Learning that your child has an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or other type of developmental delay, can be overwhelming. There are probably many questions running through your mind. Here are answers to a few of them.
“There is much that remains poorly understood, from cause to cure. However, there is one widely-accepted fact: early and intensive intervention can have a profound impact on the quality of life for children at risk of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families.”

—www.firstsigns.org
What are Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs)?

● Autism Spectrum Disorders (referred to below as “autism”) are neurological disorders that affect a person’s social interactions, communication, and interests and activities. The term encompasses five disorders: Autistic Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), Asperger’s Syndrome, Rett Disorder, and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder.

● These disorders are considered to be a spectrum because they are defined by a range of behaviors. Therefore, they manifest themselves in different ways, with varying levels of severity. No two children with autism are exactly the same.

Can autism be cured or treated? How?

● At this time, there is no cure for autism. However, autism can be treated. And the right treatment can change your child’s life. The most recommended, scientifically-proven treatment for children with autism is an intensive behavioral therapy called Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA).

● ABA is an intensive, individualized teaching approach that can help your child develop the skills that he or she is not developing naturally, such as communication, social interaction, and play skills. These skills are the foundation for learning later in life.

● ABA as a treatment for children with autism has been endorsed by organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, National Academies of Science, Autism Speaks, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NIH), and the Surgeon General.

What should I do now?

● Act quickly. Experts agree that the best thing you can do for your child with autism is to start treatment as soon as possible. Early childhood, a time of tremendous brain development, provides a unique window of opportunity to minimize the impact of this disorder on your child and potentially change the course of your child’s life. In fact, a significant portion of young children who receive ABA achieve large gains and require fewer special services as they get older.

● Connect with resources. Autism Speaks has developed a “First 100 Days Kit” to help parents make the best use of the time immediately after receiving a diagnosis. It is a essential resource and available for free on their website, www.autismspeaks.org. The Autism Society of America also has excellent information for families on their website, www.autism-society.org, and can direct you to local chapters for additional resources.
What is ABA therapy?

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a systematic approach to helping your child develop and learn. Social engagement is the foundation for learning: children learn constantly by interacting with others, by imitating adults and peers, by interpreting social cues, and more. Since autism impairs a child’s ability to engage socially, it disrupts his or her capacity to learn through everyday interactions and gain the skills that typically develop in children. ABA, in response, uses a structured approach to teach a child with autism those delayed or deficient skills. It focuses on building skills that are the foundation for future learning such as imitation, verbal and non-verbal communication, social skills, imaginative play skills, academic-readiness skills, and self-care. ABA can be provided in conjunction with other therapies, like speech and OT, and in a variety of settings such as home or school.

ABA is based on the principles of learning theory and has the following key elements for young children with autism:

- **Individualized, socially significant goals** Therapeutic sessions are tailored to the specific needs of the child, and focus on helping the child develop skills that will meaningfully enhance the ability to function in his or her family and community.

- **Individualized attention** Each child receives one-on-one teaching from a therapist at all times.

- **Individualized motivation** Therapists uncover what motivates each child (tickles, playing with a truck, high-fives, etc.) and uses them to reward appropriate behaviors, which leads to skill development. According to learning theory, rewards reinforce desired behaviors, increasing the likelihood the child will repeat them.

- **Learnable tasks** Skills are broken down into smaller parts to make them easier for a child to learn.

- **Multiple learning opportunities** Therapists are constantly creating opportunities for the child to learn. With multiple learning opportunities, the child is able to repeatedly practice targeted skills.

- **Generalization** ABA works to ensure a child has truly mastered a new skill so that it can be applied not just in one particular setting or with one particular person, but in any situation, especially in the settings where they naturally occur. For example, when a child learns to brush his or her teeth, he or she must be able to do it not just during therapy with the red toothbrush, but at home with any toothbrush.

- **Continuous assessment** Therapists continuously collect data to monitor a child’s progress and then make data-based decisions about the course of treatment, such as when a skill is mastered, or when a different approach may be needed to teach it.

- **Intensity** Organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics suggest that young children with autism receive 20 – 40 hours of intensive ABA per week. Neuro-typical children are learning from their environment all day long. Since children with autism need a more structured approach to learning, it is important to maximize their time in therapy (i.e., their “learning time”) each day.
Funding for ABA therapy

Applied Behavior Analysis, an intensive behavioral intervention, is the gold-standard treatment for children with an autism spectrum disorder. Although it is the recognized standard of care for children with an autism spectrum disorder, it can be very expensive. We provide suggestions below for ways families can obtain and pay for services.

**Contact your local public agencies**

By federal law, public agencies are required to provide services for children with developmental delays such as ASD. Check with your local agencies to see if they provide ABA.

- 0 – 36 months: Contact your local Early Intervention team.
- 3 years and older: Contact your local school system.

**Determine if you have insurance coverage for ABA therapy**

Many health insurance plans now cover the treatment of autism, including ABA therapy. Even if your state has not implemented an “Autism Insurance Law”, you may have coverage through your private insurance or Medicaid. Visit www.littleleaves.org for guidance on how to determine if you do. If so, your insurance company may refer you to a network of providers, or you may be able to choose one on your own. To find one, ask your child’s professionals, other families, or local autism community resources for names of providers in your area. You may also check the Behavior Analyst Certification Board website (www.bacb.org) to find certified providers near you.

**Self-pay**

We know that intensive ABA services are expensive. But we also know that it is an investment in your child’s future. If you have the means to pay for these services and no other source of funding for them, please consider paying for ABA therapy directly. Studies have shown that providing therapy to your child at a young age can significantly decrease the lifetime costs of caring for him or her while increasing your child’s quality of life.

“The cost of lifelong care can be reduced by two-thirds with early diagnosis and intervention.”

— *Autism Society of America*

Please visit www.littleleaves.org for our complete funding guide to help you identify ways to pay for ABA therapy services.
What is Little Leaves?

Little Leaves’ mission is to provide individualized, results-based behavioral therapy and services by creating collaborative partnerships with children, families and professionals. Little Leaves provides center-, home-, and school-based ABA therapy supervised by Master’s and doctoral level Board Certified Behavior Analysts primarily for children two to ten years old. Our model is built on creating a warm, safe, and positive environment in which to nurture your child’s development. Your child will spend much of his or her time doing what most children do at this age – learning while playing and participating in other structured activities. Visit our website or contact us to learn more about how we can help you.

Early intervention is the key to success — contact Little Leaves today.

Call 202-420-8359
Email info@littleleaves.org
Visit www.littleleaves.org