



TEN TIPS FOR AUTISM

- 1 Early warning signs:** Possible warning signs of Autism in toddlers and preschool-age children include: speech delays, lack of eye contact, hand flapping, toe walking, and behaviors such as a very repetitive use of objects, spinning objects, and lining objects up and becoming very distressed if the lines are moved.
- 2 Defining Autism:** A neurological disorder affecting three areas: *Communication*- delayed speech acquisition, idiosyncratic language, repetitive language and problems with back-and-forth conversation. *Social functioning*- the ability to make friends and engage in reciprocal interactions. *Behaviors*- repetitive motion, abnormal toy play, and overly intense reactions.
- 3 Early intervention can make a big difference:** Get intensive intervention before the age of five for the best outcome; typically between 25-30 hours per week of occupational therapy, speech therapy, behavior therapy and social skills.
- 4 The experience of everyday stimuli:** Internal cues such as, "I'm hungry," "I'm thirsty," or "I have to use the bathroom," don't make sense to a child with autism. External cues don't register, such as, "I love you," or "Go get your shoes." There can be an abnormal response to physical stimuli, such as repeatedly putting a hand on the stove to burn oneself.
- 5 A team to treat Autism:** Treating Autism can include a team of professionals: a psychologist to diagnose your child's Autism; a speech and language pathologist for pragmatics, receptive and expressive language; an occupational therapist for fine and gross motor skills; a behavioral therapist for cognition, social communication and functional analysis of behavior; a floor-time therapist for play skills; an MD for traditional medication, and/or a DAN doctor for diet changes and supplements.
- 6 Diet, nutrition and Autism:** DAN (Defeat Autism Now) doctors typically recommend a gluten-free, casein-free, dairy-free or carbohydrate-specific diet. These dietary changes have been linked to the elimination of diarrhea, constipation, gas, bowel pain, and nighttime awakenings.
- 7 Your child wants friends:** Children with Autism struggle with making and keeping friends and the results are often social isolation, loneliness, peer rejection, anxiety and/or depression. They need support to learn how to make and keep friends.
- 8 A good social skills program:** Social skills programs vary, and there are options. You may opt for a small group format with other kids at the same age and developmental level of your child, or a parent- assisted program where parents are included in the treatment and become social coaches for their child outside of class. The program may include a weekly didactic lesson targeting one type of skill with concrete rules of social etiquette; a role-playing demonstration of what to do and what not to do; a behavioral rehearsal to practice the skills learned; or a homework assignment to practice the skills in the real world. Look for an evidence-based program, which offers proof that their method is successful.
- 9 Make the school transition easier:** Meet the teacher before school starts. Draw a map of the classrooms, lunch-room, lockers, gym, drop-off and pick-up. Practice working the locker before schools starts.
- 10 Recovering from Autism:** Even with a severe to moderate diagnosis, with intervention and therapy, it is possible to make your child more adept and able to participate in the mainstream world.

The following Kids in the House interviews contributed to this "Ten Tips for Autism:" Allison Kawa, PysD, Esther Hess, PhD, Jerry Kartzinel, MD, Liz Laugeson, PsyD, Sarah Clifford Schefflen, MS, CCC-SLP and Val Fein