

In the News: **CURING AUTISM**

"I knew she was in there somewhere"

For unknown reasons, autism is on the rise: This year alone, one in 166 children will be diagnosed with the disorder, which already affects 1.5 million Americans. But six-year-old Ashley Ruben is proof that there is hope. A mother's love—and Mozart!—unlocked her world when nothing else could

"Ashley wasn't like other babies"



1 "I loved my baby so much, but Ashley wouldn't cuddle or smile," recalls Sharon. "It was like we weren't there. We didn't know why, but even our voices set her off."

2 "On her first birthday, she just stared into space. We'd tell people she was just having a bad day, but she never connected with anyone."



"They said Mozart cure her!"



4 "We heard music could help, so the experts played Mozart into headphones for two hours a day."

"Now Ashley is a loving—and normal—kid!"

6 "Our family album was filled with pictures of Ashley looking away from the camera. Now she posed for us! It was as if she were saying, 'Look at me! I'm back!'"



7 "Mozart had such an effect on Ashley that now she's learning the piano and guitar. And she has a statue of Mozart in her room."

8 "I turned our journey into a book to give other parents hope for their children."

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or unknown reasons, autism is on the rise: This year alone, one in 166 children will be Americans. But six-year-old Ashley Ruben is proof that there is hope. A mother's love—

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3 "Kids love Christmas—but at 21 months, Ashley didn't even notice it. Newly diagnosed with autism, she was lethargic and withdrawn. I wondered what the future would hold."

Easy ways to connect with your kids

● **Get on their level.** Be sure you can look into their eyes. Sit on a small chair, or even lie on the floor.

● **Do what they do.** When your child rolls around and laughs, join her! Pull out toys, play a video game together—and you'll bridge the adult-child gap.

● **Share something you love.** "Kids feel close when they see you genuinely enjoying yourself with them," says Shari Feldscher, author of *The KIDFUN Activity Book*.



"They said might cu



4 "We heard music could help, so therapists piped Mozart into headphones for two hours a day. And Ashley awakened!"

5 "By age four, she was no longer considered autistic! Watching her with her sisters, Kacey and Sydney, no one would have ever known that she was once isolated from us."



It was midnight, but Sharon Ruben sat scouring the Internet for information. The pediatrician said it was too soon to worry about her 18-month-old daughter. But Sharon couldn't stop! Ashley would arch her back when Sharon or her husband, Dave, held her. She could work their PC, but she didn't say "mama."

So Sharon typed in *speech delay*—and trembled. She kept seeing a word that terrified her: autism.

"She was locked inside"

Say I'm wrong, she prayed—but a specialist confirmed: "Ashley falls within the autism spectrum." Her case was relatively mild. But Sharon couldn't stop crying.

Ashley could remain locked in her own world—where she'd never know how much her family loved her. And Sharon couldn't bear that.

"We're going to get her better," she told Dave. She demanded

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Music your family should hear!

According to researchers, classical music can do wonders for everyone! What to look for:

1 **Harmony.** Listening to harmonic melodies appears to boost IQ scores!

2 **Violins.** High-frequency tones such as the sound of violins have been shown to stimulate the brain.

3 **Gentle sounds.** Studies show that plants placed beside speakers playing classical music thrived!



every therapy their insurance covered and searched the Internet again.

Soon she was brushing Ashley from head to toe to awaken her senses. She looked at me! She’s in there! Sharon’s heart pounded one day. But mostly, Ashley stared into space.

Then a therapist said music might help. French ear-nose-and-throat doctor Alfred Tomatis believed autistic children are less able to filter noise. So high frequency sounds like the sing-song of a mother’s voice tend to be blocked by low, dull tones that don’t

grab their attention—leaving them unresponsive. But retraining their ears to hear high notes could draw them out of their shells.

The treatment sounded unusual: Wearing headphones, Ashley would listen to high-frequency Mozart—

with the low tones filtered out—while bouncing in a harness, doing puzzles. “But we’ve got to try it!” Sharon told Dave.

Could they have been autistic?

Experts now believe that many famous people from history may have been autistic:



“After just one session, Ashley was smiling!”

Just days later, driving home after the second day of therapy, Ashley piped her first spontaneous sentence: “I want cookie.” Dave almost drove off the road! Then Ashley didn’t wriggle out of Sharon’s hug. And one day, Sharon felt Ashley’s little arms squeeze back!

Within three cycles of 31 sessions each, Ashley was bubbling, “Mommy, I love you!” And when she was four, experts saw no signs of autism!

Now Ashley is a happy first-grader, a little characterbox whose smile lights up a room.

“This is how I imagine her life,” says Sharon, who turned her journey from despair to hope into a book, *Awakening Ashley*. “I knew she was in there. It took Mozart to get her back.”

—Andrea Florczak