



Understanding Autism to Help Children Live to the Fullest

It may be the greatest wish people have for themselves and their loved ones. But for the millions of Americans with birth defects, disabilities, and blood disorders, that wish can be challenging to realize.

Life brings all of us complications and sometimes these include health problems. Staff of the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD) work to protect those who are vulnerable to health risks, such as babies, children, people with blood disorders, and people with disabilities. Our ultimate goal is to promote health and enhance the potential for full and productive lives throughout the lifespan.

Mary Elizabeth's Story

Our journey into this world of autism began eight years ago with the birth of our son, Perry. Since the beginning, he struggled. He seemed very restless. He had a lack of recognition in his eyes, didn't eat, and didn't sleep. As each day passed we recognized more 'red flag' characteristics of autism with repetitive behaviors and speech/sound delays.

There was a minimum six-month wait for him to see a developmental pediatrician. Meanwhile at 12 months old, we learned he was eligible for our state's early intervention program due to his developmental delays. He began a steady course of daily therapies. When Perry was 15 months old we finally received the diagnosis: Perry has autism. I cried for 2 days, hoping that I would be able to provide him everything he needed.

Shortly after Perry's diagnosis, our daughter Margeaux was born blue and immediately

faced feeding and sleeping problems. She was restless, but in a different way than Perry. When Margeaux was 12 months old we underwent another early intervention evaluation. Margeaux's therapy began and Perry's therapy continued. Her Asperger's diagnosis came at age 5. It has been a long road.

My incredibly special children have been a true gift. Like any mother, I would take away their struggles if I could. My ultimate hope is that my children will live in a world where they will be accepted and appreciated despite their differences. As long as I am here, I surround them with people who love and accept them because autism never takes a day off.

