



# MARCH 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

**Hurry – groups start next week! Sign up today!**

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.

- **3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> Grade:** Thursday from 5:00 – 6:00 pm starting March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018 and ending Thursday May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018
- **Preschool (3 to 5 years old):** Mondays from 2:00 – 3:00 pm starting March 19<sup>th</sup> and ending May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018
- **Preschool (3 to 5 years old):** Tuesdays from 9:00 – 10:00 am starting March 20<sup>th</sup> and ending May 8<sup>th</sup>, 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 19<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 – 7:30 PM** 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 continues to meet the **second Wednesday of every month from 6:00 – 7:30 PM**. This program is a wonderful way to meet other parents, get information and get connected to resources in your community. This month we will meet on **Wednesday, March 14<sup>th</sup>** and as always, childcare will be provided for those who sign up ahead of time by Easter Seals staff. 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 Español (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.** The next meeting is on **Friday April 6<sup>th</sup>**. 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](http://www.joliet.easterseals.com) or email Ian Barr at [ibarr@jolieteasterseals.com](mailto:ibarr@jolieteasterseals.com)

## 2019 Calendar Art Contest

Every year National Easterseals creates a calendar highlighting artwork done by children and adults benefitting from Easterseals' programs. The 2019 calendar will mail in the fall to 1.3 million households nationwide. Right now they are reaching out for artwork to be considered for the 2019 calendar! The art piece should be something that was completed during an Easterseals' program like a therapy session, summer group, or childcare. If you are interested please reach out to Valerie Lentz at 815-927-5465 on how to submit your loved ones art piece. **The deadline for art submissions is May 31<sup>st</sup>.**

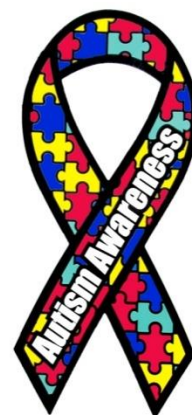


## Mark Your Calendars!

### 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, child safety IDs 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. A flyer will be coming out next week with a detailed event schedule. We hope to see everyone there!

We are still seeking non-profit 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...

# World Autism Awareness Day is Monday April 2, 2018 – and April is Autism Awareness Month



World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) 2018 is on **April, 02**. It was designated under by the United Nations General Assembly resolution "62/139. World Autism Awareness Day," adopted on December 18, 2007, proposed by Representatives of the State Qatar, and supported by all member states. It is a day to bring recognition and awareness to individuals living with Autism Spectrum Disorders and their loved ones.

There are many ways to recognize World Autism Awareness and Autism Awareness Month in your community – do something that is meaningful to your family!

One option is the “Light It Up Blue” movement started by Autism Speaks. They have a website that shares ideas on how to “light up” on April 2<sup>nd</sup>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/wam/how-to-liub>

You can also visit their website for pictures of famous buildings and landmarks around the world that light it up blue for Autism.



## *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?enh=7&mt=10&ls=1>

### **STAR NET Trainings**

STAR NET provides free workshops and webinars to families and professionals working with young children with special needs. In addition to the trainings being free, they also have grants that families can apply for to help cover other expenses, like traveling to the training.

Visit the STAR NET Region II website to see their full calendar of free trainings offered to parents of young children with disabilities. [www.thecenterweb.org/starnet/](http://www.thecenterweb.org/starnet/) Region II covers DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and the western portion of Cook County.

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](http://www.merchantstreetartgallery.org) to read about their mission and see their calendar of events.

## *Recreational & Social Opportunities*

### **Zoo for All at Brookfield Zoo-Free Event**

Brookfield zoo has recently completed some renovations at Hamill Family Play Zoo and is hosting three Sensory Friendly Open House events. Families of children with disabilities can come check out the Hamill Family Play Zoo's new features and have an opportunity to talk with staff. **The Open House events will take place on March 17<sup>th</sup> (9:00am-10:30am), April 12<sup>th</sup> (5:30pm-7:00pm), and April 22<sup>nd</sup> (9:00am-10:30am).**

Families will have the opportunity to learn more about the Zoo for All initiative, meet their Play Zoo crew and their inclusion Specialist, experience the Hamill Family Play Zoo, and learn about inclusive family programs offered at the Play Zoo. **For more information and to register go to [www.czs.org/zooforall](http://www.czs.org/zooforall), space is limited.**



## SRA

Don't forget about your local Special Recreation Association for recreational events, extracurricular activities and summer camp. Every Park District is part of an SRA, which provides programming for children and adults with special needs. The programs typically have smaller ratios, staff with additional training, and adapted activities. Just like park district programs, there is typically a resident fee and a non-resident fee – so you can check out both your SRA and also surrounding communities. If you aren't sure which SRA you belong to, call your local park district and ask!

