



FEBRUARY 2018

PARENT NEWSLETTER

From the Autism Spectrum Disorder Department at Easterseals Joliet Region

Visit our [website](#) or find us on [Facebook](#)

What's Going On At Easterseals....

Spring Session Social Skills Groups

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and other social communication delays have difficulty developing social skills, and may benefit from a therapy group focusing on teaching and practicing specific skills with other kids their age. Groups are best for children who have made progress in individual therapy and are ready to start practicing those skills in a group setting with a 1:3 ratio. At each group parents receive a schedule of activities, a hand out discussing the skills that are targeted for that day and ideas on how to continue working on those skills at home. Groups are led by behavioral therapists from our outpatient treatment program. The groups are 8 week sessions and cost \$150 for the entire 8 weeks, due at registration. This service may also be billable through your insurance.

- **3rd – 4th Grade:** Thursday from 5:00 – 6:00 pm starting March 15th, 2018 and ending Thursday May 3rd, 2018
- **Preschool (3 to 5 years old):** Mondays from 2:00 – 3:00 pm starting March 5th and ending April 23rd, 2018
- **Preschool (3 to 5 years old):** Tuesdays from 9:00 – 10:00 am starting March 6th and ending April 24th, 2018



Call Laura Wallace, LCSW at 815-927-5466 for more information or to register. Space is limited!

Grandparent & Extended Family Autism Workshop

Are you a Grandparent, Aunt, Uncle or friend to a child with Autism? If so, you might have a lot of questions. On **Thursday April 19th from 5:30 – 7:30** Easterseals will be hosting a Grandparent and Extended Family Workshop, where Autism professionals will present basic information about Autism, give tips on how to support your loved ones and answer all of your questions. The cost is \$10 per family, paid at the workshop. Registration is required. To register or with questions, call Valerie Lentz at 815-927-5465.



Parents Raising Children with ASDs

Our parent support group typically meets the second Wednesday of every month from 6:00 – 7:30. However, this month the second Wednesday falls on Valentine's Day, which can be a busy day with

school activities and parties. Instead, we will meet on the third Wednesday which is **Wednesday, February 21st from 6:00 – 7:30**. This program is a wonderful way to meet other parents, get information and get connected to resources in your community. As always, childcare will be provided for those who sign up ahead of time. Both the group and childcare are free of charge. Please call Laura with any questions or to register for childcare at 815-927-5466.

Grupo de Apoyo Para Padres de Familias que Hablan Espanol (Support Group for Spanish Speaking Parents)

This is a parent support group for families that have children with Autism and would like to meet other parents, get information and stay connected to community resources. The group will be led by a social worker from our Autism Department and a translator from our parent education program. Group will meet **the first Friday of every month from 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. This month we will meet on Friday February 2nd and next month will be Friday March 2nd**. This group is open to all parents, and children are welcome to attend with their parents. Please contact Blanca with questions at 815-927-5494.

Free Developmental Screenings

Easterseals offers multiple ways for parents to complete a developmental screening for their child. Parents and caregivers can complete a free online screening tool on the Easterseals website which you can find here: <http://www.easterseals.com/mtffc/> If you would prefer for your child to be screened in person by an Easterseals' staff member, drop by to our Barney location on the second Friday of every month from 9:00 to noon, no appointment required! We will have several staff on hand to complete developmental screenings for children age birth to 5 years old, and Autism screenings for children age 18 months to 18 years old. They will be able to recommend to you whether your child is in need of a full evaluation, and explain how you can set up that process through either Easterseals or other community programs that are available. Contact Karrie if you have any questions about our screenings at 815-927-5471.

Autism Awareness Items for Sale

Easterseals sells a variety of Autism Awareness items at cost to make them as affordable as possible for families, so you can proudly spread awareness and show support for your loved one with Autism. These items make great gifts for your family, for your child's teachers and therapists. We have coffee mugs, pins, bracelets, ornaments, car magnets, lanyards and more. Stop by our Family Center for Autism Resources, which also houses our free lending library, to browse our selection! Call 815-927-5465 for more information.



