

HARC's Guide on Autism Acceptance Month

WHAT IS AUTISM?¹

Autism is a complex, lifelong developmental disability that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person's social skills, communication, relationships, and self-regulation. Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum condition" that affects people differently and to varying degrees.



ABOUT AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH²

In 1970, the Autism Society of America launched a nationwide effort to promote autism awareness and assure that all affected by autism are able to achieve the highest quality of life possible. Every April, the efforts to spread awareness, promote acceptance, and ignite change continue. Autism Acceptance Month aims to promote a better awareness of the signs, symptoms, and realities of autism. The campaign to #CelebrateDifferences focuses on providing information and resources for communities to be more aware of autism, promote acceptance, and be more inclusive in everyday life.



In this infographic, we will provide you with local data about autism and how COVID-19 has affected the autism community in the Coachella Valley/Inland Empire.

COACHELLA VALLEY DATA³

In the Coachella Valley 3% (or approximately 2,168 children) age three and older have been diagnosed with autism.



AUTISM DIAGNOSIS⁴

Autism can be detected as early as about one year of age; however, some people are not diagnosed until well into adulthood. There are no medical tests available to diagnose autism at the moment. Therefore, trained physicians and psychologists use autism-specific behavioral evaluations to diagnose autism in people.

DID YOU KNOW?⁵

People with autism may have strengths and abilities related to their diagnosis. Some of these abilities include: learning to read at a very early age, memorizing and learning information quickly, thinking and learning in a visual way, being precise and detail orientated, being great with schedules and routines, exceptional honesty and reliability, and a strong adherence to rules.

How has COVID-19 Affected the Autism Community?

To determine the most pressing needs during the pandemic, the Autism Society Inland Empire surveyed individuals and family members in the Inland Empire Developmental Disability community (Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, Down Syndrome, Intellectual Disabilities and other disorders). The survey was conducted between March and September of 2020, and the results are presented here.

EDUCATION⁶

- The number one stressor for families with a child that has autism or developmental disabilities, was the need for educating their child.
- About **1 of 3** parents reported they would not to participate in in-person school.
- Parents of students in special education scored the distance learning as **4.2** on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being extremely poor and 10 being excellent).



SOCIAL ISOLATION

- In February 2021, almost half the families reported that their loved one needed more social interaction.⁶ Individuals who are socially isolated and as such, are likely to develop loneliness that may translate to comorbid mental health problems such as depression.⁷

EMPLOYMENT⁶

- In May 2020, 33% of families indicated they would not agree to an in-person day service or job program.
- Many individuals have co-existing conditions that make them more susceptible to complications from COVID. For example , **1 in 4** individuals struggle to keep their masks on, and **1 in 3** can't tolerate social distancing.
- Many adults also rely on public transportation. The reduced bus schedules and limit on the number of passengers have become obstacles for the community.



Understanding the needs of struggles of our local families with Autism is a very important step to creating an inclusive and thriving Coachella Valley.

To learn more about autism or to see Inland empire resources for people with autism, please visit www.ieautism.org.

Sources

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6. The Impact of COVID on the Inland Empire Autism and Developmental Disability Community (2020). Autism Society Inland Empire. Available online at: <https://ieautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/6-Month-COVID-ASIE-Surveys-Final.pdf>
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