

10th Conference on Health Care of the Chinese in North America



Autistic Children: A Parent's Perspective

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California Cries "273%" Increase in Autism - We Don't Know Why

	<u>1987</u>	<u>1998</u>
Persons with Autism	3,902	12,780

***** The same statistics HITS the Asian Community *****

As a parent of a 10 years old autistic boy, I too cry about this increase. Life has never been the same the day my son was diagnosed 7 years ago. My family has been through hell and back.

In the Fremont Unified School District here in the southern part of San Francisco Bay, the increase is even more dramatic. When my son was first eligible for special services, the district had 35 autistic kids. Today, 7 years later, we have 200.

The Asian community is the slowest group to seek help and services. We usually accept our mishaps and do not want to trouble others.

I belong to a non-profit organization, Friends of Children with Special Needs. This is an organization started by Chinese parents like myself five years ago.

We reach out to families with children with special needs here in the South Bay. We have approximately 150 Chinese families who either attend our weekly meeting or receive our newsletter and resource information. Of these families, 80 of them are with children with autism or pervasive developmental delay (PDD). Because of space limitations, we can only accommodate about 55 families at time to our weekly meetings.

With Asians being traditionally shy about admitting family members having disabilities and Regional Center ethnicity data, we estimate we've only reach 1/5 of the population.

I want to show 2-3 minutes of slides of the autistic kids in our organization with music in the background. One thing you might notice is, you cannot tell which child is autistic and which is not.

Autism is a behavioral diagnosis, not a physical one. So our special kids will demonstrate their disability when you are kept in a room with them for less than 15 minutes. Their four main areas of deficit are:

1. Communication (verbal or nonverbal)
2. Social
3. Behavioral
4. Understanding of the world around them

They are the most challenging population to teach. But with popular early childhood intervention, they can be brought to their fullest potential. Indeed, a few have become Ph.Ds. Without intervention, 99% will lead an unproductive and low quality of life and bring various misery to the people around them.

I am lucky, my son was diagnosed early and proper intervention was given. Even though, he is still sometimes behaviorally challenged, he was given the chance to improve. He is now a 4th grader, with 50% of his school day mainstreamed and 50% in a Learning Handicapped Classroom.

Autistic / PDD children can be easily missed. We need health professionals like you to help to keep a sharp eye out for these kids.