

SPARK

# Awareness to Action:

## Combating Autism Disparities in Black Communities.

Presented by Natasha Nelson, CPDE



# Introduction to Autism Awareness



She's only a little autistic.  
She's high functioning

That is why I would like to explain what is meant by 'spectrum' when we talk about the 'autistic spectrum'.

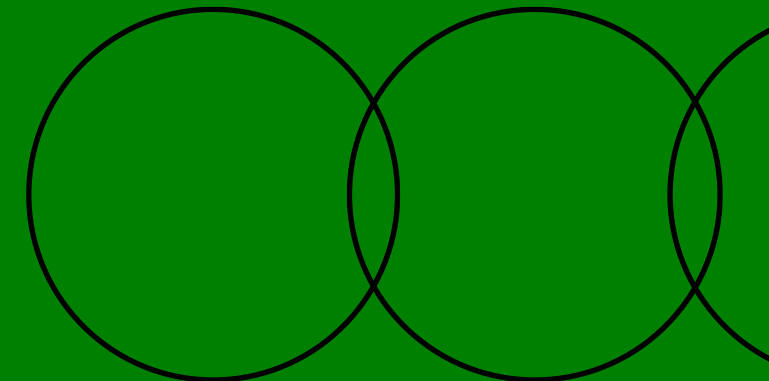
Sometimes when people think of this word, they think of the autism spectrum as being like this:

Not autistic  Very autistic

A very linear looking 'spectrum', which gives the impression that people range from being 'a little autistic' to 'very autistic'.

Hm. How can you be 'a little autistic'?

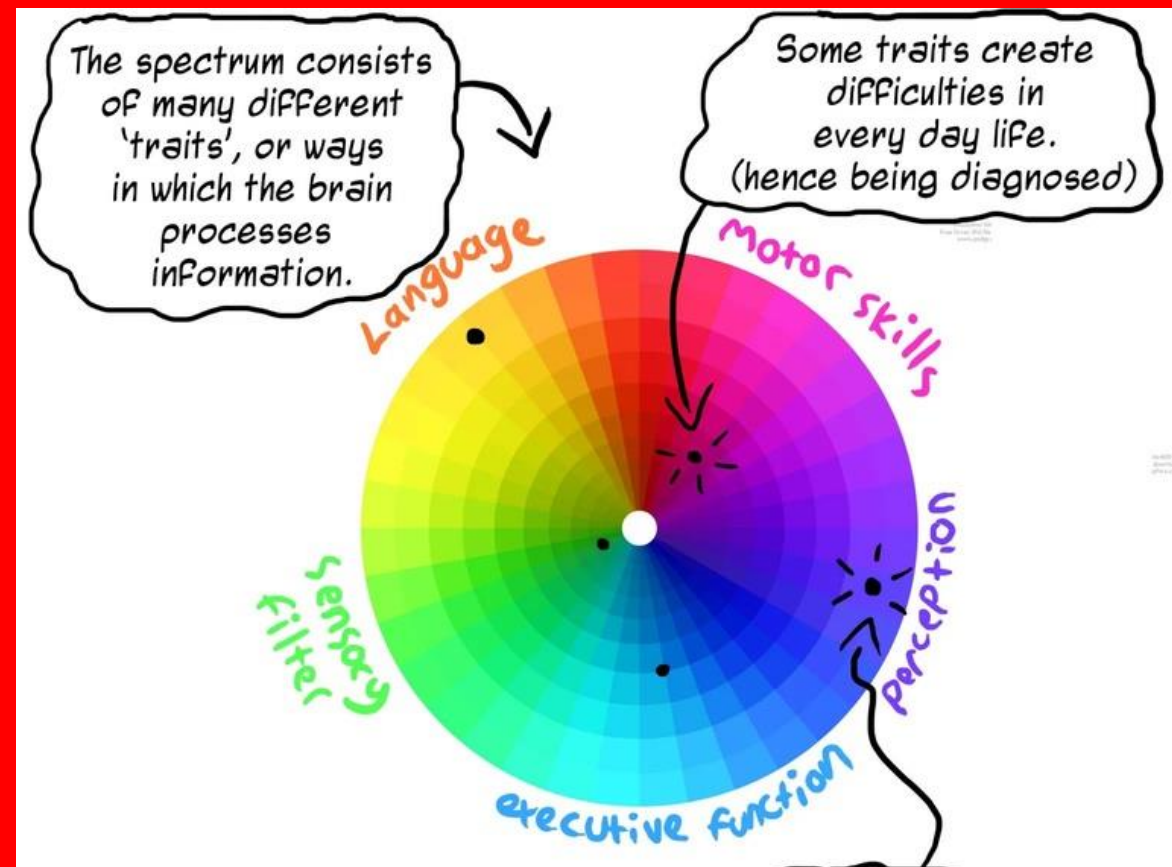
It's that vague language that I always find confusing.



