

# HELP FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS ONLINE

## Autism Society website is a good starting point

**A**pril is Autism Awareness Month. Autism is best described as a spectrum disorder, meaning each individual is impacted in a unique way and can display different symptoms. Typically, the disorder causes problems with communication and socialization that can range from mild to severe.

Some people on the spectrum are considered higher functioning and can lead productive, fulfilling lives. They may be considered slightly “off” or eccentric in social interactions, but not to such a

degree that most people avoid interacting with them. They can have a family and career, and live a “normal” life.

On the other end of the spectrum are people who can’t effectively communicate with others, can’t take care of themselves and need lifelong, 24/7 supervision to survive. They may engage in repetitive behaviors that make sense only to them, lack empathy for others and engage in danger-

ous behavior — such as eating or drinking toxic substances, wandering into traffic or engaging with strangers — out of an inability to understand. These people need unconditional love and understanding from their caregivers in order to enjoy any quality of life, never mind leading a productive, fulfilling life.

The middle of the spectrum is populated with people between these two extremes. They have a wide range of abilities and needs. Each one needs a customized plan and varying degrees of assistance to get the most out of life.

### Online resources

There are many websites and apps devoted to helping people with autism spectrum disorder. Because of the individual nature of the condition, no single site or app is going to be helpful to everyone on the spectrum. Like every other aspect of dealing with autism, it takes research and trial and error to find what will be useful in your situation.

If you are new to the world of autism, you are probably overwhelmed and looking for a starting point. **Autism-Society.org** is as good a place to start as any. It’s not going to solve all of your problems, or

### Local resources

**Friendshiphousepa.org:** Treatment, information and support

**Schools.nhsonline.org:** Autism support classrooms

**Northeast-autism.org:** Developmental programs

**Autism-support.org:** Local autism support groups

**PAautism.org:** State autism resources, news and events

answer all of your questions, but it can point you in a few good directions.

The Autism Society came early to the party. It was founded in 1965 by a group of parents, several of whom were doctors, with autistic children. Headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland, it grew into a national organization with affiliates around the country. It engages in advocacy for research and legislation, education — in the form of publications, conferences and its website — and as a link to resources for those looking for answers.

The site does a good job of covering the basics. There are good definitions and descriptions of the disorder, including symptoms, diagnosis, theories on causes and statistics. If you have a young child that

you’re concerned about, there’s good information on what to look for and what the doctors should be looking for.

For most people with autism and their families, it is a lifelong condition. The site has articles dealing with the different challenges faced as a person grows into adulthood, and public support structures start to become less available. They are helpful for anticipating and planning for these natural transitions.

There are also several sections on the site that direct you to other resources. Research, news, individual education plans, medical advice, legal help, support groups and more are covered. You also can join the Autism Society or support it from the website.

The organization is doing good work and the site is a valuable tool, but it could use some tweaking. There is too much long and repetitive writing throughout the site, and you have to wade through it to find some of the more useful items. The whole site needs to be more tightly edited, and the resources need to be accessible in a more intuitive fashion.

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