Join our Young Professional's Associate Board

The Easterseals Joliet Region Young Professional Associate Board was created with the goal of raising awareness of Easterseals, an organization that provides exceptional services to ensure that all people with disabilities or special needs and their families have equal opportunities to live, learn, work and play in their communities. The Associate Board is comprised of young professionals and emerging leaders, ages 21-35. Individuals that join the board will gain leadership experience, have opportunities for professional networking, gain knowledge of philanthropic board service and participate in

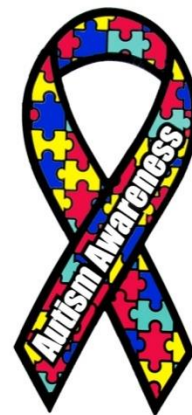
fundraising and community outreach. For more information you can visit www.joliet.easterseals.com or email Ian Barr at ibarr@jolieteasterseals.com

Mark your Calendars!

Annual Awareness Open House

This year's open house will be on **Wednesday April 11th from 1:00 to 6:00**. This event is a super fun, interactive day for kids and families. Every year this wonderful event offers a variety of drop-in therapy groups, free developmental and autism screenings, a community resource fair and more! Plus refreshments, professional networking and fun giveaways to raise awareness for Autism Awareness Month and The Week of the Young Child. Call 815-927-5465 for more information. We hope to see everyone there!

We are still seeking community organizations and programs that would like to have table space in our resource room to provide information to families regarding summer camps, recreational opportunities and resources. Contact Edith at 815-725-2194 x210 if you would like to reserve a table or drop off printed materials.



Celebration of Giving Telethon 2018

Easterseals Regional Celebration of Giving Telethon will be held Saturday, April 14, 2018 at the Jacob Henry Mansion. It is an exciting blend of the area's finest entertainment and enlightening segments showcasing Easterseals' important work in creating solutions and changing lives. The Telethon is streamed live and offered on a variety of local stations, but we also invite you to come join us in our live audience to enjoy the many talent acts and spread the word about the services at Easterseals!

What's Going On In Your Community...

Workshops & Resource Fairs

Autism and Related Disorders Course FREE

Yale University has a seminar on Autism and Related Disorders on iTunes FREE to listen to. The course covers diagnosis and assessment, etiology and treatment of children, adolescents and adults with autism and related disorders of socialization. Don't have time to take a course on Autism? Listen to lectures on your daily commute or while getting ready! Once again, these are FREE to download on iTunes! For more information, go to <https://itunes.apple.com/us/course/autism-and-related-disorders/id495056283?enlh=7&mt=10&ls=1>

Kid's Fair – FREE

A free family resource fair and kid's event will be hosted at Troy Middle School in Shorewood on Monday February 19th (President's Day) from 9:00 – 12:00. A community resource fair with booths geared towards family friendly resources and vendors around the area plus lots of fun for kids – petting zoo, face painting, stroller strides, free hair cuts, crafts, local mascots, dance demos and more. For more information please call Senator Bertino-Tarrant's office at (815) 254-4211.

The Problem with Behavior Problems: Supporting Young Students with Autism and Other Disabilities

STAR NET Region II is offering a free workshop to parents and early childhood professionals on February 23rd from 9:00 – 3:00 at Garden Terrace Banquets 1000 Wellington, Elk Grove Village. The agenda for the day covers how to analyze causes of behavior problems in preschool and primary age students, examine how staff behavior can impact behavior concerns, and explore specific strategies to avoid challenging behaviors and build on student strengths. Visit the STAR NET Region II website to register and to see their full calendar of free trainings offered to parents of young children with disabilities. www.thecenterweb.org/starnet/ Region II covers DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and the western portion of Cook County.

You can also visit the website of STAR NET Region VI to see their training calendar at <http://www.swccase.org/StarNet/default.htm> They cover Will, Grundy, Kankakee, LaSalle, Kendall and the southern portion of Cook County.

Therapy Resources

Merchant Street Art Gallery of Artists with Autism

The Merchant Street Art Gallery in Kankakee hosts regular art workshops and other events to support and showcase artists with Autism. You can visit their website at www.merchantstreetartgallery.org to read about their mission and see their calendar of events.

Recreational & Social Opportunities

Valentine's Day Dance in Plainfield

The Plainfield Township Abilities Group is hosting their annual **FREE** Valentine's Day Dance on Friday February 10th from 7-9PM. This semi-formal dance will be at the Plainfield Community Center and is available to all ages. Music, snacks and socializing for individuals of all abilities. RSVP: Lupe by 2/8/2018 gavillasenor@yahoo.com (630)229-9925

Recurring Monthly Events

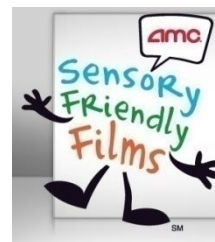
These events are going on every month out in your community. Please contact them directly for more information!