# Understanding Autism Today

## Definitions and Signs

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental condition characterized by challenges in social interaction, communication, and **behavioral patterns**. Early diagnosis is crucial for effective support and intervention.



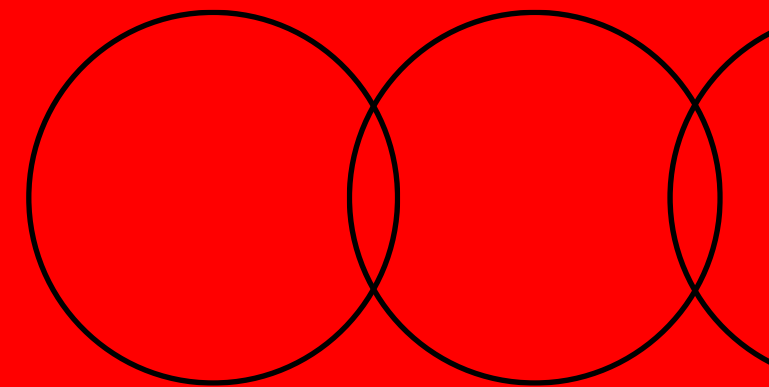
Motor Skills

Communication and Social Interaction

Perception

Executive Function

Sensory

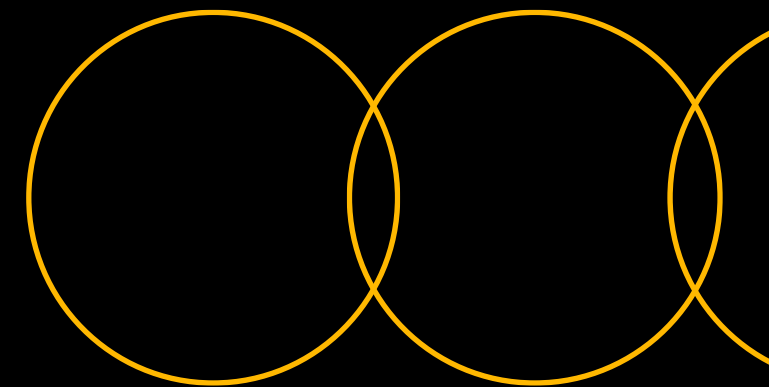


# The Mission of SPARK

**Bridging autism gaps together**

## Mission

SPARK's mission is to improve the lives of people with autism by identifying the causes of autism and informing more effective therapies, treatments, services, and supports. To understand the complexity of autism — what makes us the same and what makes us different — we need large numbers of people to participate. SPARK is open to all individuals living in the U.S. with a professional diagnosis of autism and their family members.



# Natasha Nelson's Advocacy



**Fall Into Supernova Parenting**

Supernova Momma integrates Positive Discipline, Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities Education, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and Toxic Stress, Child Development Education, Polyvagal Theory, Sensory Integration, and Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE), to make an accessible and relatable parenting 9 week virtual course for Black and /or Neurodivergent families.

