



## **SEROTONIN LINK TO AUTISM? REPORT #2753**

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**BACKGROUND:** Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. Learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged. A diagnosis of ASD now includes several conditions that used to be diagnosed separately: autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder, and Asperger syndrome. These conditions are now all called autism spectrum disorder. In 2018, the CDC determined that approximately 1 in 59 children is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Boys are four times more likely to be diagnosed than girls. Most children are being diagnosed after age 4, however, autism can be diagnosed as early as age 2. Diagnosing ASD can be difficult since there is no medical test, like a blood test, to diagnose the disorders. Doctors look at the child's behavior and development to make the diagnosis.

(Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html> and <https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-statistics>)

**AUTISM AND EMPLOYMENT:** A study in the Journal of Pediatrics shows that two years after graduation, half of ASD young adults have no paid job experience, technical education or college. Nearly seven years out, the numbers improve but remain low, with one out of three having had no paid work or post-secondary education. That's a higher percentage shut out of the work world than for other disabilities, including the mentally disabled, with heightened risk of poorer outcomes for those from low-income families and those with greater functional impairment. The study documents "What we have suspected for some time, that the young adult autism population faces significant, additional challenges to employment beyond those faced by many other disability populations," says Dr. Scott Standifer, a clinical instructor in the Disability Policy & Studies office at the University of Missouri.

(Source: <https://childmind.org/article/autism-and-employment/>)

**NEW WAY TO TREAT AUTISM:** Research from Ami Klin, PhD, the Director of the Marcus Autism Center at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, suggests that if the environment around autistic children could be engineered in such a way that it would provide a kind of scaffold, one supporting the better engagement of affected children, we would be in a position of changing their developmental trajectory. Rather than having a child spend one hour a week with a developmental expert, Klin chooses to treat a child through the engineering of social environments. He trains parents to use every day experiences in order to engineer the social engagement that is crucial. It's a form of treatment called early social interaction and sends coaches to train parents in their homes. A parent interacts with the child, has a "bud" in their ear, there is a camera, and the interventionist is sitting in the center monitoring that engagement in the home and coaching parents on how to take advantage of those moment-by-moment experiences that are learning opportunities for socialization. It's very one-on-one, on the basis that babies spend most of their time with their caregivers. When the environment becomes the daycare center, daycare providers are trained. When it becomes preschool, preschool teachers are trained. In a sense, Klin says we become architects of our own community.

(Source: <https://www.bbrfoundation.org/content/new-way-diagnose-and-treat-autism>)

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