Exploration Station Special Needs Nights

Exploration Station is a wonderful children's museum in Bourbonnais. They host a special needs night on the **First Sunday of every month from 11am-12:30pm**. The staff at Exploration Station has taken special care to adapt the environment and provide an opportunity for children with special needs to explore their exhibits so they can learn through hands on interaction. The museum is only open to families with special needs children during this time, which provides a safe and accepting environment. The fee is \$2.50 for residents and \$3.50 for non-residents. Exploration Station is located at Perry Farm Park on 459 N Kennedy Drive in Bourbonnais. Pre-registration is required. Call 815-933-9905 ext. 3 for more information or visit them online at www.exploration-station.org.

Sensory Friendly Films at AMC

AMC has EXPANDED their Sensory Friendly Film program to include some evening hours with films geared towards an older crowd! The auditoriums dedicated to the program have their lights up, the sound turned down and audience members are invited to get up and dance, walk, shout or sing! They will now be on the **second and fourth Tuesday at 7pm AND second and fourth Saturday at 10 am every month**. Go to <http://www.amctheatres.com/programs/sensory-friendly-films> for more information and to find a nearby theater that is participating in this great program!



DuPage Children's Museum Special Needs Nights

Did you know that the DuPage Children's Museum has a dedicated night for families of children with special needs? They do! It is the **third Thursday of every month from 5pm-7pm**. It is a time designated for the families of children with special needs to enjoy the museum in an inclusive, typically quieter, less crowded atmosphere. They have a creativity drop-in studio that implements sensory-based activities with a different theme every week along with purposeful play with peers, adaptive equipment, and guides to help parents use the exhibits for therapeutic benefit. Admission is \$11 per person, ages 1-59, and \$10 for anyone over 60. For more information go to their website at <http://dupagechildrens.org/>

Sensory Story Times

The Plainfield Public Library is hosting a **FREE** drop-in Sensory Story time one Saturday every month. After free play, socializing, and tactile activities, gather for a story time designed for children of all abilities. Friends and siblings are welcome. Children ages 3 to 9 must be accompanied by an adult. Drop in event, no registration is required. Find dates/time and more information at <http://il.evanced.info/plainfield/evanced/eventcalendar.asp>

Fountaindale Public Library (in Bolingbrook on Briarcliff) offers a **FREE** drop-in Sensory Story time on the second Saturday of every month from 10:30 to 11:15 for children from 2 to 6 years old with a caregiver. This story time is geared "especially for children with sensory integration issues". Visit their calendar at <http://host7.evanced.info/fountaindale/evanced/eventcalendar.asp>

ASD Life Transition Group

Alexian Brothers Health System presents the ASD Life Transitions Group. This **FREE** group will be held on the 4th Tuesday (Tuesday, February 28th) of every month from 7pm until 9pm at the Alexian Brothers Women and Children's Hospital, in the Lower Level meeting rooms 3 & 4 (1555 Barrington Road, Hoffman Estates). Each month they invite a different speaker to present to the group and address a variety of issues specific to this population, including college transition and accommodations, job skills, independent living, volunteer opportunities, government benefits, driving, exercise and more topics of interest. Additionally, our young adults will break out for the second hour where they will be able to enjoy game nights, time to socialize, and more! This group is for young adults 16 and up and parents. To register please email Ana.Garcia-Maldonado@alexian.net or call 847-755-8536.

NAMI of Will-Grundy: Family Support Group

NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness) Family Support Group is a peer-led support group for family members, caregivers and loved ones of individuals living with mental illness. Families can gain insight from the challenges and successes of others facing similar circumstances. NAMI's Support Groups are unique because they follow a structured model, ensuring everyone has an opportunity to be heard and to get what they need. NAMI Will-Grundy offers a variety of locations and times for these free support groups. For more information visit <http://namiwillgrundy.org/familysupport/> or contact NAMI Will-Grundy at (815) 731-9103 (call returned within 48 hours) or email info@namiwillgrundy.org.

Do you have an event coming up that would be of interest to families that have children with special needs?

