "pretend" games (pretend to "feed" a doll).
• Not point at objects to show interest (for instance, an airplane flying over).
• Not look at objects when another person points at them.
• Have trouble relating to others or do not have an interest in other people.
• Avoid eye contact and want to be alone.
• Have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings.
• Prefer not to be held or cuddled or might cuddle only when they want to.
• Appear to be unaware when other people talk to them but respond to other sounds.
• Be very interested in people, but not know how to talk to, play with, or relate to them.
• Repeat or echo words or phrases said to them, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language (echolalia).
• Have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions.
• Repeat actions over and over again.
• Have trouble adapting to changes in routine.
• Have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel or sound.
• Lose skills they once had (for instance, stop saying words they were once using).

Talk to your child's doctor or nurse if your child loses skills at any age.

Treatment

Treatment does seem to help the child with autism reach his or her full potential, so parents and other caregivers should keep plugging away even though at times it seems discouraging. The most symptomatic time is usually about age 4 or 5, and symptoms often improve after that, especially with treatment. Although not all such children will become completely normal, there is enough hope that it is important to take the long view and work toward goals.

If you think your child may have an ASD, ask your child's doctor for a referral to see a developmental pediatrician or other specialist. You can also call your local early intervention agency (for children under 3) or public school (for children 3 and older).

To find out who to speak to in your area, check with the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities.

COMMENTS (3) Post a comment

Posted by panicdawg on 04/23/08 at 9:49AM

There is so much we need to do for these children and so many obstacles our pitiful health system puts up. America should be ashamed of itself.

The most discouraging thing in my opinion is that:

1. Insurance Companies will not pay for autism related treatments. You are better off saying the child has almost anything else to get them to pay something for treatments.

Also

2 there is very little help for children with autism in Northern OH by people that understand it.
3.. Even the professionals do not seem to understand it well
4.. There are no (very little) research done on the natural treatments that have shown promise (e.g. vitamins, Fish Oil, Amino Acids, enzymes etc.) due to the fact that drug companies run the research industry.
and do not see profit in them.
5. The medical field can not even agree on how to treat it. DAN Doctors (Defeat Autism NOW doctors) are either feared by sceptical physicians or feel threatened that they may know more than they do. 
6. Neurologists, and specialists run loads of tests yet have no answers. They only seem to rule out other cases like fragile X.

Inappropriate? Alert us.

Posted by brin3m on 04/23/08 at 10:47AM

the prior comments are understandable but i would like to add that this really is an exciting time for the families now because so much light is being given to this disorder and many other mental disorders! 20 years ago my son was diagnosed with ADD and i never even heard of that! So many changes have occurred with the treatment of that disorder that i know that with all the media attention now being given to Autism and PDD that so many more children have hope for a positive future.
Plus families that have past experience with the trials and tribulations they had to deal must continue to be vocal and supportive to families just beginning to deal with their child's struggle.
Changes are coming even if slow. Stay active and vocal.

Inappropriate? Alert us.

Posted by rotodc on 04/23/08 at 11:37AM

There is an autism education pilot project being funded by the Department of Health. It's goal is to deal with some of the challenges presented above. Those with any interest in the project should look at ohioaap.org.

Inappropriate? Alert us.