

What Should We Know About our Younger or Future Children?

As discussed below, genetic risk factors contribute to autism. If you are expecting another child or have plans to expand your family in the future, you may be concerned about the development of any younger siblings of your child with autism. Studies show that if you have a child diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, the risk of the next child also being diagnosed with an ASD is between 10 and 20%. The risk for ASD is higher for boys than girls and for baby siblings who have more than one older sibling with ASD. However, statistics are changing and there are several ongoing research studies that are studying the recurrence rate or likelihood that autism will be diagnosed in a second or third child. For the most recent findings and updated research on the rate of recurrence and susceptibility of autism in siblings, please visit earlistudy.org. The **EARLI** study is a nationwide effort to investigate the genetic and environmental contributions to autism in a high risk group, that is, younger siblings of children who have received a diagnosis.

More recent evidence has suggests that distinct early signs of autism may be seen in some children as young as 8 to 10 months of age. For example, infants who later develop autism may be more passive, more difficult to soothe or may fail to orient when their name is called. Some of these early signs may be noticed by parents, others may only be observed with the help of a trained clinician. These signs become more pronounced by 18 to 24 months.

Through a joint venture between Autism Speaks and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, research on the early signs and symptoms of autism has been accelerated. Called the **High Risk Baby Siblings Research Consortium (BSRC)**, the goal is to improve the lives of individuals affected with ASD by making discoveries that will help researchers develop new ways to treat or even prevent some debilitating symptoms by intervening at an early age. The pace of this research has grown



exponentially over the past decade, supported by the formation of the consortium, which has enabled researchers from around the world to meet and share their ideas, methods and data. Consortium members carry out their own studies focusing primarily on younger siblings of children with ASD or other high risk infants. Each member is supported by public, private or foundation funding. The group collaborates on studies and publications, pooling collective data and knowledge to enhance the ability to contribute to this important area of research and provide help to families.

In 2007, a group of researchers within the BSRC, together with psychologists from around the U.S., formed the **Autism Speaks Toddler Treatment Network (TTN)**. The goal of the network is to determine whether intervention between the ages of 18 to 24 months affects developmental outcomes at an age when autism can be more reliably diagnosed. Today, the network involves more than 60 investigators from around the world studying the effectiveness of early intervention and the utility of parent-mediated approaches. They have begun to shift their focus from research in the clinic to implementation in “real life” community settings, so more people can benefit from them.