



Children Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Available Resources for Families

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Kavni, the mother of 18-month-old Jay, became increasingly concerned about his development over the past few months. While Jay achieved many milestones on time, his social and language development appeared to be delayed as compared to other children his age. Kavni described Jay as an independent toddler who prefers to do things on his own. He enjoys looking at books by himself, and becomes quite upset when Kavni tries to hold the book or read it to him. Kavni noted that Jay was a quiet infant who did not babble much. He currently has a few single words that he uses to communicate his wants and needs in limited contexts, but does not yet use words spontaneously in a variety of situations. Even though Jay does make eye contact, he has significant difficulty doing so when engaged in

activities that highly interest him. For example, Kavni noted that Jay becomes quite object focused when playing with his toy cars and will often not look up at her or respond to his name while playing. She stated that she often finds herself having to physically touch him in order to gain his attention. After sharing these concerns with the pediatrician, Jay was referred to an autism specialist for a psychological evaluation and was diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Learning that one's child has autism can often come as overwhelming or frightening news. However, early identification allows parents to access available resources. Research shows that early intervention treatment services can greatly improve a child's development. Therefore, it is important for parents to talk to their child's pediatrician if they have concerns. The following is a guide to some of the various resources that are available to children with ASD; this is not an exhaustive list nor is it a review of evidence based practices or treatments, but rather a starting point for many parents seeking further information regarding ASD related services.

Early Intervention Services

The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#), is a federal law that was designed to protect the rights of students with disabilities. IDEA ensures that every student receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), regardless of his or her skills or ability. Children under the age of 3 years (36 months) who are at risk of having developmental delays or who have been diagnosed with a disability are eligible for early intervention services. Each state has an early intervention system. [Early On](#) is Michigan's early intervention program. Another helpful program is the [Michigan Head Start Association](#). While [Head Start](#) is not specifically for children with developmental disabilities, its general goal of providing individualized programs for children ages 0-5 in order to ready them for kindergarten can be very helpful to children with special needs.

There are also a variety of independent programs for children with autism; one example of this is the programs of the [Hanan Centre](#). While based out of Canada, the Hanan Centre offers training programs throughout the state of Michigan. Instead of working directly with children, these programs are focused on teaching parents how to interact with their young child with ASD in order promote social communication and language skills. Hanan's research based programs are sometimes offered at no fee by school districts. To find out more about Hanan and other programs around you, it may be helpful to contact your local school district.

School Success

Transitioning to and succeeding in school can often be a challenge for children with ASD, regardless of cognitive ability. Factors such as number of children in a classroom, amount of auditory or visual stimuli, or degree of

classroom structure can all affect whether or not a child will succeed in a traditional school setting. The IDEA act, not only seeks to provide equal educational access to all students with disabilities, but also to make available [special education services](#) for those who need it. The [Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#) team, often consisting of regular and special education teachers, the school social worker, psychologist, speech language pathologist and principal, in collaboration with the parents, first conducts an evaluation to identify a child's unique difficulties and strengths. Moving forward the team identifies appropriate goals and outlines the services that the school will provide in the [least restrictive environment](#) in order to help the child succeed. The IEP is regularly maintained and updated to reflect developmental progress. For more information regarding this topic refer to the Washtenaw Intermediate School District Parent Advisory Committee - [Parent Information Handbook](#).

Government Benefits

Parents of children who have been diagnosed with ASD may be eligible to receive social security benefits on their child's behalf through the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. This program provides benefits towards daily living expenses. Families must meet certain criteria to be eligible, including having a total family income falling within certain limits. For more information on this program, please refer to the social security online's [Child Disability Starter Kit](#).

In addition to social security benefits, there are several health insurance programs available for children with autism and their families in the state of Michigan. These include [Medicaid](#), for those 21 years and younger, covering vision, dental and mental health services. There is also a family income limit on eligibility for this program. Beneficiaries of SSI (discussed above) are automatically eligible for Medicaid. The [Children's Waiver Program](#) provides in-home and community-based therapy services to children who might otherwise need to be placed into an intermediate care facility, preventing them from staying in their home. Additional information about Medicaid and the Children's Waiver Program can be obtained by contacting the [Michigan Department of Human Services](#)

Advocacy and Support

In addition to the resources provided above, many families may want or need further emotional and/or legal support. Families of individuals with autism often find it helpful to meet with others in similar situations to discuss their experiences. Many parents find relief through [support groups](#) where parents of children with ASD come together to offer each other useful support and advice. There is also a thriving [on-line support community](#) for families affected by ASD. [Siblings](#) of those with autism might also find such groups to be beneficial, as they also tend to take on additional responsibilities and share unique experiences that are associated with their sibling's condition. [Sibshops](#) provide opportunities for siblings of children with special needs to obtain peer support and education in a recreational environment.



Some families may also feel the need for legal support to help access appropriate resources. [Wrightslaw](#) is a trusted source to obtain information about legal rights concerning public school systems. Furthermore, parents can gain information and seek legal counsel from a large number of non-profit disability rights advocacy groups including [Disability Rights Advocates](#). More advocacy groups can be found by following this [link](#).

For more information about Sunfield Center for Autism, ADHD and Behavioral Health, and our [Autism Spectrum Disorders Service](#) and [early intervention treatments](#) please visit our website at [sunfieldcenter.com](#) or call us at (734) 222-9277.

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