## 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 [https://www.btpd.org/es\\_about\\_us.php](https://www.btpd.org/es_about_us.php)

## 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, March 27<sup>th</sup>) 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:vlentz@joliet.easterseals.com) to be considered for our next newsletter*

## Articles of the Month

This article explains how to use First-Then visual supports and has some wonderful examples. It is written for a classroom, but you can easily adapt these supports to a home or community environment. The article appears on [www.autismclassroomresources.com](http://www.autismclassroomresources.com) as part of their Visual Schedule Series.

### Visual Schedule Series: First-Then Schedules

<https://www.autismclassroomresources.com/visual-schedule-series-first-then/>

By: Chris Reeves

Posted: May 31, 2013

First-then schedules are some of the simplest types of schedules that we use with students with autism and other disabilities. Simply put, it just presents what we need to do now (first) and what we will do next (then). It can be done with pictures, objects, in writing, or using apps.

We typically use them in different ways depending on the student.

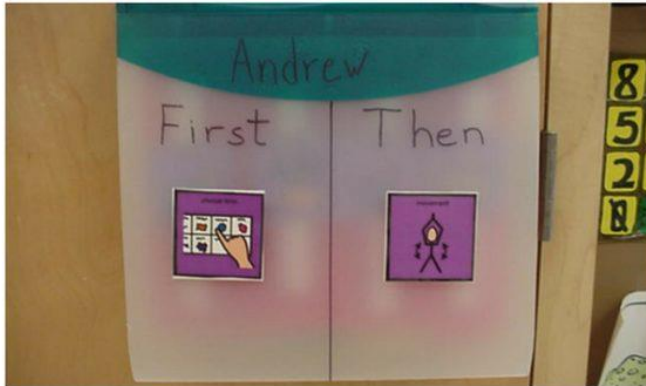
Sometimes we use them for behavior support, such as when we think (or know) that an individual doesn't want to do something we want them to do. In that case, we present the thing we want them to do in the "first" and the thing they want to do in the "then." The idea is to show them a preferred activity or a possible reinforcer to motivate them to complete the thing they don't want to do. We often will use this type of first-then schedule on a board like the one above or below.

We use them proactively (before a problem) and when a student refuses to complete a task. Ideally using them proactively is the best to avoid having adding the reinforcer (then) in when there is a problem, which could inadvertently reinforce the negative behavior (because it creates a reinforcement opportunity).





In the picture above, the first-then board is used to show a student that sitting in his PE class will result in a reward from his token board. The first then board is part of the set of tools his staff use and they keep their tools in a zip up canvas notebook (e.g., Trapper Keeper) so they are readily at hand. The student has a full day schedule on the front of the notebook and the first-then is used when a problem is anticipated.



# First-Then Visual Schedules

*with a free schedule*

Visual Schedule Series



< In pictures on the left, the student is using the first-then schedule as his schedule for the day. In the top picture, you see a binder with first work then pack up. For this student, we started working with him using a full-day schedule that was on the wall. In working with him for a day, we realized that he was struggling with the number of transitions this created for him and checking his schedule became an antecedent for problem behaviors. Each time he had to go to the wall, check the schedule, go to the check-in board and put on the visual, it was difficult for him to understand the process.

The second day we worked with him, we used this first-then schedule. The schedule itself was on the outside of a notebook and the events of his day were on sheets inside the notebook in order. This allowed the staff working with him to quickly switch out the visuals for each transition. At first we started with the scheduled activity being followed by a reinforcer (e.g., first work with teacher, then play dough). Over time he was able to manage the schedule with just the events of the day and eventually he was able to go into the notebook and change his own schedule. This greatly increased his independence throughout the day.

