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FSU awarded Autism Grant

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A Florida State University College of Medicine researcher has been awarded two separate grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) totaling \$2.4 million to continue her work in detecting autism in children as young as 18 months.

Amy Wetherby is director of the Autism Institute in the College of Medicine. For a decade her FIRST WORDS® Project has screened children to identify early red flags of various autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Among those red flags are a child's reluctance to look at the face or eyes of others; a delay in the use of gestures, sounds and words; a tendency not to share excitement or interests; and a fixation on certain objects.

The younger the child, the more subtle the red flags but the greater the chances of working with the family to lessen the negative effects. People with autism can have many strengths, Wetherby said, citing Albert Einstein as a prime example. For some people, however, autism is a severe disability.

"The symptoms themselves can actually impair learning," Wetherby said. "Just like cancer, the earlier we can catch it, the far better the outcomes."



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