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Early diagnosis, effective treatments can benefit children with autism

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April is Autism Awareness Month, an opportunity to promote autism awareness and acceptance for the tens of thousands who are facing an autism diagnosis. With one in 68 children living with autism in the U.S., the need for awareness and research is significant. Stephen Kanne, assistant professor and executive director of the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders at the University of Missouri says early detection and ongoing research are key in helping those living with autism.

"The most important thing to remember during Autism Awareness Month is that autism is a serious disorder; however, it is not one without hope," said Kanne. "Early diagnosis, along with effective treatments and groundbreaking research, mean children with autism can and will get better."

Kanne's recommendation for parents is to seek help, either by talking to their child's pediatrician or someone in the child's school. Health providers and schools often have access to autism-specific resources and can help parents address their child's needs. Parents who notice "red flags" in their children's behavior should consult their doctor as soon as possible. Examples of "red flags" include:

- No big smiles or warm or joyful expressions by six months or thereafter;
- No babbling by 12 months;
- Any loss of speech, babbling or social skills at any age;
- Not turning to their name when called.

"Parents, especially mothers, who are concerned something is wrong with their child should trust their instincts," Kanne said. "Past research has found that 80 percent of the time, a mother's instinct about her child's health was correct. So, if parents are concerned, they should not hesitate to ask for a referral to an autism specialist."

Source:
University of Missouri Health
