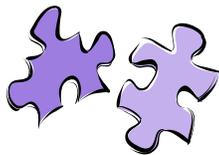
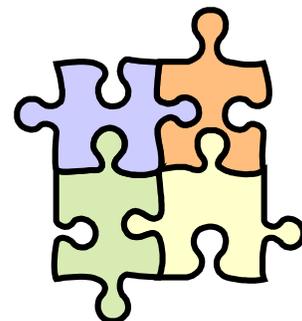
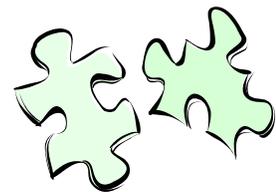




**Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Early Intervention Services**



**SPECIALTY SERVICES FOR
YOUNG CHILDREN WITH
AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS**



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN DIAGNOSED WITH AN AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Most parents with a child newly diagnosed on the autism spectrum feel they have a lot to learn. The term “spectrum” refers to the wide range of symptoms, skills, and levels of impairment that children with ASD can have. Early intervention can reduce or prevent some of the challenging behaviors associated with ASD. Early intervention may also improve your child's communication, problem solving, social and everyday functional skills.

Children are identified as having ASD because they have challenges in three specific areas: communication, social interaction, and behavioral differences (shown by repetitive, stereotyped motions and limited interests). While you may wonder about labeling your young child with ASD, the earlier the disorder is diagnosed, the sooner specific interventions may begin. Treating autism early can greatly reduce ASD symptoms and increase your child's ability to grow and learn new skills. With appropriate services and supports, young children on the autism spectrum will grow and learn, even if at a different developmental rate than others.

Whether autism rates are actually increasing, or whether diagnosis has improved while diagnostic categories have broadened, it is clear there are many, many people affected by ASDs. What this means is: *you are not alone*. There are literally tens of thousands of families coping with the challenges of raising a child with an ASD. Advocacy organizations and support groups addressing those needs exist all over the world. Through these organizations, you can meet other parents who have walked this road before you, and who may have knowledge about local resources and services. They can be especially helpful when you are just starting out because the amount of information available can be overwhelming. Keep in mind that you cannot possibly learn everything all at once. Take your time, and recognize that there are many varied opinions about what causes ASD and how to treat it. There are also many unknowns and limitations in our current understanding.

While there is no proven cure for autism, there are treatment and educational approaches that may reduce some of the challenges associated with ASD. But just as there is no one symptom or behavior that identifies individuals with ASD, there is no single treatment that will be effective for all. Treatment should be fit to the child's unique strengths, weaknesses, and needs.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health provides intensive intervention to children on the autism spectrum who are enrolled in Early Intervention. In addition to the comprehensive services provided by your local early intervention program, you may choose to have additional help from a *Specialty Service Provider*. These providers have been approved by DPH to offer highly structured, individualized treatment programs in natural settings such as the home and childcare settings. Parents are encouraged to actively participate in these programs. Please note that each Specialty Service Provider covers specified areas of the state and may not provide services in your town.

Some Early Intervention Programs provide intensive individualized programs for children with ASD – check with your Service Coordinator.

The Specialty Service Providers use one of the three major comprehensive approaches to intervention (and will be happy to explain their model to you):

Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) is the most researched treatment approach. The effectiveness of ABA methods in increasing communication, learning, and life skills and reducing inappropriate behavior has been well documented. ABA builds new skills, such as learning to speak and play, by breaking tasks down into small steps and providing positive reinforcement to the child. A sequenced curriculum that guides children from simple behaviors to more functional, complicated skills can be used in any setting - at a table, on the playground, or in the classroom. Programs are planned and supervised by trained ABA professionals who involve parents as team members.

The Developmental, Individual Difference, Relationship -based (DIR)/Floortime Model aims to build healthy and meaningful relationships, social communication, and play skills by following the natural emotions and interests of the child through increasingly complex, playful interactions. The child's actions are assumed to be purposeful. It is the parent or caregiver's role to follow the child's lead and help him develop social interaction and communication skills with the guidance of Floortime specialists. Floortime strongly emphasizes social and emotional development and parent involvement in the program.

The Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) incorporates both ABA (modeling, positive reinforcement, repetition), as well as developmental Relationship-based approaches similar to Floortime (e.g. focusing on the child's interests and using play and positive adult – child jointly created motivating interactions as the teaching framework) to build on social interactions. Working directly with the child as well as providing coaching for the parent is key. Therapists assess the child's current skills, identify target behaviors (skills) to focus on in the context of play, and make sure that teaching opportunities are frequent and that the child is given many opportunities to practice selected skills. This newer approach incorporates components of previous approaches with strong evidence (ABA; Floortime) and

also has several quite significant studies supporting developmental and neurological progress.

Your EI Program can provide you with the list of DPH approved Specialty Service Providers who serve your area. A list of websites that may be helpful to you are included in this packet. You may request an intake visit from any of the Specialty Service Providers that serve your geographic area to help you determine the best fit for you and your child.

There are no additional fees associated with specialty services for children enrolled in the Early Intervention system. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health, MassHealth, and some private health plans may pay for Specialty Services. The Department of Public Health pays all costs that are not covered by insurance and for eligible children who have no insurance.

ASD RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES OF NEWLY DIAGNOSED CHILDREN

- **AUTISM CONSORTIUM** A Massachusetts research collaborative looking into the causes and treatments of autism. Look for Parent Information Packets (in six languages) on the Family Partners page.
www.autismconsortium.org

- **AUTISM SPEAKS** A major autism science and advocacy organization, dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and a cure for autism; increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders; and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families
www.autismspeaks.org

- **AUTISM SOCIETY OF AMERICA** A leading grassroots autism organization working to increase public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people on the spectrum, advocate for appropriate services, and provide the latest information regarding treatment, education, research and advocacy.
www.autism-society.org

- **AUTISM RESOURCE CENTERS** Regional centers that provide a range of resources, referrals, information, educational advocacy, technical assistance, and training to families and providers. Look for specialized packets related to young children, basic autism information.
www.mass.gov/dds Click on Autism Spectrum Services

- **ASPERGER'S ASSOCIATION OF NEW ENGLAND** AANE works with individuals, families, and professionals to help people with Asperger Syndrome build meaningful, connected lives by providing information, education, community, support, and advocacy.
www.aane.org

AUTISMWEB.COM A community of parents interested in ASDs. Reviews autism teaching methods, diets and vitamins, autism research, medicine, conferences. Provides message boards to link parents to others who have “been there.”

www.autismweb.com

INTERACTIVE AUTISM NETWORK works to facilitate research that will lead to advancements in understanding and treating ASDs.

www.iancommunity.org/cs/newly_diagnosed

FAMILY TIES A statewide parent-to-parent network providing information and support to families and professionals helping children with special needs

www.massfamilyties.org

MA STATE ACT EARLY TEAM aims to educate parents and professionals about healthy childhood development, early warning signs of autism and other developmental disorders, the importance of routine developmental screening, and timely early intervention whenever there is a concern

www.maactearly.org

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH A branch of the federal government that plans, supports, and administers programs of research to evaluate the effectiveness of preventive, treatment and rehabilitative interventions.

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/a-parents-guide-to-autism-spectrum-disorder/how-is-asd-treated.shtml

OTHER RESOURCES

FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS Provides information, support, and assistance to parents of children with disabilities, their professional partners, and their communities.

www.fcsn.org

MASS ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN Autism Special Education Legal Support Center provides training, technical assistance and advocacy to ensure that children with autism overcome lowered expectations and receive equal educational opportunities.

www.massadvocates.org/autism-center.php

EARLY INTERVENTION

www.mass.gov/dph/earlyintervention

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

www.doe.mass.edu/sped/prb