

# Early Intervention in Autism and PDD's

(Revised) Committee for Early Detection in Autism

Autism, PDD-NOS, and Asperger's syndrome are part of a group of neurologically based "pervasive developmental disorders"(PDD). The term "pervasive" is used because these disorders affect many areas of development including communication and language, social awareness and skills, cognition and reasoning, sensory systems and sometimes motor skills. Behavior is often adversely affected as a result of these deficits. PDD's are also commonly known as the "autism spectrum".

There is no specific test to identify autism and related disorders and currently there is no cure. The cause(s) are unknown but it is suspected, in some cases, to have a hereditary component. A developmental pediatrician or expert psychologist will usually make the diagnosis when a child who has distinctive and identifying symptoms is referred to him. Pervasive developmental disorders are considered to be a "spectrum" of disorders because the symptoms and severity can range anywhere from mild to severe. It takes a professional trained in these disorders to determine where a particular child lies on the spectrum and what interventions would be the most effective for him or her.

Even though there is currently no cure, there is hope today. The key to this hope is early diagnosis and treatment, preferably around the age of 18-24 months. The earlier a diagnosis can be reached, the earlier intervention and learning can begin. The more that we can teach him/her early on, the better chance he/she has to become a self-supporting, self-sufficient adult. It is possible. Well-informed doctors, caregivers and parents can make a big difference. The first step is to recognize the symptoms and bring them to the attention of a pediatrician or family physician and then to follow his/her recommendations in obtaining a professional opinion on a diagnosis. Early intervention techniques should begin as soon as possible.

We know that early intervention is a critical factor in success. Another reason it is so important to obtain a diagnosis early is that these children are very difficult to understand and can be frustrating to the parents. They may be feeling very unsuccessful in terms of their parenting skills and nothing they do seems to work. It is important that parents begin to learn about the child and what is difficult for him or her, and how best to address those concerns.

Autism and related disorders have been long misunderstood and people are just beginning to realize how important it is to focus more attention on finding effective treatments. They affect approximately 1 in every 500 people. They are more prevalent than multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, childhood cancer or Down's syndrome\*, yet receive only a fraction of the research funding of some of these less common disorders. Great gains have been made in recent years, and advocates are now searching for more funding to provide better research into the medical causes of these mysterious disorders.

There is a great deal of information that is available to families of affected children once a formal diagnosis has been made. This is a process of learning, and it will not all come from one source. A good place to start is with a parent support group or seeking out other parents of children similarly affected. The day-to-day knowledge acquired by others can be invaluable and their support and help will be some comfort during a difficult time while you adjust and learn.

*\*According to Cure Autism Now (CAN)*