

Autism Awareness Month

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, delayed speech and non-verbal communication. According to the Centers for Disease Control, autism affects an estimated 1 in 59 children in the United States today (2019). Because Autism is a “spectrum disorder”, this means that each person with autism has a distinct set of strengths and challenges. Some people with ASD may require significant support in their daily lives while others may need less support, and, in some cases, may be able to live entirely independently. Dr. Stephen Shore is famously quoted for saying **“If you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism”**, to further illustrate the continuum along which characteristics will appear.

Indicators of autism usually appear by age 2 or 3. Signs include: limited or no eye contact by age 6 mos.; little or no back-and-forth sharing of sounds, smiles, or other facial expressions by age 9 mos.; little or no babbling, back-and-forth gesturing or little or no response to own name by age 12 mos.; very few or no words by age 16 mos.; and very few or no meaningful two-word phrases by age 24 mos. At any age, signs could include loss of previously acquired speech or social skills, avoidance of eye contact, delayed language development, using repetitive words, phrases or behaviors, difficulty understanding other people’s feelings, resistance to minor changes in routine or surroundings, unusual and intense reactions to sounds, smells, tastes, textures, lights and/or colors, etc.

Research shows that early intervention leads to positive outcomes later in life for people with autism, so it is important to note these signs and discuss them further with a professional. More resources can be found at: www.autismspeaks.org; local resources are available at Blue Sky Center for Learning (607-319-4009, www.facebook.com/blueskycenterforlearning), Family & Children’s Service of Ithaca (607-273-7494, www.fcsith.org), Racker Center (607-272-0188, www.racker.org), the Ithaca Youth Bureau’s Recreation Support Services (607-273-8364, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/244/Recreation-Support-Services>) and the Collaborative Solutions Network (www.collaborativesolutionsnetwork.org).

Pledge to “Go Blue” this month to support Autism awareness!

This Monthly Message is adapted from www.autismspeaks.org.

Monthly Messages are brought to you by the Tompkins County Youth Services Department, a proud partner of The Community Coalition for Healthy Youth.

If you have further questions or comments about this message or would like information on how to become involved with the Community Coalition for Healthy Youth, please email kshanks@tompkins-co.org.

