

Welcome to Holland

I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability, to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it, to imagine how it would feel. It's like this...

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip, to Italy. You buy a bunch of guide books and make your wonderful plans. The Coliseum. The Michelangelo David. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

"Holland?!!!" you say, "What do you mean Holland?? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy."

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay.

The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place, full of pestilence, famine and disease. It's just a different place.

So you must go out and buy new guide books. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would have never met.

It's just a different place. It's slower paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around... and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills... Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy... and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say, "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever go away... because the loss of that dream is a very significant loss.

But... if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things... about Holland.

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You May Feel All Alone...

"After our child was diagnosed with autism, I felt frightened and alone. I didn't think there was anyone who had walked this path before me... I am thankful for the friends I have made through the South Carolina Autism Society."

The SCAS sponsors regional support groups. We will put you in touch with someone in your community who has walked the path ahead of you.

Chapter of Autism Society of America

A United Way Participant



THE JOURNEY BEGINS



Discovering that your child has autism can be an overwhelming experience. For some the diagnosis may come as a complete surprise, while others may have suspected autism and attempted for months or years to obtain an accurate diagnosis. In either case, you are probably troubled with many questions.



While you are working through these difficult feelings, we want you to know that you are not alone. Through our network of families across South Carolina, we can put you in touch with other parents of children with autism... parents who understand how you are feeling now, because they have experienced it themselves. They can help you learn more about how to cope, find local resources to assist you, share information on treatment, and lend a friendly ear.



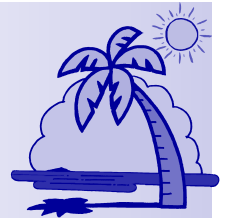
Children with autism will grow and learn, although it may be at a different developmental rate than others. Adults with autism may hold jobs and enjoy some level of independence. People with autism can establish meaningful relationships with others. You and your child are not alone. If you are feeling discouraged, try not to lose hope.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Approximately 500,000 individuals in the United States, 9,000 in South Carolina, are believed to have autism. This is a conservative estimate based on an occurrence rate of 20 of every 10,000 individuals. It is not a rare disorder, as you may have been told. For example, autism is the third most prevalent developmental disability, more common than Down Syndrome, Muscular Dystrophy or Multiple Sclerosis. Many thousands of parents have learned to deal with autism; you can do this too.

*Autism occurs in families throughout the world, regardless of income, race, religion or social factors. Even such noted celebrities as Pro Football stars Doug Flutie and Dan Marino, opera star Beverly Sills, and M*A*S*H star William Christopher all have a child with autism.*

THERE IS HOPE



WITH A SUPPORT GROUP NEAR BY...

The South Carolina Autism Society sponsors regional support groups throughout South Carolina for families of people with autism.

Please contact the South Carolina Autism Society to find the support group closest to you.

"After a long search for why our child behaved the way he did and was unable to talk, Steven was diagnosed with autism. I did not know any one in my family or in my community who had a child with autism. My "friends" turned away. I guess they couldn't handle it. I needed someone to listen to my fears, let me cry, and share my hopes. I needed someone to understand! The friends I made through the South Carolina Autism Society have endured and survived the challenges of autism. They are on a path I would not have taken if not for autism. I am glad they are there. The way is easier because of them."

**Angela Fender, Greenville
Honorary SCAS Board Member**
