

Developing Minds

Winter/Spring 2008

EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF AUTISM

Pediatricians play a particularly important role in the early recognition of autism spectrum disorders

Parents are now much more aware of the early signs of autism spectrum disorders, thanks to frequent coverage in the media. If their child demonstrates any of the published signs, they will most likely raise their concerns to their child's pediatrician. Therefore, it is critical that pediatricians be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of autism spectrum disorders and have a strategy for assessing them systematically. In fact, at the last annual meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics, pediatricians were urged to screen *all* children for autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) during their 18 and 24 month-old visits.

ASDs are not rare: recent estimates of the prevalence of ASDs are in the range of 6.5 to 6.6 per 1000 children, and pediatricians, therefore, are likely to care for children and adolescents with these diagnoses. Many primary care pediatricians care for several children with ASDs. In fact, a survey completed in 2004 revealed that 44% of pediatricians reported that they care for at least 10 children with ASDs; however, only 8% stated that they routinely screened for ASDs.

Some pediatricians feel unprepared to identify and manage children with ASDs because, until recently, many medical schools offered little education in the area of ASDs. **Today, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that physicians refer children for early intervention if they satisfy two of the following four criteria: sibling with autism, parental concern, other caregiver concern, or physician concern.** With one concern, it is suggested that the physician administer an ASD screening instrument. Pediatricians who wish to learn more about these mandates and procedures can refer to the article "Identification and Evaluation of Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder" in the November, 2007, *Pediatrics*.

In the last two decades, research and program development in the area of educational intervention have focused largely on very young children with ASDs, due to the ability now to identify children with ASDs at a younger age, and evidence that early intensive intervention may result in substantially better outcomes. The primary goals of treatment are to

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Child Development Chats

The Center for Developing Minds regularly hosts informal and interactive sessions where topics including child behavior, development concerns and parenting questions will be discussed. Free of charge.

In addition to the general monthly chats, periodically, a session will focus on a specific area of interest:

Common Behavior Problems in the Preschool-aged Child

12:30 – 1:30 pm
March 25, 2008

Complementary Alternative Therapies for ADHD

12:00 – 1:00 pm
April 10, 2008

Putting Sleep to Rest

12:00 – 1:00 pm
May 8, 2008

Lectures to Note

Upcoming presentations by Dr. Korb include:

"Developing the Attention System"

February 12, 2008 7:30pm
Parents Helping Parents,
Santa Clara.

Please see our website for the complete schedule, as well as more details on each of these events.



Pediatric expertise in child behavior, development & learning
www.devminds.com 408.358.1853

Autism Screening

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minimize the core features and associated deficits, maximize functional independence and quality of life, and alleviate family distress. Facilitating development and learning, promoting socialization, reducing maladaptive behaviors, and educating and supporting families can help accomplish these goals. Ideally, interventions should help mitigate the core features of ASDs, which include impairment in social reciprocity, deficits in communication, and restricted, repetitive behavioral repertoire.

Pediatricians today must familiarize themselves with local resources that can assist in making a definitive diagnosis of, and in managing, children with ASDs. The Center for Developing Minds is available to aid pediatricians in the identification of their clients with ASDs. To complement the detailed developmental evaluations currently provided at the CDM, this spring we will open our Autism Screening Clinic and offer families low-cost, mini-assessments for early identification of children with ASDs (see the back page for more details). Other helpful organizations include:

- Early Start, for screening children age 0-3,
- Parents Helping Parents, for parent education,
- County school districts, for screening children aged 3-years and older.

Note to Physicians...

The following autism screening tests are appropriate to use in the primary care office. Drs. Korb or Rojas, behavioral and developmental pediatricians at the CDM, would be happy to discuss the merits of these screens and suggest appropriate level II screens with interested physicians.

Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (CHAT)
www.autismresearchcentre.com/tests/chat_test.asp

Childhood Asperger Syndrome Test (CAST)
www.autismresearchcentre.com/tests/cast_test.asp

Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT)
www.firstsigns.org/downloads/m-chat.pdf

PDD Screening Test-II www.harcourtassessment.com

Information Regarding Prescription Refills

Please be sure to discuss any prescription renewal needs during your appointments at the clinic. There is a \$25 fee for prescription refills requested via phone or email.

Plan ahead — be sure to not run out of your child's medicine.

Ask the Clinician

Q: My five-year-old son always appears interested in what other children are playing, but then shies away from interaction. At home, he seems just like any other child. Why is my child so shy?

The five most typical reasons children behave shyly include: anxiety, language delays, social cognitive deficits, sensory integration issues, and temperament. Children with one or more of these issues appear to act shy for different reasons. If we expand on each of these areas, you may be able to pin-point the root of your child's shy behavior.

1. Is the cause anxiety? The anxious child reacts in a worried manner in a variety of situations and in different conditions. He or she may have specific phobias, or be timid to try new things, such as engaging in play with new children. Frequently, children with anxieties also demonstrate obsessive or compulsive behaviors (nail biting, etc.), which may help you identify if this is the issue.

2. Language delays may preclude a child from interacting with peers. A child lacking language skills may not join in with others, because he or she cannot keep up with the verbal exchange. If you suspect language delays are an issue for your child, in terms of comprehension or articulation, discuss this with your child's teacher or physician and have your child assessed.

3. When children lack social skills they often struggle interacting with other kids. Contrary to your child, five-year-olds with social skill deficits usually seek out, albeit ineffectively, interaction with other children. Over time, after many failed attempts at interaction, some children may become more introverted and shy away from other kids.

4. A child who has many hypersensitivities to environmental stimuli can be overwhelmed in social situations. Loud noises, clothing textures, or the over-stimulation of being around other children can cause an overwhelmed child to "shut down" in social situations, and thus shy away from others.