**INSTRUCTOR**  
Natasha Nelson,  
Disability Advocate and  
Certified Positive  
Discipline Educator

**UCLA SPARK**

**PARENT TRAINING SESSION**

**Positive Discipline for Children with Disabilities**  
**Natasha Nelson**

Natasha is a mother of two autistic children and is autistic herself. She serves as the CEO of Supernova Parenting, which is dedicated to empowering caregivers of families facing neurodivergence, intellectual developmental disabilities, and/or mental health vulnerabilities.

**Educating Parents on IEPs**  
**Gloria Perez, JD**

Gloria is a disability rights attorney, special education expert, and former court-appointed counsel for parents navigating the child welfare system. She works with Hope4Families, LLP, a public interest law firm dedicated to representing marginalized students in the special education compliance process.

**FREE EVENT!**  
Refreshments & Lunch Provided!

**ECHO Autism Primary Care Early Diagnosis**

**What is ECHO Autism?**  
Giving Knowledge, not people

**ECHO Autism STAT Instrument Training:**  
February 26, 2026 8am-4pm  
February 27, 2026 8am-3:30pm

**ECHO Autism: Primary Care Begins March 3rd, 2026**  
1st & 2nd Tuesdays of the Month

**Who Should Participate?**  
Pediatricians, Family Physicians, Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioners who work in primary care settings

**Learn more about ECHO Autism Community at**  
echoautism.org

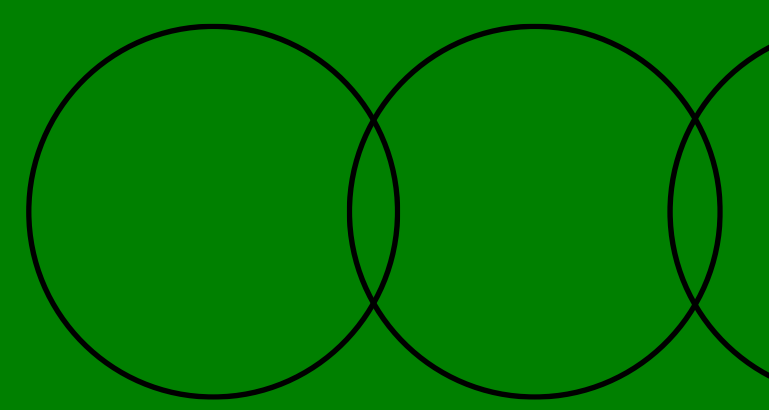
**Questions?**  
Contact the Coordinator  
**Jun Kim**  
jun.kim2@emory.edu  
**Alexa Gonzalez Laca**  
alexa.gonzalez.laca@emory.edu

**How it works**  
**All Teach, All Learn Model**

Participants will learn to evaluate, differentiate and diagnose children with unambiguous characteristics of autism between the ages of 14-48 months.

Participants will learn the STAT instrument to support diagnostic decision-making, and share best practices for addressing co-occurring conditions, connecting with community resources, and supporting families.

Participants will receive specific de-identified case vignettes and practice in a convenient, interactive, and case-based small-group format.



# The Stark Reality

**Autism is not just a childhood condition**

**Autism Can Be Interpreted Differently in Black People**

**Black people can be Autistic, too!**

Autism is a lifelong condition

High rates of mis-diagnoses

Challenge gender norms

Supports change over time

**#AutisticWhileBlack**

It's never too late to get help

You are not alone!

