

## UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY OF AUTISM

Autism is a lifelong disability affecting nearly 1 in 250 children born in the world today. With the diagnosis of autism reaching epidemic proportions, it is important that accurate information is made available to anyone who will be working with, living with, or loving a person with autism. And let's face it, with numbers as small as these, it is becoming more likely than not that each and every one of us will be touched by a person with autism in our lifetime.

It is with this in mind that I assembled my PowerPoint Presentation. It is a comprehensive presentation that includes statistics, symptoms, causes, and treatments regarding the subject of autism, as well as providing a brief glimpse into the life of a child with autism. The following is a synopsis of what you will find in this presentation:

### DEFINITION

- Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life. It impacts the normal development of the brain in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. It is a spectrum disorder, meaning that the symptoms and characteristics can present themselves in a wide variety of combinations, from mild to severe.  
(Autism Society of America)
- Autism is widely recognized as a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the functioning of the brain. It is not a behavioral, emotional or conduct disorder. It is not a mental illness. There are no medical tests that can be used to diagnose autism.  
(Shriver, 1999)

### STATISTICS

- 1 in 1000 individuals are diagnosed with "classic" autism.
- 1 in 500 individuals are diagnosed within the autism spectrum, including Pervasive Developmental Disorders.
- 1 in 200 individuals are diagnosed within the autism spectrum, including Pervasive Developmental Disorders and Aspergers Syndrome.  
(Autism Society of Wisconsin)
  - Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified is the diagnosis made for children who do not meet the criteria for a specific diagnosis, but there is a severe and pervasive impairment in specified behaviors.
  - Asperger's Syndrome (Disorder) is characterized by impairments in social interactions and the presence of restricted interests and activities, with no clinically significant general delay in language, and testing in the range of average to above average intelligence.  
(Autism Society of America)
- Every day 53 babies are born in the United States who will later be diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders. (Autism Society of Wisconsin)
- Autism is four times more prevalent in boys than in girls. It has no racial, ethnic or social boundaries. Family income,

- lifestyle, and educational levels do not affect the chance of autism's occurrence. (Autism Society of America)
- Research shows that 50% of children diagnosed with autism will remain mute throughout their lives. (National Institute of Mental Health)
  - Approximately 10% of autistic individuals have savant abilities. (Edelson)
    - Savant abilities refers extraordinary skills not exhibited by most persons.

### **SYMPTOMS**

- The National Institute of Mental Health listed many of the symptoms that might occur with an autistic individual. Deficits in the area of communication, social interaction and exploration of environment are the three main areas cited. (National Institute of Mental Health)
- Children and adults with autism typically have difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and leisure play or activities. Stereotypic (self-stimulatory) behaviors may be present, and in some cases, aggressive and/or self-injurious behaviors might be present. (Autism Society of America)

### **CAUSES**

- A specific cause of autism is unknown.
- Current research links autism to biological and neurological differences in the brain. (Autism Society of America)
- Studies of twins in the UK confirm that autism has a heritable component but suggest that environmental influences play a role as well. By examining the inheritance of the disorder, researchers have shown that autism does run in families, but not in a clear-cut way. Siblings of people with autism have a 3 to 8 percent chance of being diagnosed with the same disorder. (Rodier, 2000)
- Autism is not caused by bad parenting. (Autism Society of America)
- Autism is not caused by "refrigerator moms" as suggested by psychiatrist Bruno Bettelheim in the 1950s. (Jones, 1999)

### **TREATMENTS**

- Sensory Integration
  - Integration and interpretation of sensory stimulation from the environment by the brain. (Hatch-Rasmussen)
- Behavioral Interventions
  - Early, intensive behavioral interventions may improve outcomes for children with autism and help them to achieve their maximum potential. (Center for Disease Control)
- Diet