When we first gave him the notebook, the look of comprehension that came over his face was amazing to see. It seemed as if he was saying, “Oh! Now I get it!” His behavior was significantly better using this schedule than the first one we tried. The picture below is a similar situation and you can see how we stored the schedule on the wall. This student was not able to independently manage his schedule and he did best when only shown 2 pictures at a time rather than a full-day schedule.

For more complex learners this often is a great place to start. A word of caution, however. Don't start an entire class on first-then notebook schedules at the same time when they haven't been taught to use them. We tried that one time and were constantly looking for the schedules because the students weren't independent at keeping track of them. In short, it was disaster and the next day we broke it down and just started with 2 of the students and then added more as the first ones became independent. You can also use first-then boards to show students what will happen after a desired activity. Helping students to know what is coming next sometimes helps them to make the transition more easily.

This next picture is a picture of an app I've used on my iPhone and iPad pretty successfully. I find it to be a great tool for making first-then schedules on the fly. It's called First Then Visual Schedule and you can find it [here for iTunes](#). It is put out by Good Karma and in looking for the links, I discovered that they have a new app called FTVSHD that allows you to add video as well as choice boards and a timer. They are each \$9.99. While that is a bit pricy in apps, I have used the regular First Then app quite frequently. I haven't yet tried the FTVSHD so if you have it please leave a note for me in the comments on how you like it. It appears that if you have an iPad you may want to use the new one; the original app just expands to be twice the size on the iPad as it is designed for the iPhone or the iPod Touch.

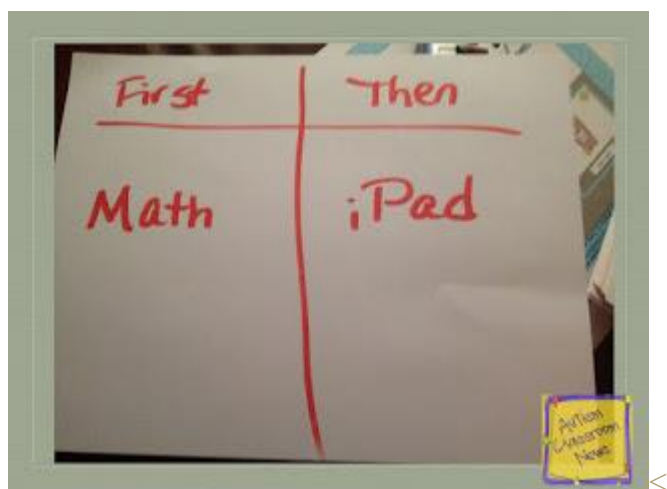
What I like about the first-then app is that sometimes I don't have pictures handy with me for the right things, but I always have my phone. The app allows me to snap a quick picture of the items and then put it in a first then schedule (or in a longer schedule).



The example above was for a student I was working with who really liked to read books but didn't really like to work on money skills. I didn't have a picture to break down the tasks in his work session, so I quick pulled out my phone, snapped pictures of the material, and voila! A first-then schedule. It really helped him to work through the money task with just a few reminders that he would then be able to look at the book.

I don't typically use this feature, but you can also record words with the pictures so the person using it can hit the picture and it will tell him what is next. Overall, the app is easy to use and can be used to make a variety of different types of schedules.

And then we have the low-tech option—you can just draw it out on paper, post-its or dry erase board and use writing if the student can read. You just want to make sure that the student is able to clearly comprehend what is written.

