



My child was recently diagnosed with autism, now what?

Getting a diagnosis of autism will mean very different things to different families. Stephen Shore, a man with autism on the board of directors of Autism Society of America puts it best, *“If you have met one person with autism then you have only met one person with autism”*. Autism is very diverse as are families and communities are also diverse, so the impact of autism will be very diverse- some will celebrate it, some will resent it. Some have significant challenges and some have significant strengths- many have both.

Our understanding of autism is always advancing. Many treatments and supports used 20 years ago are seldom used today and we can speculate that popular approaches to autism today, will be different again in 20 years from now. Families must consider what autism will mean for them first. Some will focus on accommodating and incorporating autistic differences into their home while others will work towards overcoming those differences so that their child will fit in with other children. It is important to think about what is important for your child while also considering your families values- it is extremely important that parents remain in charge of the supports available to their children- no expert on autism knows more about an autistic child than the child’s parents know about him or her.

There are virtually no treatments or therapies that incorporate the many strengths associated with autism into their care plans. It is however extremely important that all children with autism learn that they have unique strengths, as well as unique challenges and that they learn to use their strengths to their advantage.

Embracing The Future

Once a family comes to terms with autism, many will realize that they have a cool kid after all. Think of the woman who thought she was flying to Sydney, Australia but landed instead in Sydney, Nova Scotia. She managed to have a great vacation by embracing Sydney NS and having a different sort of vacation than she had planned for. If she spent her time lamenting the loss of her trip to Sydney Australia, her vacation would have been ruined. We can think of having a child with autism in this same way- if we spend our time comparing that child to typically developing children then we may miss all the things having a child with autism has to offer. It is very different raising a child with autism with different challenges and these differences can make families feel very isolated and doubt their approaches. Be confident that with good information, support and understanding, you can do it. No child’s fate is predetermined, so shoot for the stars and dream for your autistic child; don’t just *plan for their future*.

As with all of us, support needs will change as children with autism grow and mature into adulthood. Prepare to look at your autistic child with new eyes every so often and never dismiss their strengths as insignificant.

See other side for more information



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Receiving Diagnosis at Different Ages

If under 6: If social and communication concerns are significant, parents may want to pursue the provincially funded Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention (EIBI) program. Information can be found through the IWK Central referral number 464-3110 or call them directly at 457-5020. Fact sheets on this program are available on our website, www.provincialautismcentre.ca

If older than 6: Many children on the autism spectrum, including those with Asperger's Syndrome will be diagnosed later in life. The gifts of children with Asperger's may be more obvious in early childhood and parents may not have any concerns until social problems arise at school. We meet people of all ages at the Autism Centre who have just had a diagnosis of an ASD, from 3 to 63. Visit the autism centre library to understand issues in autism at different stages in life.

Obtaining a diagnosis as an adult: Many are realizing that social and communication challenges that they have had in their lives are rooted in a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Increasingly we meet professionals, parents and husbands and wives with an ASD diagnosis. For some, obtaining a diagnosis of autism is a turning point to finally beginning to make sense of a lifetime of social confusion and misunderstandings.

In Halifax and elsewhere in Nova Scotia it can be extremely difficult for an adult to obtain a diagnosis from a qualified professional. One should be able to get a referral from their family doctor to Mental Health Services for a qualified professional that can provide the diagnostic testing. It may take several attempts to locate a qualified professional and many adults report to us that the process is frustrating and not supportive.

Joining the Autistic Self Advocacy Council can help adults with autism connect with others who have had a similar journey. Contact the Provincial Autism Centre asac_ns@provincialautismcentre.ca for more information.