

AUTISM AWARENESS



Dear Parents,

This edition of Mindscapes will focus on
AUTISM AND MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS.

As you may know, April was Autism Awareness Month. Statistically, approximately 1 in 68 school aged children are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Autism is defined as neurodiversity or a variation of the neural connections that form the core of all our brain functions. In simpler terms, Autism can be referred to as a difference in the way a person experiences sensations and the way the brain processes and responds to this information.

Some of the common symptoms of Autism include:

- Persistent difference in social communication and interaction- indicated by lack of social understanding, minimal eye contact and minimal social interaction.
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests or activities- indicated by difficulty to cope with changes to routine and pattern of daily activities, obsessive interests or activities.
- Difficulty to understand abstract concepts, imaginative tasks- indicated by a child not engaging in normal "imaginative play" such as role playing, understanding fairy tales, telling stories etc.

Every child with Autism is unique. Awareness, early detection, acceptance and targeted therapeutic intervention can help children with Autism learn and succeed.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING



What is mental health?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

Why is mental health important for overall health?

Mental and physical health are equally important components of overall health. For example, depression increases the risk for many types of physical health problems, particularly long-lasting conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Similarly, the presence of chronic conditions can increase the risk for mental illness.

MENTAL HEALTH AMONG CHILDREN

Mental health in childhood means reaching developmental and emotional milestones, and learning healthy social skills and how to cope when there are problems.

What is Children's Mental Health?

Mentally healthy children have a positive quality of life and can function well at home, in school, and in their communities.

Many children occasionally experience fears and worries or display disruptive behaviors. If symptoms are persistent and interfere with school, home, or play activities, the child may require additional help and guidance to develop better coping skills.



SELF-CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH FOR CHILDREN

- Share your own feelings to encourage self-awareness.
- Set aside time for low stress or solo activities.
- Encourage journaling and diaries.
- Find social groups that help them feel like they belong.
- Establish a self-care routine.
- Cultivate interests and hobbies.
- Recognize toxic stress events.
- Focus on articulating feelings like "I am angry." "I am sad."

TO THE PARENTS...

As your child starts school, their physical, mental and social skills are developing rapidly. They are learning to describe experiences and talk more about their emotions. Friendships and peer pressure start becoming more important as they shift their focus from home to the world outside.

By spending more time outside home, your child is gaining a sense of responsibility and learning to be independent. Some older children will start to go through puberty and will show physical changes, as well as emotional ones.



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