



Kennedy Krieger Institute

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www.kennedykrieger.org

Our Mission

We at the Kennedy Krieger Institute dedicate ourselves to helping children and adolescents with disorders of the brain, spinal cord, and musculoskeletal system achieve their potential and participate as fully as possible in family, school, and community life.

Center for Autism and Related Disorders



Helping children
with autism through
patient care, research,
and education.

We are all born with great potential.
Shouldn't we all have the chance to achieve it?



Center for Autism and Related Disorders
at Kennedy Krieger Institute



Who We Are

The Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD) at Kennedy Krieger Institute is a multifaceted, interdisciplinary program serving children, families, and professionals in the autism spectrum disorders (ASD) community. CARD combines research, clinical service, a therapeutic day program, and training programs to unlock the potential of children with ASD enrich their life experiences, empower parents, and promote the well-being of families through evidence-based practices. One of our major endeavors is developing effective new models of care for families and providers, whether locally, nationally, or internationally.

Our Team

Our interdisciplinary services are offered by a wide range of patient care and research professionals, including:

- Behavior analysts
- Child and adolescent psychiatrists
- Clinical psychologists
- Developmental cognitive neuroscientists
- Developmental neurobiologists
- Developmental psychologists
- Epidemiologists
- Genetic counselors
- Geneticists
- Movement scientists
- Neurodevelopmental pediatricians
- Neuropsychologists
- Neuroscientists
- Occupational therapists
- Pediatric neurologists
- Special educators
- Social workers
- Speech-language pathologists
- Statisticians

Clinical Services

An accurate diagnosis is crucial to helping children with ASD and their families identify appropriate therapies. As leaders in diagnosing ASD, we provide our patients and their families with the most up-to-date diagnostic information and help them understand their child's strengths and needs. For each child, our team develops individual treatment programs that can include behavioral intervention; verbal and augmentative communication treatment; social skills and cognition intervention; occupational therapy; medical management; and family support services. Driven by ongoing research, our clinical programs offer children the most innovative therapies available.

Achievements Therapeutic Day Program

This program offers four different intervention options enabling us to provide individualized treatment in small-group settings to children under age 6. Our comprehensive approach focuses on the most challenging areas for these children: communication, social, emotional, and self-regulatory development. Using best-practice approaches—including Applied Behavior Analysis and others anchored in the developmental sciences—we make the classroom not only a place of learning, but also a place to form friendships. We strongly encourage parent involvement through observation, training, and team meetings. By encouraging and teaching children to apply their skills outside of clinical settings, we help children and their families to prepare for the transition into school-age years.

"My girls made a lot of progress. Our social worker was so helpful and instrumental in guiding me on what steps to take and what I could do to help them because I didn't know much about autism back then. They also had an awesome teacher. Before the Achievements program, my girls were never verbal at all. But just a couple of weeks after they started, one of my daughters actually started singing songs she'd learned there. It brought tears to my eyes because she had never even talked, and now she was singing."

—parent of twin girls with autism

Research Program

Research & Education for Autism in Children (REACH)

An internationally recognized research program, REACH drives our clinical practice and training programs. Our team approach enables us to comprehensively and innovatively research the causes and treatments of ASD.

We are dedicated to translating research into treatments and educational practices. Funded by federal sources, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and private sources, much of our research is done in collaboration with other national and international autism experts. Some of our ASD research includes:

- Early detection of ASD and other developmental disorders or delays
- Early diagnostic criteria
- Preventive intervention for infants and toddlers at risk
- Understanding and enhancing how children with ASD learn
- Effective methods for training caregivers and family members of children with ASD
- Intervention for children with ASD
- Neuro-immune abnormalities in ASD
- Neurological basis of motor and attention impairments and the effects on communication
- Early abnormality in neurotransmitters and the effects on development
- Prevalence of ASD
- Environment-gene interactions
- Cholesterol abnormalities



Cooper's Story

For the Berman family, travel is more than a luxury—it's a way of life. Having lived and worked all over the world, Shannon and Kurt Berman knew firsthand the benefits of raising children among many different cultures. But when their son Cooper was diagnosed with autism, they worried that their dreams of raising him internationally would go unrealized.

