

Catherine Rice, Ph.D., behavioral scientist with the CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

Rice says that parents may not realize that active but odd attempts at social interaction and unusual speech patterns are also indicative of autism. "ASDs affect many areas and require a knowledge of milestones across many areas: communication, interacting, play, learning and movement," she says. Behaviors may be extremely mild, but as Rice notes, all children with an ASD will need help.

Concern that their child will be labeled or a sense of hopelessness are other possible reasons parents don't pursue a diagnosis. Parents need to understand that autism is not synonymous with being institutionalized and that children with ASDs can show significant improvement if given appropriate therapies. Rice explains that due to the neuroplasticity of the brain during the toddler and preschool years, 80 to 90 percent of children given early intervention learn functional language and can learn to play with toys and interact socially as opposed to 50 percent of children who do not receive specialized services.

The CDC notes that siblings of autistic children need to be closely monitored, since families with one autistic child are 3 to 7 percent more likely to have another child with autism. In addition, parents and professionals need to be aware that many autistic individuals suffer from physical conditions such as seizures, digestive problems and sleep disorders, which need to be treated.

Laudable as the campaign is, it doesn't resolve all the problems in evaluating children and providing appropriate therapies. In some areas, families must still wait months before their child can be evaluated by a qualified professional. "Who pays is also a challenge," says Bell. School districts may be unable or unwilling, and insurance companies often deny coverage for mental health, leaving parents burdened with paying, or not being able to pay, for expensive therapies. Still, bringing more public awareness to these disabilities and identifying a greater number of children at risk is bound to make a difference in the lives of many children and families.

Laura Slatkin, founder of the New York Center for Autism, is the mother of twins Alexandra and David: Alexandra is neurotypical and David is severely autistic. "Early intervention is families getting the support they need," she says. "It's knowing you're doing everything you can for your child."

The campaign does not replace the CDC's other efforts. The agency is collaborating with other organizations in several states to monitor rates of ASDs, detect changes in its prevalence, understand the national impact of autism and determine whether there is a geographic correlation.

Helpful Websites:

The CDC's "Learn the Signs. Act Early" Campaign
www.cdc.gov/actearly

Contains information on developmental milestones for various ages, descriptions of autism and other disabilities and links to download printable materials.

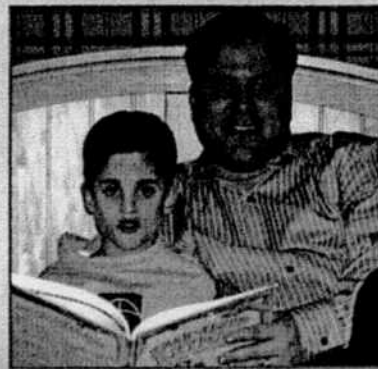
The CDC's Autism Information Center
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/aic/resources

Includes resources for parents and researchers and links to pages that describe the CDC's activities related to autism spectrum disorders.

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JOSEPH M. FEIN

For the past eight years, I have watched one of the smallest babies ever born in Nassau County blossom into a kind, gentle and loveable little boy. He has conquered more in his short life than most people achieve in a lifetime. He is my son Brett. As Brett's father, I have learned what it



takes to attain appropriate educational services for a special needs child, for any child for that matter, through the Board of Education. This was the inspiration behind my law practice, specializing in Educational Law.

I started my legal career as an Assistant District Attorney working in the Office of the Queens County District Attorney. I then spent the next three-and-a-half years as the chief litigator for the New York City Off-Track Betting Corporation, where I engaged in both arbitrations and mediations on behalf of a major city governmental agency.

The trial experience and the negotiating skills I gained throughout my career have prepared me to be a successful and effective legal advocate on behalf of your child. Equally as important, for the past five years, I have been directing other parents of children with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and special needs navigate the school system. The experience of advocating on behalf of my own special child, and the experience of assisting other similarly situated parents convinced me that there is a real need for a legal partner to help parents help their children.

My law practice is based in Hewlett, with a concentration in the representation of children and adolescents with learning and physical disabilities in educational matters and related litigation. Since your child's educational needs may be different than those of other children, the necessity for legal representation is imperative. There is no fixed set of standards that are appropriate for all children, and your child's education should be tailored to his or her specific needs, whether your child needs a reading specialist, a speech therapist, or a full one-to-one A.B.A. program.

My exposure to numerous school districts and the services they provide to students allows me to be creative while advocating on behalf of your child. My goal is to avoid confrontation with the school districts by demonstrating through proper evaluations with experts what is appropriate for your child. My philosophy is that the earlier we start, the better the chance that your child will succeed at reaching his or her fullest potential. I look forward to bringing the best education possible to all children in our community.

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