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Human Service Seminar

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***Autism in Mental Health throughout the lifespan: from 0-Adulthood.***

***0-2 years of age***

Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder as it sometimes called is terms used to generalize the meaning of what Autism is. Autism is a developmental disorder that appears in the first 3 years of life, and affects the brain’s normal and development of social and communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal and repetitive behaviors. Some of these disorders includes: autistic disorder, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger Syndrome. (Autism speaks. <http://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism>)

Autism is usually diagnose at the age of 18 months because this is the time where the child’s gross, motor, skills, and physical attributes starts to develop; as well as their speech and language impairment, sensory, socialization skills, cognitive and adaptation of the outside and inside world around them. Children who are at risk for developing Autism also are very sensitive and tactile to hard surfaces as well and have difficulty responding to one or two words commands and display repetitive behavior when engaging in social activities that involves groups or the outdoors. There is also the Modified Checklist of Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT) which is a list of informative questions about the child. According to Autism speaks, from birth to at least 36 months of age, every child should be screened for developmental milestones during routine well visits; from these visits, if the parents have concerns the doctor should refer the patients to a development specialist for evaluation and early intervention. At these evaluations a hearing and lead exposure test as well as an autism-specific screening tool can be used. An experienced doctor who has history of diagnosing patients with autism can use the DSM-V manual since there is no biological test for autism. An evaluation of autism will often include a complete physical and nervous system (neurologic) examination. It may also include: Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (AD-R), Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS), and Childhood Autism rating Scale (CARS), Gilliam Autism Rating Scale, and Pervasive Developmental Disorders Screening Test- Stage 3. (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002494/?REPORT=PRINTABLE>.)

There are many tests that can help a parent, caregiver, or family doctor to tell if their children are at risk for developing Autism; according to PubMed Health, if a child fails to meet any of these milestones. These includes: Babbling by 12 months, Gesturing(pointing, waving bye-bye), saying single words by 16 months, saying two-word spontaneous phrases by 24 month or losing language or social skills at any age.

Scientists aren’t certain about what causes ASD, but it’s likely that both genetics and environment play a role. Researchers have identified a number of genes associated with the disorder. Studies of people with ASD have found irregularities in several regions of their brain. Other studies suggest that people with ASD have abnormal levels of serotonin or other neurotransmitters in the brain. Theses abnormalities suggest that ASD could result from disruption of normal brain development early in fetal development caused by defects in genes that control brain growth and that regulate how brain cells communicate with each other. (Autism speaks: <http://www.minds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail_autism.htm0>)

Treatment for Autism is most successful when it is geared toward the child’s particular needs. There is no cure for ASDS. Therapies and behavioral interventions are designed to remedy specific symptoms and can bring about substantial improvement. Other forms of treatments are:

* Applied behavior analysis
* Medications
* Occupational therapy
* Physical therapy
* Speech-language therapy
* TEACCH( Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped

Everyone with Autism is unique. Many of the people with Autism Spectrum Disorder goes on to live normal lives, have exceptional abilities in visual skills, music, and academic skills.( About 40 percent have average to above average intellectual abilities, according to <http://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism>. )