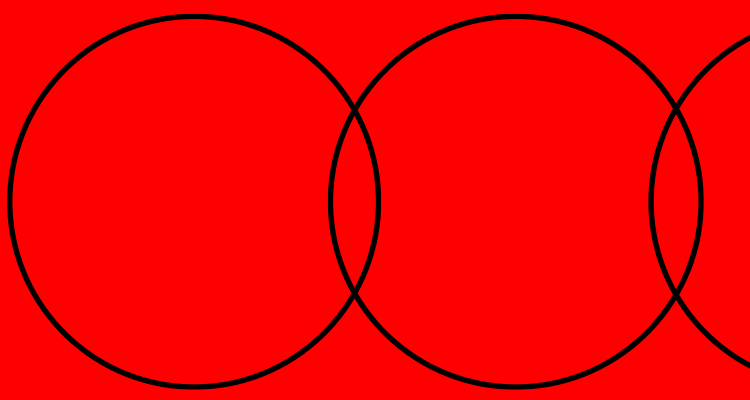

**Connect with other families for more support**

**Learn more about Education, Employment & Advocacy**

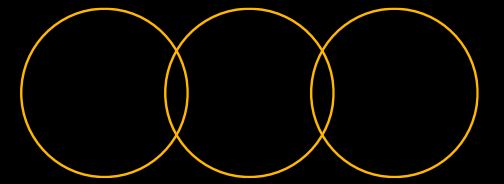
**Take action and learn more about Autism, remove the fear of difference, and embrace acceptance and understanding.**

Click the link or scan the QR code for more information

<https://linktr.ee/blackautismresources>



# Autism Disparities Unveiled



## Understanding Key Challenges

### Delayed Diagnosis

Many Black children experience **significant delays** in receiving autism diagnoses, often due to systemic issues and lack of access to culturally competent healthcare providers who can recognize early signs.

### Limited Access

Access to essential services for Black families is often obstructed by **geographical and financial barriers**, restricting opportunities for early intervention that can significantly improve outcomes for children with autism.

