

What can I do if my child has Autism?

by Jeffrey Karasik, MD



The diagnosis of autism is becoming increasingly more common and is now estimated to affect 1 in 88 children, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). When a parent finds out that their child is affected it is easy to become overwhelmed. But after some time is taken to absorb the news, a parent is his or her child's best advocate in seeking the latest treatment. Here are a few basic facts:

- Autism is a disability that affects three major developmental areas: **social interaction, behavior, and communication.**
- Autism is a spectrum, meaning it affects each individual in a different way and can range from very mild to very severe.
- Early intervention and intensive therapy using a team approach will offer the your child the best chance at progress.

How do I begin to help my child? There are a few basic steps that parents should take to embark on the road to treatment:

Make sure the you have the right diagnosis! Children with autism might be diagnosed by a pediatrician, through the school system, or often through the suspicion of parents and family members. It is important to speak with your doctor about consulting with a Child Neurologist or Developmental Pediatrician to confirm the diagnosis, especially since autism and other developmental conditions can look similar.

If your child is under age 3, contact the *Rockland County Health Department Early Intervention Program*. This program provides services to children between birth and age 3, either in-home or in a preschool setting. If your child is over age 3, contact the *Committee on Preschool Special Education* of your local school district.

Learn about the different modes of treatment. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is one of the most common methods used, but there are other methods that have also shown promise. The health professionals at *Early Intervention* can help guide you

Become familiar with your child's rights. You have to learn a whole new language including terms such as *IEP* (Individualized Education Plan), *LRE* (least restrictive environment), *EI* (Early Intervention), *IDEA* (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and *FAPE* (Free Appropriate Public Education). The more educated you become, the better you can advocate for your child.

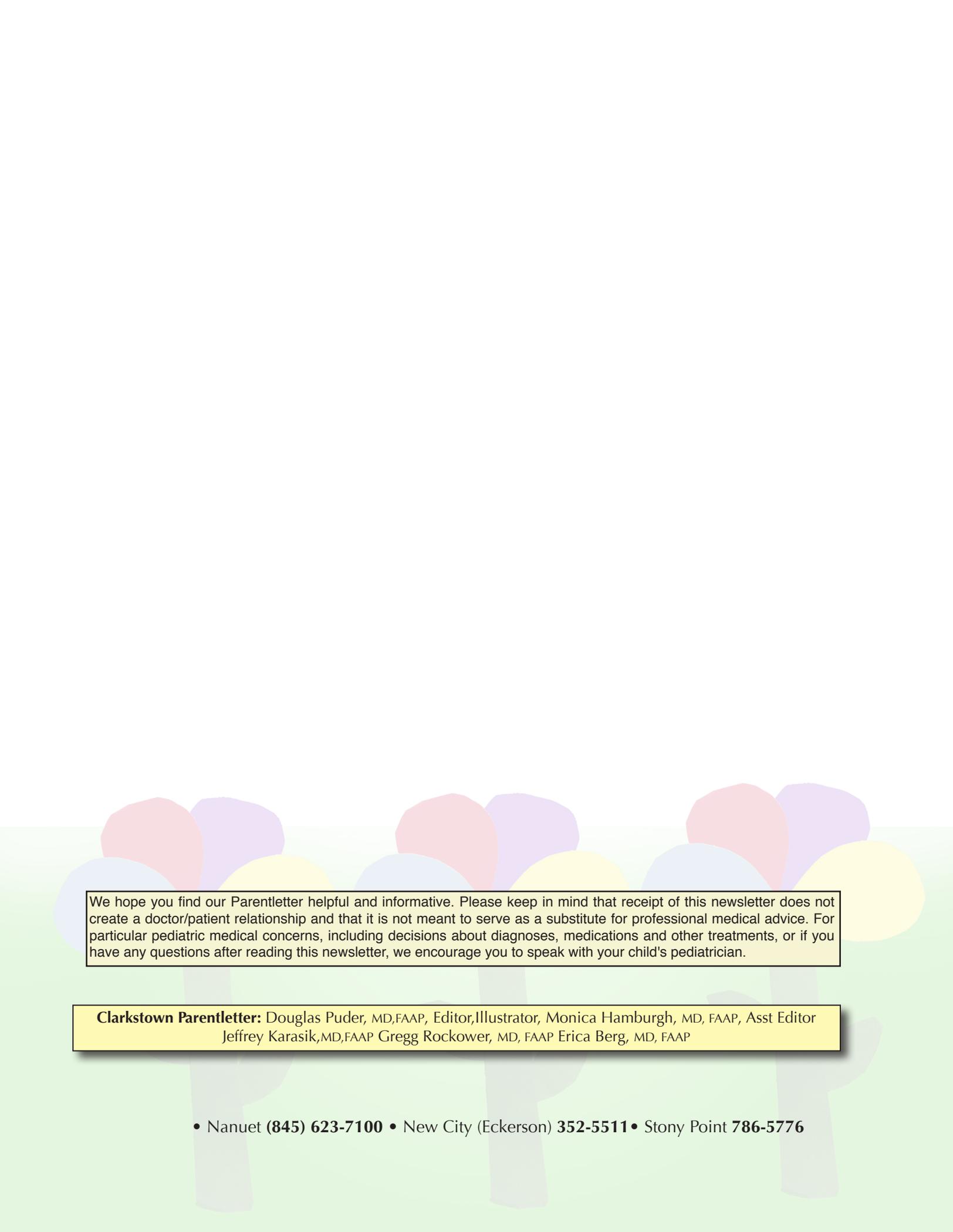
Beware of therapies that have been disproven. Over the years autism has been blamed on vaccines*, dietary factors, vitamin deficiencies, gastrointestinal issues, and many other unrelated things. These have not been supported by research and have sometimes been used to prey upon parents desperate for a cure. Remember, there is no total cure for autism, but treatment can optimize a child to achieve his maximum social and communicative function.

All of our patients are screened carefully for Autism at age 18 months and again at age 2 years.

This MCHAT form can also be downloaded on our website (Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers)



*(*Our full article on how the fraudulent vaccine-autism link was disproven is on our website in the download section.)*



We hope you find our Parentletter helpful and informative. Please keep in mind that receipt of this newsletter does not create a doctor/patient relationship and that it is not meant to serve as a substitute for professional medical advice. For particular pediatric medical concerns, including decisions about diagnoses, medications and other treatments, or if you have any questions after reading this newsletter, we encourage you to speak with your child's pediatrician.

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