

POINTERS FOR PARENTS

A Program Designed To Protect Children With Autism

(NAPSA)—Raising a child is a challenge. Raising a child with an illness or disability such as autism is a journey with unprecedented struggles along the way.

According to the Autism Society of America (ASA), autism is a complex developmental disability that affects a person's ability to communicate and interact with others. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that autism affects one in 150 children, with a higher concentration among male children, where one in 94 boys are affected.

Autism Speaks, a nonprofit organization devoted to autism, indicates that autistic children may have impaired communication, social and cognitive skills, very rigid routines and repetitive behaviors.

Since autism affects individual children to unpredictable degrees, there is no textbook method when it comes to caring for an autistic child. The ASA advises parents that it is important to be flexible and open-minded to treatment options, changing paths when need be. Methods for caring for an autistic child should be adapted to the individual child's strengths, weaknesses and needs.

Parents should create a safe and nurturing environment for their child, assisting the child during difficult times with positive reinforcement.

There are many resources for parents to help them provide care for a child with autism. The ASA can equip parents of newly diagnosed autistic children with the tools and information they need to treat the condition.

Autistic children need to learn how to respond during a medical emergency. Many children are either too young or lack the ability



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to properly articulate their needs, especially during an urgent medical situation.

"Parents need to ensure that their child's personal medical information is available in an emergency situation," says Martin Kabat, Ph.D., president and CEO of MedicAlert Foundation International. "This will give them comfort and peace of mind, knowing that their child's health will not be endangered due to insufficient information when it is needed most."

One of the tools available to parents that can help protect autistic children in an emergency is the MedicAlert Kid Smart program.

MedicAlert, a nonprofit foundation, has been managing and communicating critical medical information on behalf of its millions of members since 1956. The MedicAlert Kid Smart program ensures that children's medical records are immediately available to emergency responders to help with their treatment decisions.

MedicAlert's 24-hour emergency response personnel also help identify children who are

involved in emergencies or lost and notify designated family members and caregivers of the situation.

When enrolled in the program, children are provided with one of MedicAlert's personalized identification jewelry designed just for children and engraved with a membership number, medical condition(s) and the foundation's 24-hour toll-free hotline.

Children with autism have the tendency to act on impulse and may wander away from their caretakers, making identification and family notification critical when a child is found.

Robyn Olson, whose son Ryan has autism, recounts that, "Ryan doesn't comprehend the danger he's in when he wanders off. We enrolled Ryan in the MedicAlert Kid Smart program after the first time he got lost, which had us worried for hours as to where he might be. Now, with MedicAlert, we know we're going to be contacted, usually within minutes. That's a huge comfort to me."

Parents should take advice from the ASA in remembering that in an emergency situation involving the health of their child, it is important to remain calm. Children have the ability to sense and copy your emotional state. There is no reason to make them worry. It is more beneficial to teach them how to calmly respond to a given situation.

The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has joined with MedicAlert to bring about awareness of the Kid Smart program that underscores the importance in the safety and wellness of all children across the country. For more information about autism and other children's conditions, visit www.medicalert.org/kidsmart.