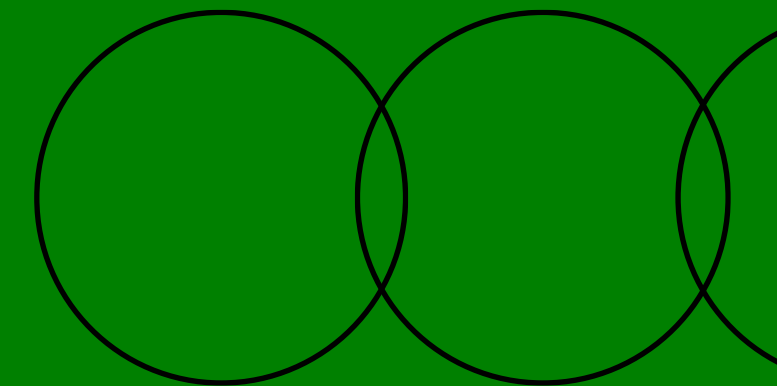
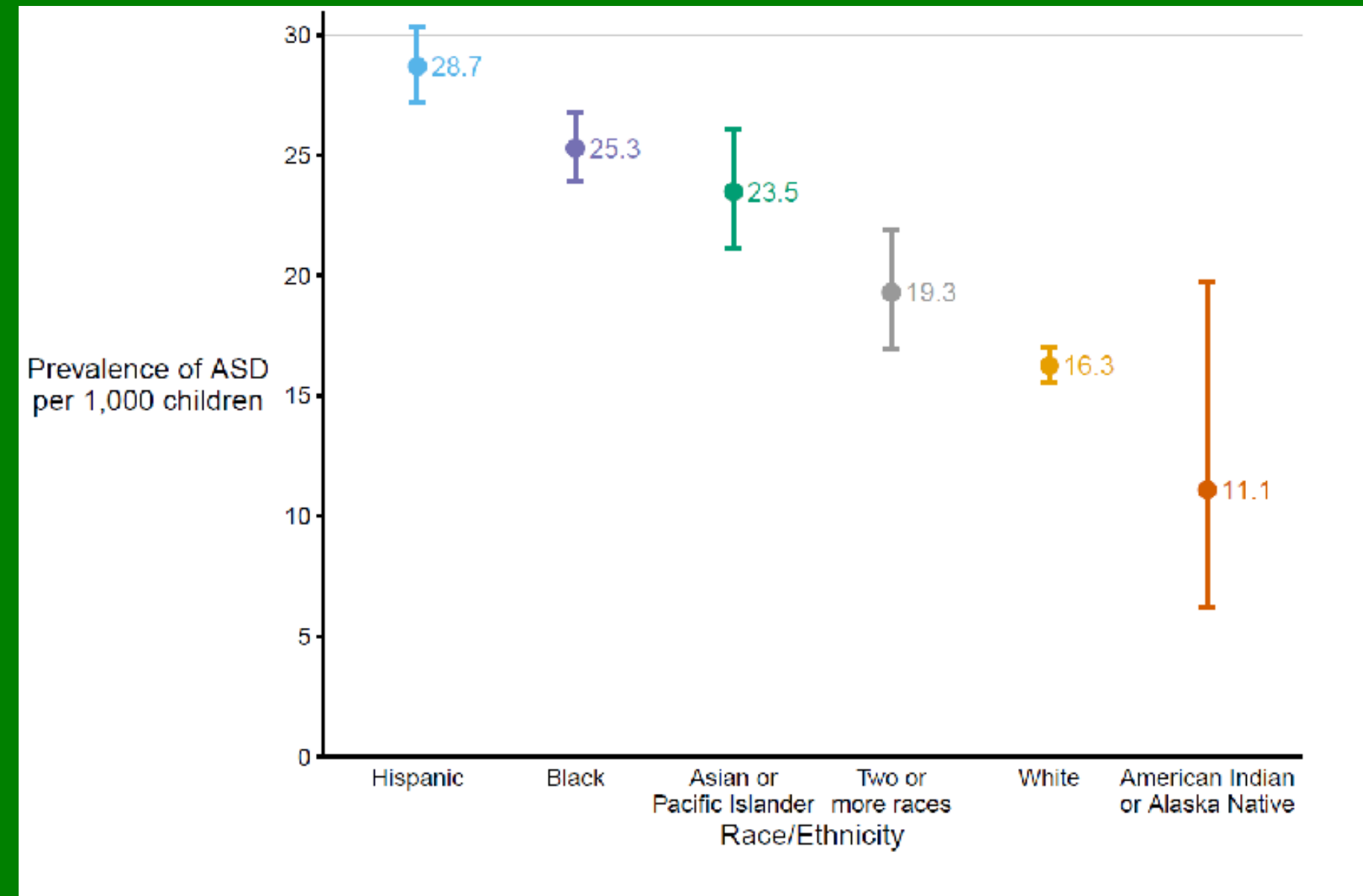
### Cultural Stigma

Cultural perceptions surrounding autism can lead to **misunderstandings** and stigma within Black communities, impacting families' willingness to seek help, which further exacerbates existing disparities in diagnosis and treatment.

