

Autism

April is Autism awareness month and April 2 is World Autism Awareness Day! Autism is a condition characterized by a range of symptoms depending on the severity. 1 in 36 children are estimated to be diagnosed with Autism in the United States every year compared to 1 in 59 children in 2014, according to the Center for Disease Control. Those that are diagnosed with Autism are considered 'on the spectrum' due to the large range of severity and functionality.

Because Autism is such a complex condition, the diagnosis of Autism is also complex with a wide range of assessments including developmental screenings and speech and language assessments. Families have reported their child developing normally then begin to regress in development prior to an Autism diagnosis. This phenomenon is still not fully understood and the condition itself is still being studied to find a cause to then be able to prevent Autism. This is understandably concerning for parents seeking answers for their child's behaviors or development. Many resources exist to invest in the health and development of young children including regular check-ups with your physician, the Women, Children & Infant program (WIC), Early Intervention/Help Me Grow, school nurses, and the Children with Medical Handicap program can help assess and identify if your child is developmentally on track to begin intervention as soon as possible.

Once a child receives an Autism diagnosis it unfortunately does not provide much more information to how a child will learn, behave, or act. Each child is different and has differing symptoms of Autism. Many therapies exist to begin to learn and assess children with Autism. These therapies include Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), Developmental, Individual-differences, and Relationship-based (DIR) therapy, and PLAY therapy. Each therapy has its own merit and parents are urged to research and discuss the best option for their child with their provider.

Local parents of children with Autism want other parents to know that they are not alone. An Autism diagnosis is not 'the end of the world', but the beginning of a new reality. In many ways a child with Autism can bring a family closer to embrace and celebrate small progressions such as being able to go to the grocery store. So, if you are out and about and see a child that is seemingly 'misbehaving' or seems 'different', please be aware that it is more helpful to offer kindness rather than judgement and love rather than anger.

In conclusion, and in the interest of Autism awareness month, please keep your child's annual check-ups with their physician and be open-minded with shared concerns and potential suggested interventions. If you have any questions about local resources, please contact the Meigs County Health Department: (740) 992-6626.

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