



# HEALTH AWARENESS

## Understanding Autism

(NAPSA)—Every 20 minutes another child is diagnosed with autism. That's three an hour and 67 a day. This complex neurobiological condition, which can inhibit a person's ability to communicate, respond to surroundings or form relationships with others, is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the United States and presents lifelong consequences for individuals, family and society.

The statistics are alarming: Thirteen years ago only one in 10,000 children was diagnosed with autism; today it's one in 166, making it more common than pediatric cancer, diabetes and AIDS combined. Despite these epidemic proportions, research shows that many parents of young children are generally unaware of autism.

While there is currently no cure, nor an effective means of prevention, early detection and intervention can result in critical improvements for many young children. The most important thing parents and caregivers can do is to learn the early signs of autism and understand the typical developmental milestones their child should be reaching at different ages. Research now suggests that children as young as 12 months old can exhibit signs of autism, some of which may include:

- No big smiles or other warm, joyful expressions by 6 months or thereafter
- No back-and-forth sharing of sounds, smiles or other facial expressions by 9 months or thereafter
- No babbling by 12 months
- No back-and-forth gestures, such as pointing, showing, reaching or waving by 12 months
- No words by 16 months
- No two-word meaningful



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phrases by 24 months

- Any loss of speech or babbling or social skills at any age.

The earlier a child is diagnosed with autism, the greater the chance for success in treatment. With appropriate early-intervention services, from ages 3-5, between 20 percent and 50 percent of children with autism will be able to attend mainstream kindergarten. Effective intervention programs focus on developing communication, social and cognitive skills, and include training for parents and teachers as well.

Many families are uninformed, confused and even fearful when a child exhibits signs of autism. They may be relieved to learn that there are ways to cope with it, reports Autism Speaks. For this reason the organization has made a commitment to raising public awareness about autism and its effects on individuals, families and society.

Short of a cure, awareness and early detection are our best weapons and are critical to improving the lives of individuals and families struggling with autism. Autism Speaks urges all parents, grandparents, teachers and caregivers to visit [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org) to learn the signs of autism.