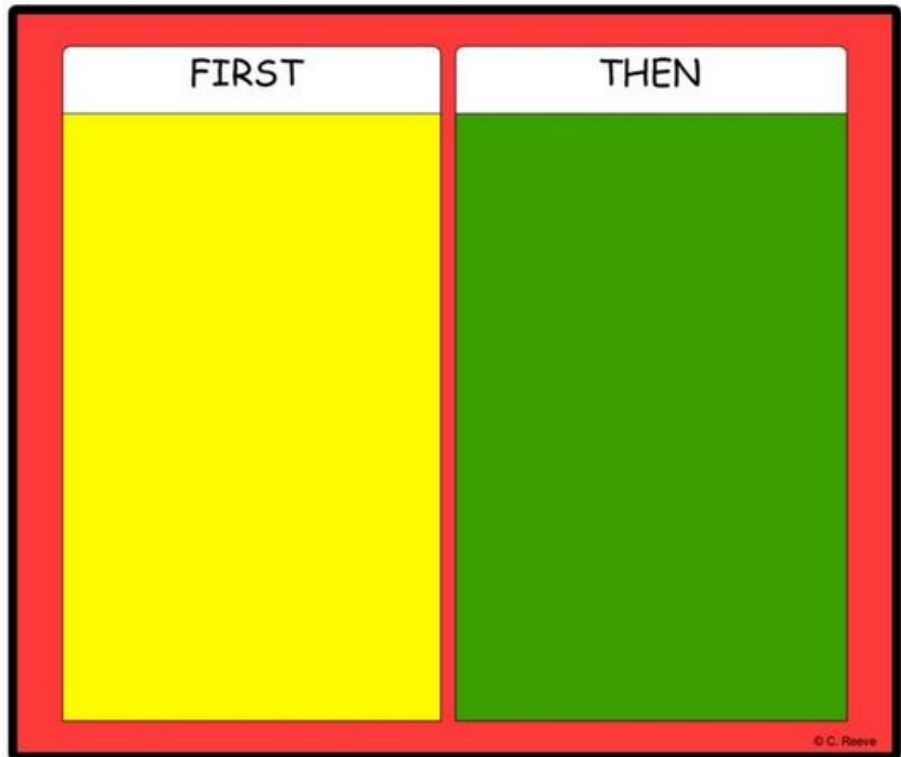


How you decide which one to use really depends on your purpose and the student's abilities. The video below demonstrates the use of a first-then schedule used for work time, similar to the way I use the app above. It also talks about using a matching schedule that we will talk about later in this series.

And finally, I promised you a freebie! You can use the board with a variety of visuals and you may want to use a [previous freebie of the communication visuals from this post](#) as your “then.” Simply download the board, laminate it, and put velcro on it to hold the pictures.

Click [here](#) or on the picture below to download a copy of a first then board from [my TPT store](#). Not a member, there are a ton of free and paid products you are missing—you can sign up for free [here](#).

free  
first-then  
Schedule  
Board



*This is part of an ongoing series of posts on different types and uses for visual schedules. you can check out the visual schedule series [here](#).*

Until next time,



# Reflections on Autism's Rise

[https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2012/03/13/reflections-autisms-rise?utm\\_source=/blog/2012/03/13/reflections-autisms-rise&utm\\_medium=text-link&utm\\_content=Reflections on Autism's Rise&utm\\_campaign=relateditems2](https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2012/03/13/reflections-autisms-rise?utm_source=/blog/2012/03/13/reflections-autisms-rise&utm_medium=text-link&utm_content=Reflections+on+Autism's+Rise&utm_campaign=relateditems2)



*Guest blog post from Autism Speaks Science Board Member [John Elder Robison](#), author of [Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's](#) and [Be Different: Adventures of a Free-Range Aspergian](#)*

Last year I participated in the Autism Speaks-CDC workshop on evaluating changes in the prevalence of autism. Now that the CDC has published the meeting [summary](#), I'd like to offer a few thoughts on the discussions and findings that came out of this meeting.

I wish I could say we had a solid conclusive finding, but we didn't. If anything, we emerged with more questions than we had when we started. That said, the meeting did produce worthwhile results that will help shape plans and directions for the work ahead of us.

At the outset, we agreed that autism diagnoses have become far more common in recent years. However, we could not decide how much of the increase is an artifact of greater awareness and evaluation as opposed to a true change in incidence. It's possible both things are happening. It may be that we are becoming more aware of autism at the same time as it is becoming more common. Or not.

We talked about studies that found "pockets of autism" in particular places and demographic groups. For example, we discussed a study that found autism was more common near interstate highways. Does this suggest that traffic is contributing to an overall increase in autism? We don't know, because it's unclear whether this situation is new or long standing.

Even when a situation of high prevalence is obviously new – the "Geek enclaves" around tech companies being a good example – we don't know if this is contributing to an overall increase, or simply concentrating autistic people from a wide area into a single spot.

We also lack clear understanding about recognized differences in autism prevalence among different ethnic groups and nations. I don't think we will fully answer questions like this until we have a definitive medical test for autism and put cultural and national differences in evaluation and diagnosis to rest.