We help to spread the word about events that are reasonably priced and promote awareness, inclusion, learning opportunities and fun for the special needs community! Please submit your events to vlentz@joliet.easterseals.com to be considered for our next newsletter

Articles of the Month

Autism Speaks names Top Ten Autism Studies of 2017

Autism Speaks science staff and advisers review the 2017 studies that most powerfully advanced understanding, treatment and support for people on the autism spectrum

January 02, 2018



Autism Speaks is pleased to announce its annual selection of the ten studies that most-powerfully advanced the field of autism research to enhance lives today and accelerate a spectrum of solutions for tomorrow.

The Autism Speaks Medical and Scientific Advisory Board and the Autism Speaks science leadership team selected the annual Top Ten from more than 4,000 peer-reviewed research reports published in scientific journals this year.

“These studies exemplify the noteworthy advances we’re witnessing across the field – from research into the causes and biology of autism to the evaluation of new methods for earlier identification and intervention,” says Autism Speaks Chief Science Officer Thomas Frazier. “Their results are helping children today and laying the foundation for more-effective, personalized treatments and support services across the lifespan.”

The selections listed below include commentary by science staff and advisors with related expertise.
(Autism Speaks funding noted where applicable)

Harnessing the power of parent participation in early intervention



A therapist reviews a video of mother-child interactions as part of a program teaching parents how to increase social engagement with infants at high risk for autism.

Photo by Ariella Green

Randomised trial of a parent-mediated intervention for infants at high risk for autism: longitudinal outcomes to age 3 years. Green, J, Pickles, A, Pasco, G, et al. *J Child Psychol Psychiatr*. 2017 Dec;58(12):1330-40. [Autism Speaks research grants [7773](#) and [1292](#)]

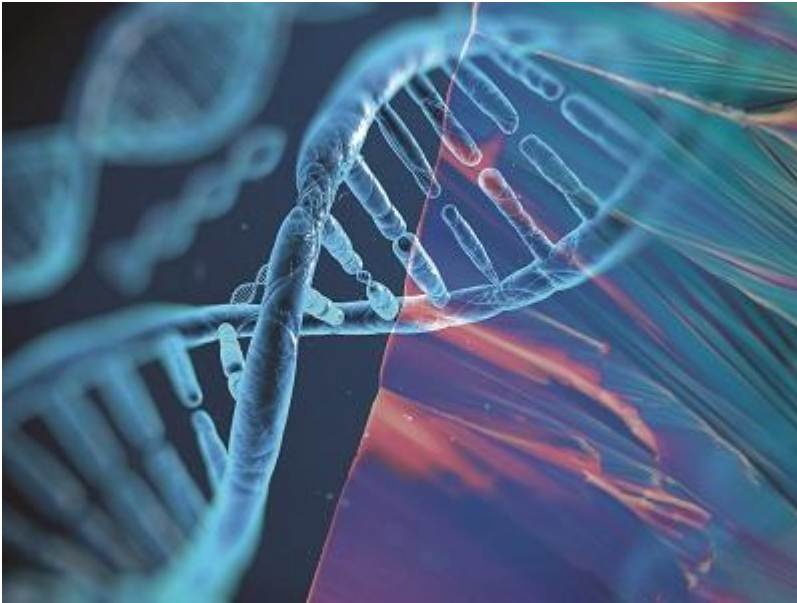
Longitudinal follow-up of academic achievement in children with autism from age 2 to 18. Kim SH, Bal VH, Lord C. *J Child Psychol Psychiatr*. 2017 Sept 26 Epub

“These two studies stand out in demonstrating the benefits of parent participation in early intervention for autism. The study led by Jonathan Green, at the University of Manchester, is the first to show long-term benefits – milder autism features and increased social interaction – from a very early intervention that teaches parents how to interact with infants at high risk for autism. ([Read more about this study here.](#))



The research led by So Hyun Kim, at Weill Cornell Medicine, focuses on the understudied topic of what influences academic achievement in children and youth on the autism spectrum. I find it particularly interesting that the study identified parent participation in early intervention by age 3 to be a significant predictor of academic achievement, in addition to cognitive abilities.”

- **Stelios Georgiades, Ph.D.**, member of the Autism Speaks Medical and Scientific Advisory Board and co-director of the McMaster Autism Research Team, at McMaster University & Hamilton Health Sciences, in Hamilton, Ontario



Advances and insights in autism genomics

Whole genome sequencing resource identifies 18 new candidate genes for autism spectrum disorder. Yuen RK, Merico D, Bookman M, et al. *Nat Neurosci*. 2017 Apr;20(4):602-11. [Autism Speaks research grants 9767, 9365, 7907]

Polygenic transmission disequilibrium confirms that common and rare variation act additively to create risk for autism spectrum disorders. Weiner DJ, Wigdor EM, Ripke S, et al. *Nat Genet*. 2017 Jul;49(7):978-985.

