

Reaching and Teaching Autistic Children

Long Isl

By Judith S. Bloch, ACSW

The number of children being diagnosed with autism, PDD (Pervasive Developmental Disorder) and Asperger's syndrome is now 1 in 500 births; 4 times more prevalent in boys than in girls. This disability is found in all socio-economic and racial/ethnic groups, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute of Health and the Autism Society of America. Due to these changing demographics, autism has become a major concern of many local families and educators.

Early identification and intervention offers children their best hope for a future, and can lead to significant improvement in their behavior. The characteristics that set these children apart from their peers are often noticed by their worried parents by the time they're 18 to 24 months old. Failure to respond or become attached to their own family, delays in speaking and understanding and unusual and repetitive play patterns are typical. Yet, many of the children have strengths and special skills that can be used to teach and reach them.

Fortunately, there are many local resources to help worried parents and their children. They include:

■ The Early Childhood Direction Centers (ECDCs) of Nassau (516-364-8580) and Suffolk (631-863-2600), who know about services for children birth to 5 years.

■ The David Center (516-536-3717) for children birth to 21 months.

■ The Department of Health (Nassau: 516-571-3410; Suffolk: 631-853-3100) for children birth to 3 years.

■ The newly created North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System Center for Autism (516-802-8602).

■ The Matt and Debra Cody Center at SUNY Stony Brook (631-632-3070), which provides diagnostic evaluations.

■ And Variety Child Learning Center (VCLC), which does evaluations and provides a year-round program for children 18 months to 7 years of age. Our Home/School Collaborative Model (HSCM) is research-based and psycho-educational; a New York State Education Department Sharing Success Validated Program. Call Judith Tabak at 516-921-7171, ext. 2191. ☺



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