

## Autism Awareness Month: Understanding The Degrees of Autism

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors. They include autistic disorder, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger syndrome.

According to Autism Speaks, with the May 2013 publication of a new diagnostic manual, these autism subtypes will be merged into one umbrella diagnosis of ASD. "ASD can be associated with intellectual disability, difficulties in motor coordination and attention and physical health issues such as sleep and gastrointestinal disturbances. Some persons with ASD nonetheless excel in visual skills, music, math and art," according to the Autism Speaks website.

Autism appears to have its roots in very early brain development. However, the most obvious signs of autism and symptoms of autism tend to emerge between 2 and 3 years of age. Autism Speaks continues to fund research on effective methods for earlier diagnosis, as early intervention with proven behavioral therapies can improve outcomes. Increasing autism awareness is a key aspect of this work and one in which our families and volunteers play an invaluable role.

Healthcare providers who work with people diagnosed with the spectrum of autism disorders are among the most highly specialized in the healthcare workplace. They understand that each individual with autism is unique and while some demonstrate exceptional abilities in visual skills, music and academic skills, and can live independently, others with autism have significant disability and cannot live alone.

Autism Awareness Month gives significant and necessary attention to the growing numbers of people diagnosed with autism and to the professionals who have found it important enough to make autism work their lifetime pursuit. Thank you to all of our clients who work in the field of Autism. We know some days it may be a challenge, but your work and help in this field is exceptional.

Keep in mind that from time to time, counselors and therapists working with patients who have Autism, may come across an unwanted lawsuit from time to time due to the nature of the business. If this should happen to you, it is important to have protection for your license and career. Professional Liability insurance will keep you protected and help you fight for your career should a lawsuit ever be filed against you, no matter what the reason is behind the lawsuit.

