

# AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

April is Autism Awareness Month. Join us as we  
#CelebrateDifferences

## Did You Know?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)—or Autism—is a broad term used to describe a group of neurodevelopmental conditions typically characterized by differences in communication and social interaction.

April is National Autism Awareness Month and aims to help you learn more about the fastest-growing developmental disorder in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 36 children has autism. Today, autism is usually diagnosed in early childhood. Early diagnosis can improve the quality of life for those with autism and positively impact their careers and relationships.

- About every 20 minutes, someone in the world is diagnosed with autism
- Autistic individuals (verbal and non-verbal) use a variety of different and unique ways to communicate
- People with autism have a range of very special gifts and talents!



## Screening & Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Diagnosing autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can be difficult because there is no medical test, like a blood test, to diagnose the disorder. Doctors look at the child's developmental history and behavior to make a diagnosis.

ASD can sometimes be detected at 18 months or younger. By age 2, a diagnosis by an experienced professional can be considered very reliable. However, many children do not receive a final diagnosis until much older. Some people are not diagnosed until they are adolescents or adults. This delay means that children with ASD might not get the early help they need.

Early signs of ASD can include, but are not limited to

- Avoiding eye contact,
- Having little interest in other children or caretakers,
- Limited display of language (for example, having fewer words than peers or difficulty with use of words for communication), or
- Getting upset by minor changes in routine.

CDC's "Learn the Signs. Act Early." program provides free resources to help families monitor developmental milestones and recognize signs of developmental concerns, including ASD.

As children with ASD become adolescents and young adults, they might have difficulties developing and maintaining friendships, communicating with peers and adults, or understanding what behaviors are expected in school or on the job. They may also come to the attention of healthcare providers because they have co-occurring conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety or depression, or conduct disorder.

Monitoring, screening, evaluating, and diagnosing children with ASD as early as possible is important to make sure children receive the services and support they need to reach their full potential. There are several steps in this process.

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April is Autism Awareness Month and April 2<sup>nd</sup> is World Autism Awareness Day. Chances are you are personally affected by autism or know somebody who is. In honor of the thousands of Hoosiers with autism and the people who love, care and work with them, we'd like to take this opportunity to share some facts about the fastest growing developmental disability in the United States.

1 in 36 children are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and boys are four times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than girls. ASD consists of a broad range of symptoms characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and communication. Because ASD is a spectrum disorder, each person with autism has a distinct set of strengths and challenges. The ways in which people with autism learn, think and problem solve can range from highly skilled to severely challenged, hence, the spectrum.

Signs of autism usually appear by the age of two or three. Some associated developmental delays can appear even earlier, and often, autism can be diagnosed as early as 18 months. Common early indicators of autism are: limited or no eye contact and few or no big smiles or other joyful and engaging expressions by six months; little or no back and forth sharing of sounds, smiles or other facial expressions by nine months; little or no babbling or response to name by 12 months; very few or no meaningful two word phrases by 24 months. Contact the LittleStar Psychological Services team if you have any questions about autism or needing diagnostic services at (317) 564-5095 .

Research shows that early intervention leads to positive outcomes across their lifespan for people with autism. However, even children who are diagnosed with ASD later in childhood can benefit greatly from treatment and associated therapies. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and therapies based on its principles are the most researched and effective behavioral interventions for ASD. Founded in 2022, LittleStar was Indiana's first ABA provider and is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to inspire, serve, and guide all those touched by autism to achieve a better reality. Today, LittleStar has service centers in Bloomington, Carmel, Clarksville, Newburgh, and West Lafayette.

Caring for a child with autism is a demanding job and no one is equipped to do it alone. For this reason, LittleStar offers respite for families. Respite care provides temporary relief for a primary caregiver, enabling them to take a much-needed break from everyday demands.

Also offered are social skills groups. Many individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder have difficulty interpreting social cues when interacting with others. This can sometimes be challenging when making friends. LittleStar's social skills groups are specifically designed for children and teens who struggle to connect with their peers. Topics addressed include using appropriate conversational skills to start and maintain conversations, how to appropriately use humor, how to handle rejection and handling direct and indirect bullying. A new adult group will be starting in the summer and will include work place topics.

The newest program at LittleStar is Sibshops. Siblings play an important role in the lives of their brother or sister. Sibshops provide an opportunity for siblings to form a community and share experiences in a relaxed, recreational setting. Participants meet other sibs, have fun, laugh, talk about their experiences, play games and learn about the services their siblings receive. Sibshops allow siblings to gain a voice to express their fears, anxieties and hopes for the future. They begin to feel valued and build a community where they feel safe and heard.

LittleStar Intake Services can be reached at (844) 311-1775. For additional information, LittleStar can be reached at the following locations or a [www.littlestaraba.org](http://www.littlestaraba.org) :

**Bloomington:** 3101 North Canterbury Ct, Bloomington, IN 47404 Phone: (812) 650-3032  
**Carmel:** 12650 Hamilton Crossing Blvd, Carmel, IN 46032 Phone: (317) 249-2242  
**Clarksville:** 632 Eastern Blvd, Clarksville, IN 47129 Phone: (812) 725-9025  
**Newburgh:** 3777 Haley Dr, Newburgh, IN 47630 Phone: (812) 490-0904  
**West Lafayette:** 2555 Yeager Rd, West Lafayette, IN 47906 Phone: (765) 269-7756

Visit LittleStar's

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## Jokes of the Month

What did the tree say during springtime?  
*Well, this is a re-leaf!*

Where did the shark go for summer vacation?  
*Finland.*

Why couldn't the flower ride its bike?  
*It lost its petals.*

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