

Recognizing National Autism Awareness Month

Respite from Jill's House is part of solution to reduce families' stress

Over 50 percent of the children Jill's House serves are identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). April has been designated National Autism Awareness Month and is a time when organizations and individuals come together to shed light on the need for education, research and understanding for people with ASD. First celebrated in the 1970s by the Autism Society, National Autism Awareness Month is now recognized across the United States as a time to educate the public about autism.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010 data shows that one in 68 children has been identified with ASD, compared to one in 150 children in 2000. The number is growing, and the toll on parents is, too:

- It costs \$17,000 more per year to care for a child with ASD to cover health care, therapy, family services and caregiver times. For children with severe ASD, the cost increases to \$21,000.
- Parents raising children with delayed development experience 60% more stress than the general population does. This added stress comes from the child's behaviors and the sense of lost control.
- Mothers of children with autism are twice as likely to suffer from depression, and the majority score in the mental health "distress range."

The results of financial challenges, experiencing more stress and, in some cases, suffering from depression include:

- **Exhausted parents.** Since parents need to monitor their children continually, they tend to sleep less, wake up more often, and sleep restlessly.
- **Failed marriages.** Marriages become vulnerable when chronic daily stress builds, creating marital alienation. Parents of children with ASD experience less marital intimacy, which often results in divorce.
- **Typical siblings feel neglected.** Since the focus of the family can be on managing the behaviors of the child with ASD, financial concerns, stress and depression, oftentimes there is nothing left for the typical siblings in the family. This creates an additional layer of guilt and anxiety for the parents.
- **Delayed development.** The stress on parents has been shown to further delay the development of a child with ASD since stressed, weary caregivers cannot provide the kind of attention and structure that children with ASD need.

During Autism Awareness Month, Jill's House is bringing awareness to the unique challenges parents raising children with ASD face and to the critical need to bring relief to these families. The ideal support for these families has five characteristics:

1. Focus on reducing parents' stress.
2. Aim to serve children with severe intellectual disability, particularly those whose reduced communication and behaviors make them the most challenging.
3. Put the parents back in control, allowing them the chance to reintegrate socially and in their marriages.
4. Restore parents' sleep.
5. Relieve chronic daily stress by reducing caregiving burdens while encouraging the child's development.

Jill's House meets these needs through overnight respite service focused on solving the most acute problem -- parent stress -- with the best possible solution: overnight respite for children with ASD and other severe intellectual disabilities. Designed to be cost-effective (families pay as little as \$3 per hour for their children's stay), Jill's House is responsive to the individual family's needs by tailoring each child's service plan to the family's requests, which helps reduce, if not eliminate, worry that the child will be cared for well.

"Our studies show that regular respite from Jill's House reduces stress by 73%, helps save marriages and builds community among families to reengage them socially," said Cameron Doolittle, president and CEO of Jill's House. "It is our belief that all agencies and organizations dedicated to supporting ASD issues must work together to ensure each population group within the growing ASD community is lifted up and supported. Jill's House focuses on parents. When they are less stressed and well rested the child with ASD benefits, as do typical siblings, marriages, and the entire family unit. It is a critical part of the whole solution."

[Back to top.](#)