# Digging Deeper

## The Number of Black Children Diagnosed with Autism is Growing

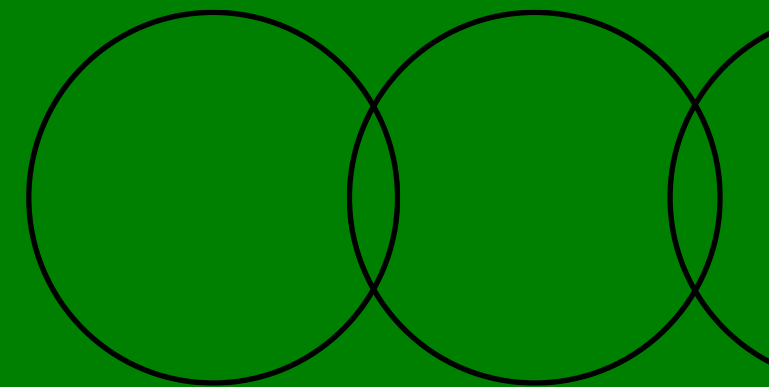
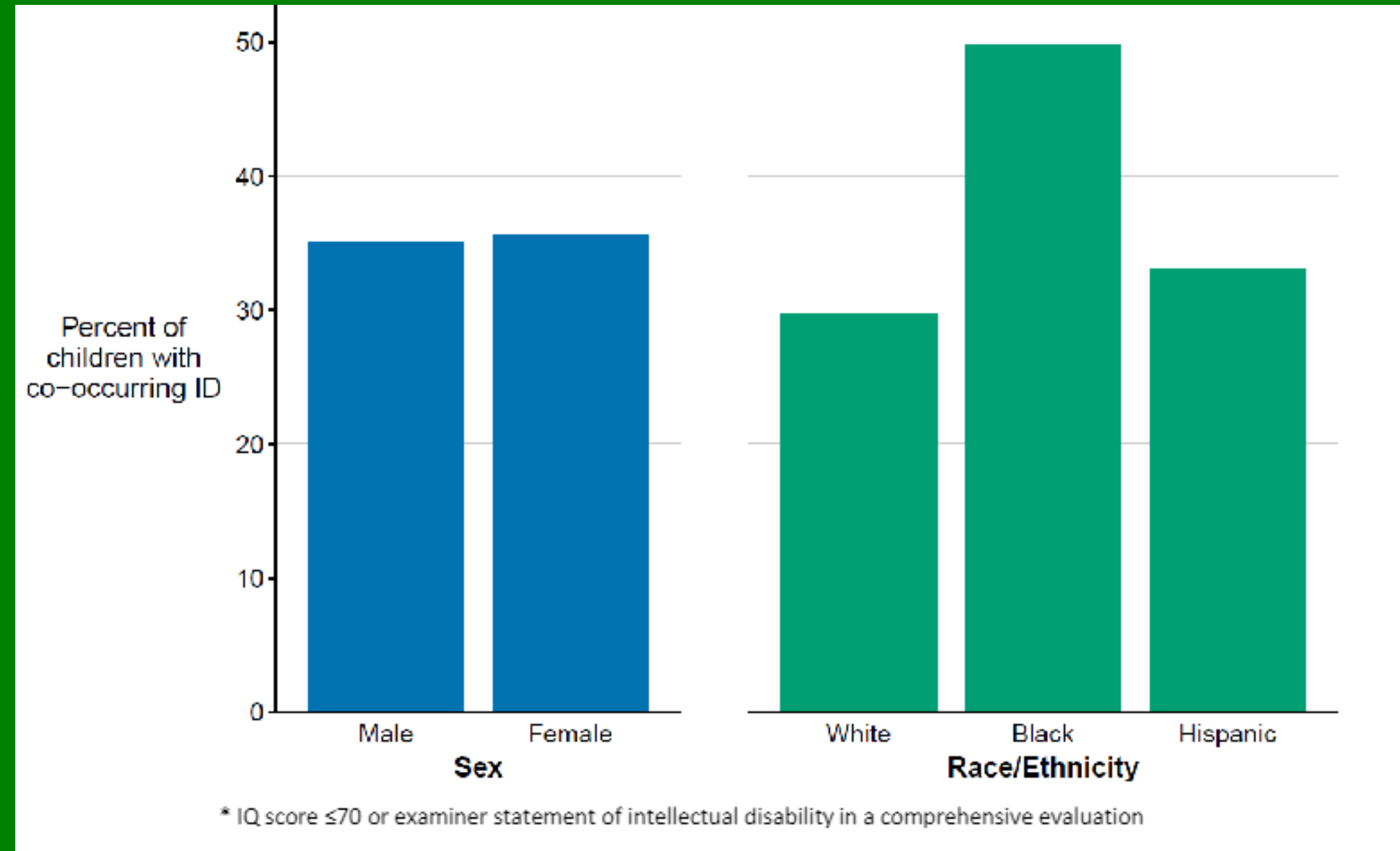
Prevalence of autism spectrum disorder per 1,000 children aged 4 years, by race/ethnicity Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 11 sites, United States, 2020