Meta-analysis of GWAS of over 16,000 individuals with autism spectrum disorder highlights a novel locus at 10q24.32 and a significant overlap with schizophrenia. Autism Spectrum Disorders Working Group of the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium. *Mol Autism*. 2017 May 22;8:21.

“These studies highlight how far we’ve come and how fast we’re moving in understanding the complex genetics of autism, though they were not alone in doing so. (Also see [Turner 2017](#), [Werling 2017](#) and [Grove 2017](#).)



Previously, genetic studies focused almost exclusively on genes, which contain instructions, or coding, for making proteins in our body. But they didn’t look closely at other parts of the genome, such as the less-understood “non-coding” regions. We’re just beginning to understand the role of non-coding DNA changes in autism. The next step is to combine the results of these and still more genomic studies. Only then will we be able to understand how different types of genetic – and environmental – risks interact with each other.

- **Joseph Buxbaum**, Ph.D., member of the Autism Speaks Medical and Scientific Advisory Board and director of the Seaver Autism Center, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, in New York City

Deciphering early differences in infant behavior and brain development



An infant views images of faces as researchers use highly sensitive eye-tracking technology to monitor where she's focusing. Image courtesy Emory University

Infant viewing of social scenes is under genetic control and is atypical in autism. Constantino JN, Kennon-McGill S, Weichselbaum C, et al. *Nature*. 2017 Jul 20;547(7663):340-344.

Early brain development in infants at high risk for autism spectrum disorder. Hazlett HC, Gu H, Munsell BC, et al. *Nature*. 2017;542:348-51. [Autism Speaks research grant 6020]

“These two studies are important for revealing new early predictors of autism and its severity. Such predictors can help us identify infants who may benefit from early interventions before the outward signs of autism develop. The study findings also give us insights into autism’s underlying biology, which can help us develop better treatments and support services.

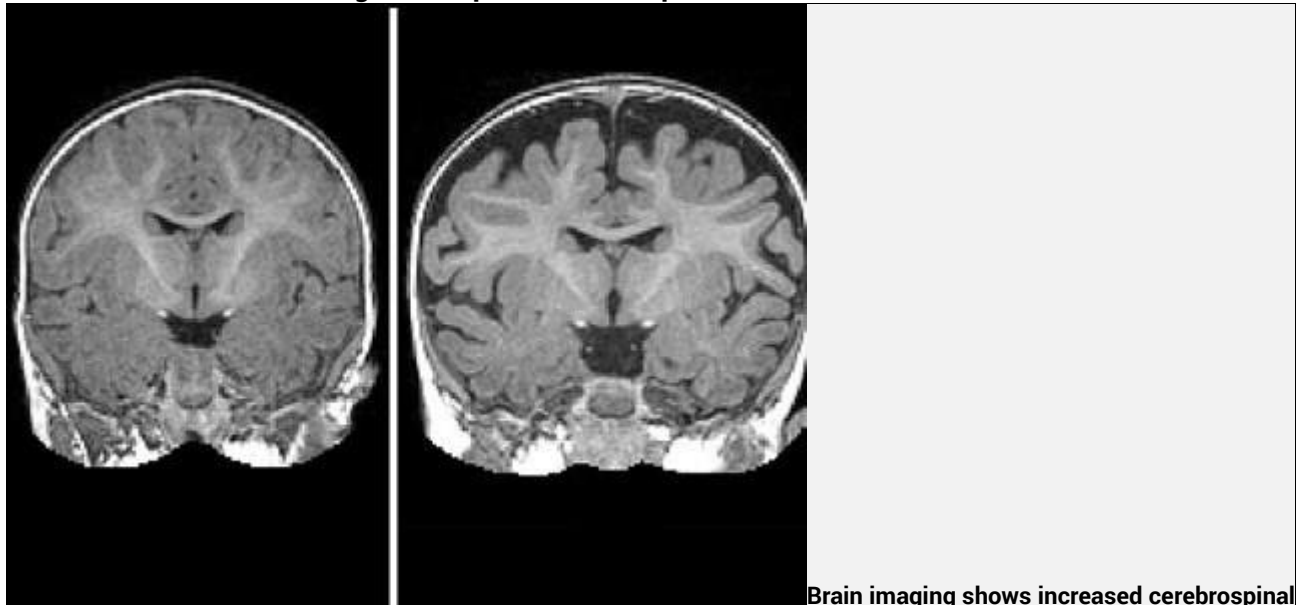
Because autism tends to run in families, both studies enrolled the baby siblings of children already diagnosed with the condition. Heather Hazlett’s team identified an increase in brain surface volume before 12 months in babies who later developed autism. During the second year of life, their overall brain size increased at the same time as their behavioral symptoms appeared. And the babies with the largest brain overgrowth developed the most-severe symptoms.



