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**“I Am Autism” Video Summary**

The “I Am Autism” video is a short 3.5 minute video that was released on September 22, 2009 at the Autism Speaks' Second Annual United Nations World Focus on Autism in New York. The first half of the video is a series of real video clips of children with autism all alone. While the videos are being displayed, music is being played that sounds “dark” and a male voice speaks of autism as a “being”, saying things such as “I am autism, if I can help it, I am invisible to you before it is too late,” and “everyday you wake up you will cry wondering who will take care of your children when you die.” It claims “autism” is winning. It is “taking” our children, “making our marriages fail” and bankrupting families.

In the second half of the video, families surround the children with autism in all of the videos and you hear children giggling and “pleasant” music plays. Then you hear the voices of parents and family members of children with autism speak of not being afraid of autisms’ threats. They say that their “capacity to love” will beat autism and they will not give up. They will “knock it down with their bare hands.” Parents strongly remind “autism” that “when you came for my child, you came for me!”

**REACTION:**

I have seen a lot about this video posted online this week. It is very controversial and Autism Speaks has removed it from their website. Critics say the Autism Speaks video clip depicts people with autism in a very negative way and as less than human.

My immediate reaction to this video was that it is very offensive. I thought of my friends and family members who have children with autism and wondered how they would respond to this horribly negative portrayal of “their children” as burdens on them and society. I kept thinking, “what if I had never met someone with autism? What kind of first impression is this giving?” Indeed, I think the video gives a very negative impression. Even with the parents’ optimism and combative language toward autism in the second half of the video, I think the video instills fear. I started to wonder though, is it a legitimate fear?

After I watched the clip a few more times, my impression has softened a little only because I think the intention behind it was good. I think the intention is to motivate individuals to act by creating a fear of autism, NOT PEOPLE with autism. Its’ portrayal of the children while making negative points about autism, makes distinguishing the two virtually impossible. I think Autism Speaks represents **some** in the autism community that are desperate to get people to “listen” and hear their pleas for help in finding answers for preventing, diagnosing, and treating this disorder. Many families touched by autism feel that doctors and government officials ignore them and that enough research is not being done to treat the autism epidemic. Some of the points presented in the video clip are harsh, but are also heart-breaking realities. The obvious emotional impact of a diagnosis of “autism” in the family is often magnified by financial devastation. Currently, health insurance in the State of Florida and elsewhere does not extend coverage to treat autism. Insurance will cover some of the aspects of autism, but not the disorder as a whole. Treatments for “autism” are expensive and many families do not have the resources to pay. It does bankrupt some families. Divorce rates are very high among families of children with autism also (80 – 90%). Parents of children with autism often have a hard time sleeping at night wondering who will take care of their children when they die. It is heartbreaking! While the story is not the same for all families, I can tell you from the experience of one of my friends who has TWO children with autism that this is her life. She and her husband divorced a couple years ago and she and her five children are now alone, without insurance, bankrupt, and in foreclosure. Another friend, who has one child with autism, sold her house a few years ago to use the money to pay for alternative treatments for autism. They love their children, but they hate autism.

So, while I think that the creators of the video clip should have been more sensitive to families touched by autism, I think that objective was to vilify autism, not people. I think the video would not be as controversial as it has become had they used other images and changed some of the language. The way that it was done appears to “blame” children rather than other possible targets for the harsh realities that plague many families of individuals with autism.