5. Lastly, some children have slow-to-warm-up temperaments. Those children are shy in new situations and around unfamiliar people.

From this list, hopefully you can identify the likely underlying cause of your child's shy behavior. Once you find the cause, you can then move forward and help your child address each issue, so that they can more comfortably interact with others.

Have a question? E-mail info@devminds.com

Current Classes at the CDM

SKILLS FOR SCHOOL

Specialized training course for kids with social-skill, organizational and attention difficulties

Thursdays, 4:30-5:30pm

Meeting dates: February 28, March 6, 13, 20, 27, April 3

Parent orientation: Wednesday, February 27, 7:00-8:00 pm

Open to students in grades 2-4

Instructors: Cassandra Harms, Child and Adolescent Therapist & Teri Jetter, Occupational Therapist

This unique, multi-disciplinary class combines psychotherapy and occupational therapy to help kids gain information through their bodies, in order to fully absorb teachings to the brain. The course provides a holistic approach to attention differences by teaching concepts in both a kinesthetic and a cognitive manner.

This six-week program will specifically address:

- Strategies for your child to self-regulate their bodies
- Hands-on techniques on how to be a good friend and how to manage bullies,
- Methods to help with transitions
- Organizational systems that will strengthen your child's time-management skills, planning, memory and spatial organization.

LET'S GET ORGANIZED

Support Group for Kids Who Struggle to Stay Organized in their Life

Tuesdays, 4:30-5:30pm

Meeting dates: March 4, 11, 18, 25 and April 1, 8

Parent orientation: Monday, March 3, 7:00-8:00 pm

Open to students in grades 5-8

Instructor: Cassandra Harms, Child and Adolescent Therapist

Organization problems are common among students whose performance in school is disappointing. Even the most motivated of these children may find it hard to change their patterns of disorganization. This fun and encouraging group will help students build new skills essential for good organization, while improving self-esteem in a supportive environment among students that struggle with similar issues.

This support group will focus on your child's skills in attending, planning, time management, performance anxiety and memory.

As a part of the sessions, the participants will collaboratively plan an "End of Group, Beginning of Success" party as a concrete and enjoyable way to utilize their new organization skills.

All classes are held at the CDM. Course fees range from \$300-\$450 for the set of sessions and the parent orientation. Class sizes are limited to provide participants with personal attention. To register, or for more information regarding these classes, please contact the CDM at 408-358-1853.

Welcome New CDM Staff

Cassandra Riedy Harms, M.A., M.F.T.

Child and Adolescent Therapist

Cassandra Riedy Harms is a therapist at the Center for Developing Minds providing counseling for children and adolescents between the ages of 7 and 22 and their families. She uses a cognitive behavioral approach to working with youth struggling with anxiety, depression, behavioral and social problems. Harms also manages a variety of support groups and classes at the CDM, which provide organizational and social-skills training for children and their parents.

Natalia Esquivel

Receptionist

Natalia Esquivel works with the office staff at the Center for Developing Minds, helping to greet patients and their families, answer phones, and schedule appointments. Ms. Esquivel holds a B.A. in psychology from UCSC and is currently working toward her Masters in Occupational Therapy.

For more biographical information about CDM staff, please visit our website, www.devmonds.com.

Friendship Coaching

The CDM now offers a unique program to help kids strengthen their friendship skills. In these new sessions, children are matched with one other client, either their own friend or another child with similar issues and age, to allow them to get real-time feedback about their interactions. The 90-minute sessions are structured so the first 15 minutes focus on skill review, during the next hour clients practice those skills while doing a structured activity, and then the remainder of the time is used for evaluation and discussion of next-steps for improvement.

This dynamic program teaches kids valuable friendship lessons using a variety of approaches:

- the children examine video tapes of their interactions,
- the instructor(s) provides critical advice,
- the children give each other immediate, direct reactions,
- each parent may be consulted for suggestions.

Fees for the sessions range from \$120 to \$160 per child, depending upon the number of therapists utilized. For more information, or to schedule a friendship coaching session, please contact Cassandra Harms at the CDM.



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NEW

Autism Screening Clinic for Infants and Toddlers

The Center for Developing Minds Now Offers Mini-Assessments for Early Identification of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

The Center for Developing Minds is now accepting appointments for its new Autism Screening Clinic. The clinic is specifically designed for families who are interested in having their child evaluated for possible Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). The program will support community clinicians in the prompt recognition of autism, so that local children with autism spectrum disorders receive early entry into appropriate community resources and services. Children with ASDs who begin therapy at a young age achieve better overall outcomes.

The assessments are conducted by our experienced developmental and behavior specialist, Janel Astor, who reviews a pre-evaluation questionnaire and standardized developmental survey, meets with the family and provides a 45-minute structured play session to observe each child. At the completion of the exam, the family will be informed about whether or not it appears that their child has an ASD or other developmental delay, as well as if further evaluation is recommended. Ms. Astor will also help each family navigate possible treatment options using her extensive experience and knowledge of community resources.

“For busy pediatricians, with a concern that their patient may fall in the ‘grey area’ of autism spectrum disorders, or for parents who would like reassurance at a reduced cost, these ASD mini-assessments will provide a needed service in our area,” according to clinic director, Damon Korb, M.D. The 75-minute visit will include an evaluation summary and treatment plan, for a fee of \$400. In addition, the CDM will continue to offer its more comprehensive ASD evaluations, for families who wish to collect as much information as possible about their developing child. If you have concerns about your child and potential ASDs, please contact your pediatrician, or the CDM, to schedule an appointment as soon as possible.

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