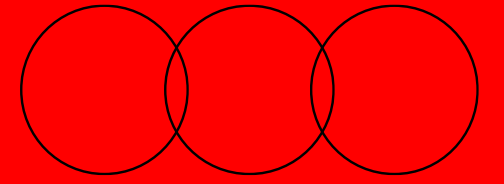
# Digging Deeper

The Number of Black Children with ASD and Co-occurring Intellectual Disability is Growing

Percent of children aged 8 years with autism spectrum disorder with co-occurring intellectual disability\*, by sex and race/ethnicity Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 11 sites, United States, 2018



# Factors Contributing to Disparities



## Understanding the Challenges

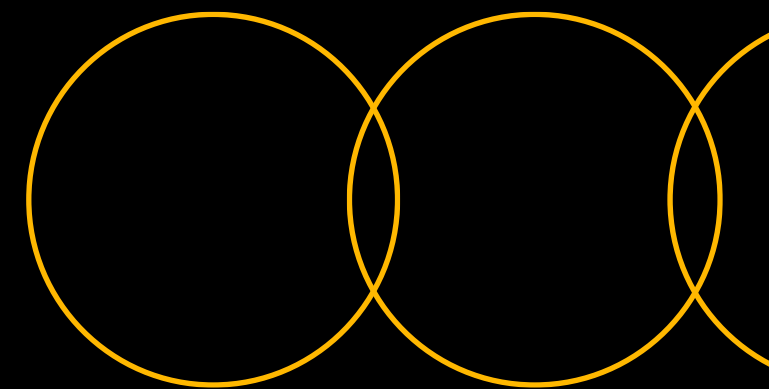
### Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers significantly impact access to autism services in Black communities. These obstacles include inequitable healthcare systems, discriminatory practices, and inadequate funding for autism programs. Addressing these barriers is crucial for ensuring equitable support for families and individuals affected by autism.

### Socioeconomic Factors

Socioeconomic factors play a critical role in the disparities faced by Black families regarding autism. Limited financial resources can hinder access to necessary diagnostic services and interventions. Additionally, socioeconomic stress can affect family dynamics, making it challenging to seek appropriate support for autistic children.

# Let's Be Real



# Making a Difference

## Advocate for Policies

Supporting inclusive policies helps ensure access to resources and services for autistic individuals in Black communities, promoting equality and understanding.

## Support Black Organizations

Investing in and collaborating with Black-led organizations strengthens community ties and creates tailored resources for families affected by autism disparities.

## Promote Early Screening

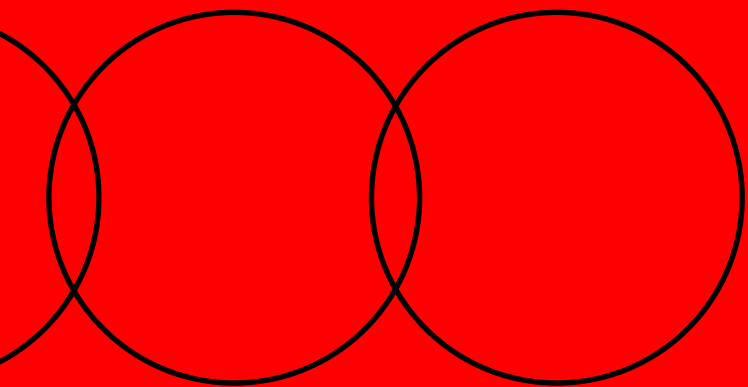
Encouraging early screening and intervention can significantly improve outcomes for Black youth with autism, leading to better long-term opportunities and support.

## Raise Community Awareness

Raising awareness in the community fosters understanding and acceptance of autism, breaking down cultural stigmas and encouraging support for affected families.

# What will you do?

**Join us in fostering change and awareness today!**



# Contact Information for Advocacy

Email

[hello@supernovaparenting.org](mailto:hello@supernovaparenting.org)

Instagram

[@Supernovamomma](https://www.instagram.com/Supernovamomma)

Website

<https://supernovaparenting.org>