- o People with autism are more susceptible to allergies and food sensitivities than the average person. (Edelson) The most common food sensitivity for children with autism is to gluten and casein.
  - o Special diets, as described in Karyn Seroussi's book, may be helpful to some children. (Seroussi, 2000)
- Vitamin Therapy
  - o parents have reported that they have tried B6/magnesium and /or DMG often with good or spectacular results (Rimland, 1994)

#### **TEACHING TIPS FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM**

- Use visuals
- Avoid long strings of verbal instruction
- Encourage developing child's special talents
- Use child's fixations to motivate school work
- Use concrete, visual methods to teach number concepts
- Let child use a typewriter instead of writing
- Protect child from sounds that hurt their ears
- Place child near a window and avoid using fluorescent lights
- Use weighted vests to calm nervous system
- Interact with child while they are swinging or rolled in a mat
- Don't ask child to look and listen at the same time
- Teach with tactile learning materials (sandpaper alphabet)
- Use printed words and pictures on flashcard
- Generalize teaching  
(Grandin, 2001)

#### **PARENTING A CHILD WITH A DISABILITY**

- Seek the assistance of another parent
- Rely on positive resources in your life (church, counselors)
- Take it one day at a time
- Learn the terminology
- Seek information (internet, support groups, library)
- Do not be intimidated
- Maintain a positive outlook
- Find programs for your child
- Take care of yourself
- Decide how to deal with others
- Keep daily routines as normal as possible
- Know that you are not alone
- Most importantly, keep your sense of humor  
(Smith, 2000)

There are no known causes, no known cures and no good answers as to how to work with children with autism. However, it is important to dispel some of the myths and mysteries of autism. View the enclosed PowerPoint Presentation regarding this subject. My goal is to do just that.

## References

Autism Society of America (2002) *What is Autism?* Retrieved March 17, 2002,

from <http://www.autism-society.org/whatisautism/autism.html>

Autism Society of Wisconsin *Autism Spectrum Disorders - Statistics*. Retrieved March

17, 2002, from <http://www.asw4autism.org/Incidence.htm>

Center for Disease Control. *FAQs about Autism*. Retrieved March 17,

2002, from <http://www.cdc.gov/nip/vacsafe/concerns/autism/autism.htm>

Edelson, Stephen M. *Allergies and Food Sensitivities*. Retrieved March 17, 2002, from

<http://www.autism.org/allergy.html>  
Edelson, Stephen M. *Autistic Savant*. Retrieved March 17, 2002, from <http://www.autism.org/savant.html>

Grandin, Temple (2001) *Teaching Tips for Children and Adults with Autism*.

Retrieved March 17, 2002, from <http://www.autism.org/temple/tips.html>

Hatch-Rasmussen, Cindy *Sensory Integration*. Retrieved March 17, 2002, from

<http://www.autism.org/si.html>  
Jones, Nancy (1999) *About Autism: A Severe Disorder of the Nervous System*.

Retrieved March 17, 2002, from <http://www.closingthegap.com/lib/pdf/1999/Oct-Nov99/jones.pdf>

National Institute of Mental Health. *Autism*. Retrieved March 17, 2002, from

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/autism.cfm>  
Rimland, Bernard (1994). *The Second Great Autism Watershed*. Retrieved July 23, 2003, from

<http://www.autism.com/ari/editorial/watershed.html>

Rodier, Patricia M. (2000). Early Origins of Autism. *Scientific American*, 282, 56-63.

Seroussi, Karyn (2000). *Unraveling the Mystery of Autism and Pervasive*

*Developmental Disorders*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster

Shriver, Mark D., Allen, Keith D., Mathews, Judith R. (1999). Effective assessment of the

shared and unique characteristics of children with autism. *The School Psychology Review*, 28, 538-58.

Smith, Patricia McGill (2000) *You Are Not Alone: For Parents When They Learn*

*That Their Child Has a Disability*. Retrieved March 26, 2002, from  
<http://www.kidsource.com/NICHCY/parenting.disab.all.4.2.html>