"We love adventure," says Shannon, "and we wanted to give Cooper a life full of it."

But by the time Cooper turned one year old, odd behaviors that had previously worried his parents had only grown worse. He seemed disconnected, wouldn't make eye contact, and demonstrated obsessive behaviors, such as opening and closing doors over and over and over again for a full week. At the time, the family was living on a small island in the Maldives in the middle of the Indian Ocean, amid a culture that doesn't even recognize developmental disabilities.

Uncertain what to do, Shannon emailed some friends back in the United States. Having grown up in Maryland, she'd heard of Kennedy Krieger. So, when her friends recommended the Center for Autism and Related Disorders, she took their advice. "CARD was able to fit us in just a few short weeks later," Shannon says.

In May 2009, the Berman family arrived at Kennedy Krieger where Cooper, at 14 months old, was diagnosed. They were so impressed with the care and evaluation they were receiving, as well as the potential for participating in research, that they decided Shannon should move back to the U.S. with Cooper full time. That way, he could continue his care at CARD while Kurt stayed behind to continue working. As difficult as it was, Shannon says, it was the right decision.



Fast-forward almost two years, and that decision has made all the difference. During his time at CARD, Shannon says, Cooper has made amazing improvement. He's talking and playing, socializing and laughing: "He's such a happy little boy," she says.

Much of that she credits to CARD. "The teachers were fantastic," she says. "You could tell they all really love kids and love what they do."

And as for adventure? In February 2011, the family packed up to move to Shanghai, China, where they plan to eventually enroll Cooper in an international school and learn Mandarin together—all while continuing their son's speech therapy and autism care. "We're terrified to leave the Kennedy Krieger nest," Shannon says, "especially to go so far away. But they've provided us with the tools to handle whatever might come up, and I know they're only a phone call or an email away."

Outreach And Training

Through outreach and training, we address areas—such as social-communication difficulties—that affect the lives of children with ASD and their families. Through various training methods, we target a wide range of community needs, from child-specific consultations to systemwide change. Our training program extends from local to international sites, benefitting children and families from many ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Opportunities include the following:

- **Annual Autism Conference:** This conference is as applicable to scientists and practitioners as it is to patients and families. The event brings together ASD experts to share ideas and provide updates on the latest innovations.
- **Professional training programs:** Specialized training for preprofessionals and professionals in pediatric medicine, psychiatry, psychology, and speech-language pathology.
- **Immersion training:** Our evidence-based classroom model allows for intense immersion training on the Early Achievements model, which incorporates both didactic and in vivo experiences with feedback.
- **Clinical practice workshops:** Trainings on assessment instruments, therapeutic strategies, and intervention models that are designed for a wide range of practitioners from a variety of disciplines.
- **Sharing Treatment and Resources (STAR) parent training:** Our own experts and outside speakers discuss a variety of topics, including strategies for playing with your child and understanding behavioral challenges, at no cost to participants.



- **School consultation:** Guidance to national and international programs serving children with ASD as well as assistance for school districts across Maryland in collaboration with the Maryland State Department of Education.

For more information about our unique training opportunities, please visit www.card.kennedykrieger.org.

Parent Wellness Activities

We strive to provide a soothing environment for families, along with opportunities that focus on wellness by offering:

- A mind-spirit room
- Informational sessions
- The Parent Resource Center
- Family networking opportunities
- Group wellness gatherings



Our outreach and training efforts incorporate:

- In-service training on ASD and intervention
- Specific intervention strategy training
- Supervision strategies for the classroom
- Empowering and working with family/parent training programs
- Early Achievements (early intervention) model and consultation
- Individualized outreach and training programs to match the specific needs of the participants
- Student-specific consultations
- Consultations for classroom design and intervention programming