John Constantino’s team followed up on their previous discovery that, as babies, children who later developed autism were already paying less attention to socially important features of faces – the eyes and mouth. The team’s new study confirmed this finding and found that the preference for looking at eyes and mouths is strongly controlled by genetics across the general population. This implies that a strong genetic influence leads to differences in how a young child begins to experience and draw information from the social world. Such insights hold promise for guiding the development of interventions that support very early social development and communication in babies and toddlers at risk for autism. This includes any baby who shows warning signs. (See “[Learn the signs of autism](#)”)

- **Edwin Cook**, M.D., member of the Autism Speaks Medical and Scientific Advisory Board and director of the Laboratory of Developmental Neuroscience, University of Illinois, Chicago

New insights into predictors and possible contributors to autism



Brain imaging shows increased cerebrospinal fluid around the brains of babies who later developed autism (right). Image courtesy University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Hill

[Increased extra-axial cerebrospinal fluid in high-risk infants who later develop autism](#). Shen MD, Kim SH, McKinstry RC, et al. *Biol Psychiatry*. 2017 Aug 1;82(3):186-193. [Autism Speaks research grant 6020]

[Association between serotonergic antidepressant use during pregnancy and autism spectrum disorder in children](#). Brown HK, Ray JG, Wilton AS, et al. *JAMA*. 2017 Apr 18;317(15):1544-1552.

“The large study led by Mark Shen involved 343 infants and confirmed the unexpected results of a smaller [2013 study](#) that found increased cerebrospinal fluid overlying the brain in babies who are later diagnosed with autism. This discovery represents more than an early biomarker of autism risk. It may lead to a better understanding of the neurodevelopmental processes that contribute to autism. For example, we now need to understand whether fundamental problems with the production or control of cerebrospinal fluid contribute to autism. Or perhaps the increased fluid stems from an underlying factor such as inflammation.

The report by Hilary Brown and colleagues is one of the best in a flurry of studies suggesting that serotonin antidepressants taken during pregnancy do *not* increase risk for autism. Some earlier studies suggested such a risk. But we know that autism occurs at higher rates in families affected by depression, anxiety or obsessive-compulsive disorder – the conditions commonly treated with these medicines. The new study found no difference in autism rates between siblings whose mothers took such a medication during one pregnancy but not the other.



This illustrates the need for exquisite control for differences in study populations when identifying risk factors for autism. The results also offer crucial guidance to expectant mothers who want to balance a medicine’s potential risk to a future child against the known risks of leaving a serious medical condition such as depression untreated.”

- [Jeremy Veenstra-VanderWeele, M.D.](#), member of the Autism Speaks Medical and Science Advisory Committee and director of Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Columbia University College of Physicians and

Surgeons, in New York City

Functional neuroimaging of high-risk 6-month-old infants predicts a diagnosis of autism at 24 months of age. Emerson RW, Adams C, Nishino T, et al. *Sci Transl Med*. 2017 Jun 7;9(393). [Autism Speaks research grant 6020]

“Earlier identification of autism is crucial for earlier intervention with its great potential to improve outcomes. To that end, Robert Emerson and colleagues showed that, at 6 months of age, differences in brain activity patterns (e.g. functional brain connections) can predict a later diagnosis of autism. This discovery is consistent with those of previous studies that identified tell-tale differences in anatomical, or structural, brain connections in babies who later developed autism. Together, this body of research reinforces the idea that the brain changes leading to autism begin very early in life.



However, this year’s study involved just 59 infants at high risk for autism (because they were born into families already affected by the condition). It’s important to confirm its results with a larger group of babies. If the findings prove true – and these brain-imaging methods become practical for use outside of research studies – we may gain an important new tool for detecting autism and intervening earlier in babies at high risk for the condition.”

- *Autism Speaks Chief Science Officer Thomas Frazier, Ph.D.*