HOPE
You are not alone.
The Autism Society advocates for effective services and supports, offers reliable information, and provides a nationwide network of chapters so that parents, professionals, and those on the autism spectrum can meet, share resources and experiences, attend conferences, and receive the latest information.

WHAT IS AUTISM?

* \( 1 \text{ to } 1.5 \text{ million Americans live with an autism spectrum disorder}^1; \) this represents 1 percent of the population of children in the U.S. ages 3-17.\(^2\)
* Despite evidence that ASDs can often be identified at around 18 months, many children do not receive final diagnoses until they are much older.\(^3\)

The Autism Society can’t do it alone.

We need those on the autism spectrum, their families, and the professionals who work with them to join our efforts to change the discussion and ensure that those with autism are treated with dignity and have the opportunity to lead independent and productive lives.

Become a member or donate today! www.autism-society.org/get-involved

NOW IS THE TIME...

... Autism should be accepted as a whole life, whole body condition that affects all aspects of well-being.

... All children, regardless of economic level or ethnicity, should be screened for autism prior to age three. Early diagnosis and intervention can reduce the cost of lifelong care by two-thirds.

... Well-trained professionals must prepare adolescents leaving school for employment, advanced education, and independent living so they are well positioned to be successful adults.

To Change the Discussion...

2. The cost of autism over the lifespan is 3.2 million dollars per person.\(^4\) 60% of those costs occur in adulthood.
3. The unemployment rates for people with autism are estimated to be 90%, compared with 9% for people without a disability.
What is Autism?

Autism is a specific diagnosis that falls under the umbrella term Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and affects the normal functioning of the brain. Currently, no medical tests can be performed to indicate the presence of autism or any other PDD, the diagnosis is based upon the presence or absence of specific behaviors.

The key defining symptoms in both children and adults with autism are typically difficulty with verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction. Autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning two individuals, both with the same diagnosis, can be completely different from one another and have varying capabilities. Diagnostic labels indicate commonalities among individuals but do not define them or provide a complete picture of who they are and what they are able to achieve.

It is important to understand that people with autism can learn and progress with appropriate treatment and education.

Autism is Treatable

The causes of autism are not well understood and no cure currently exists. Early intervention can significantly improve the quality of life for individuals with autism. However, the majority of individuals on the autism spectrum will continue to exhibit some commonalities among individuals but do not define them or provide a complete picture of what they are and what they are able to achieve.

Autism is a lifelong condition, and the availability of necessary supports and treatments change as people on the spectrum move through major life phases. Quality of life depends not only upon the foundation that is provided in childhood, but requires ongoing supports that are specific to the needs of a person.

The Autism Society works to ensure that every adult living with autism has opportunities to seek jobs of their choosing and have the chance (and support required) to achieve the highest possible quality of life and are able to pursue independence, fulfillment and productivity. We identify gaps in services and societal issues that negatively impact adults living with autism and their families. Problems such as poverty are common and can result in dependence on government support as well as high rates of unemployment and violations of civil rights. The Autism Society is working for social services that encourage work, family and savings (all common American values). A lifespan approach is required for adults with autism to reach their greatest potential and be empowered, self-sufficient citizens who contribute to their community.

Early Screening

Early identification and access to effective treatments before age 3 significantly improves outcomes in people with autism. Ideally, a multidisciplinary team of professionals should participate in an evaluation; a brief observation in a single setting cannot present a true picture of an individual’s abilities and behaviors. Parental (caregiver) input and knowledge of developmental history are essential components of making an accurate diagnosis.

There are differences between a medical diagnosis and an educational determination, or school evaluation. A medical diagnosis is made by a physician based on an assessment of symptoms and diagnostic tests. An educational determination is made by a team comprised of school professionals to determine whether a student qualifies for special education and related services. The CDC states that the median age for an autism diagnosis is between 4.5 and 5.5 years, but for the majority of children with ASD developmental concerns were recorded before age 3. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to watch for the early signs of autism, which can include:

- Lack of or delay in spoken language
- Repetitive use of language and/or motor mannerisms (e.g., hand-flapping, twirling objects)
- Little or no eye contact
- Lack of interest in peer relationships
- Lack of spontaneous or make-believe play
- Persistent fixations on parts of objects

Strong Educational Foundation

Services provided through the school system are federally mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). A strong educational foundation prepares a student for the greatest degree of independence in employment, advanced education and living - all components of success in adulthood. Educational planning for students with autism must address a wide range of skill development, including academics, communication and language, self-help, self-advocacy, leisure, behavioral issues and social skills. It is important to consult with professionals trained specifically in autism to help ensure the greatest benefit from school programs. Laws require that transition planning begin no later than age 16 and become a formal part of the student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Transition planning should include the student, parents and members of the IEP team that work together to support the individual make decisions about next steps. When entitlement to public education ends at age 21, the transition to the adult service system can be a challenge.

Adults on the Spectrum

In mainstream culture, autism is often associated with children. However, autism is a lifelong condition, and the availability of necessary supports and treatments change as people on the spectrum move through major life phases. Quality of life depends not only upon the foundation that is provided in childhood, but requires ongoing supports that are specific to the needs of a person.

The Autism Society works to ensure that every adult living with autism has opportunities to seek jobs of their choosing and have the chance (and support required) to achieve the highest possible quality of life and are able to pursue independence, fulfillment and productivity.

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The Autism Society

Since 1965, the Autism Society’s nationwide network of chapters has provided a place for the autism community to share resources and experiences, receive the latest information and join in advocacy efforts.

Our programs and services focus on the following:

- Proactive Advocacy in collaboration with the greater disability community that leads to systemic change via federal, state and local public policy that benefit the autism community.
- Community outreach and education with accessible and accurate information that supports stakeholder ability to make informed choices.
- Encouraging and fostering a strong grassroots network that creates local connections and provides support as an integral part of a larger community.
- Building capacity within local communities for delivery of effective services to individuals and their families.
- Translating research results into applied practice that impacts everyday lives.

Now is the time...

...to join our efforts and advocate for improved services
...to change the discussion to one of hope
...to get involved in your local chapter
...to support the Autism Society’s critical work with national and local impact.

Please consider membership for yourself or as a gift. Your generous donation is essential.