Over the last decade we've discovered a number of genetic mutations and a few environmental factors that are implicated in autism. The trouble is, none of these things are new to the world, either. Take mercury as an example. Mercury has been around longer than humanity. People have handled and even eaten the stuff as long as we've had industry. Have you ever heard the phrase, "mad as a hatter?" It refers to people in the hat-making trade, who suffered mercury poisoning 200 years ago.

By way of context, we discussed the broad and alarming rise in childhood allergies and sensitivities. Two well-known examples are asthma and peanut allergy. Fifty years ago the former condition was rare among schoolchildren and the latter was almost nonexistent. Today, both are commonplace.

Many researchers in many fields are trying to understand the increase in these conditions. Could some common factors be contributing to all of these "epidemics," including autism? It's certainly possible.

Some laypeople blame it all on "Western diet and lifestyle," but that is not specific enough for us to take real action. There are many questions to explore, but answering them will take years of additional study, and the answers may simply lead to more questions.

For example: Is the proliferation of genetically engineered food affecting us in unexpected ways? Is factory farming harming us by largely eliminating the diversity in our food supply (genetic and otherwise)? Is our shift away from outdoor activity in favor of sedentary activity impacting conditions like autism?

These are all good questions. I wish I knew the answers. I will say this: I do my best to eat a wide variety of organic foods, walk and engage in physical activity as my ancestors did. I don't need a study to show the personal benefits of that lifestyle change.

Unfortunately, none of that helps us understand today's rise in autism diagnoses. The essential problem is this: Since we don't know what causes most autism, it's difficult to make sense of prevalence findings.

Just consider the thought process when we find a town with a high incidence of autism. Is it because the doctors are particularly observant there? Is it because there is a chemical plant nearby? Is it because there is a science company there, and they employ a lot of people on the spectrum who produce autistic offspring in greater than average numbers?

All are possible explanations, but the history of science and discovery tells us the true explanation may well be something none of us imagined. Yet.

If there was one thing we agreed on at this workshop, it was the broad scope of what we do not know. One outcome of this workshop was a "punch list" of things we should be doing to move our understanding forward in meaningful ways. Without additional knowledge, we can speculate, but guesses aren't answers, as much as we want them to be.

Another central issue is this: In the absence of a hard test for autism, we must rely on observation and discussion to diagnose it. That makes our diagnoses "softer" than we'd like. A person who was diagnosed with mental retardation in one decade might well have been diagnosed autistic the next. Even more confusingly, he could end up with both diagnoses, which really confounds our efforts to evaluate prevalence.

Many people who receive Asperger diagnoses today would not have received any diagnosis thirty years ago. I know because I am one of these people. Is there any evidence that the population of Asperger



people is really growing? I didn't see any, but neither did I see any evidence that it's not. All the numbers are going up.

Some of the questions we study sound funny, but I know them to be serious. For example, one study asked, "Is autism diagnosis contagious?" In fact, the likelihood of a child being diagnosed with autism is much higher if he's in a community that contains other autistic kids. No one is suggesting people "catch" autism from the kids around them, but parents and professionals may well "catch awareness" from the first autistic kid they encounter.

Factors like that, and today's broad public awareness of autism, certainly contribute to the rise in diagnoses.

For many years, we have recognized that one to two percent of the human population has significant developmental disability, such as severe autism or intellectual disability. A much larger percentage of the population has less severe developmental disorders, which include Asperger syndrome, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disability. The total affected by these less severe differences is quite large – at least ten percent of the population according to studies of school-age children.

That's a big umbrella, enough to contain the whole autistic population and then some. Is the umbrella growing, or is autism just taking a bigger share? I wish I knew.

*Editor's note: Autism Speaks is funding a number of [studies looking at prevalence](#), including an important new [studying looking at direct screening](#) of the school-age population. Please visit our [science news](#) column for [our report](#) on the above-mentioned Autism Speaks-CDC meeting. It includes download links for the meeting report and executive summary.*

*The Autism Speaks blog features opinions from people throughout the autism community. Each blog represents the point of view of the author and does not necessarily reflect Autism Speaks' beliefs or point of view.*