

Special Needs Lawyer in Savannah GA Celebrates Autism Awareness Month

/EINPresswire.com/ April is Autism Awareness Month, which seeks to educate the public about the needs and challenges facing those with autism spectrum disorders. Savannah family attorney Michael Smith explains 3 ways to protect special needs children should something happen to mom or dad.

April is Autism Awareness Month in the United States, a time dedicated to educating the public about the needs and challenges facing those with autism spectrum disorders.

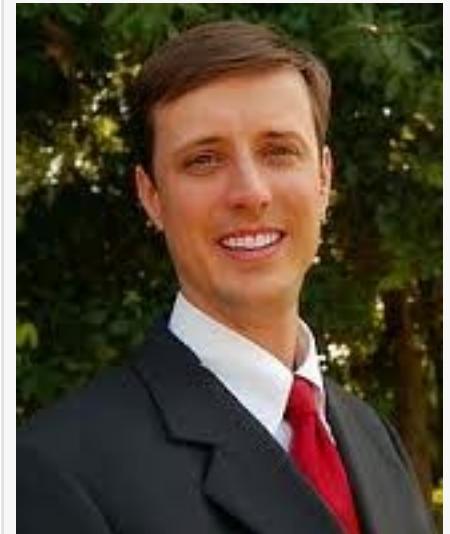
According to AutismSpeaks.org, the disorder affects one in 110 children in the United States, with boys being four times more likely than girls to be diagnosed on the spectrum. The prevalence of autism has also increased 57 percent from 2002 to 2006, thus prompting The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to refer to autism a “national public health crisis”.

Yet while autism awareness is at an all time high, [Savannah family lawyer](#), Michael Smith warns that many parents are still in the dark as to how to make sure their child is physically and financially cared for if mom or dad’s unexpected death or incapacity occurs.

“As much as parents of special needs children hate to think about it, there will come a time when they are physically unable—or perhaps no longer alive—to oversee their child’s care,” warns [Savannah special needs lawyer](#) Michael Smith. “That’s why long-term care plans must be put in place as soon as a diagnosis is made to ensure the child always stays physically and financially protected if the unthinkable occurs,” he adds.

While Smith does admit that the options for long-term care planning are broad and depend on the needs of the child, he explains that parents can simplify the process by starting with these 3 key planning steps:

1. Name Guardians- Michael Smith urges parents to immediately name short and long-term guardians who can oversee their child’s care if something unexpectedly happens to them. Without such designations in place, the child could end up in a lengthy custody battle—or



Savannah GA special needs lawyer Michael Smith

worse—be placed in foster care if the unthinkable happens. Michael Smith advises parents to think outside the box and focus on finding someone whose love and dedication to the child closely resemble their own. Finally, parents should give copies of their designations to the guardians themselves, as well as the child's school, babysitters and even the neighbors so everyone knows exactly who to call if a crisis strikes.

2. Set up a Special Needs Trust- A special needs trust in Georgia is a legal tool that ensures a disabled child's health care and living needs are taken care of if something happens to mom or dad. Michael Smith explains that while many parents have good intentions of leaving their child life insurance benefits or other assets in a will if they die, doing so could jeopardize their eligibility for Social Security or Medicaid in the future (which is often the only health care option available). Instead, a trust helps to ensure that the child receives such financial benefits without actually having assets in their name—thus leaving all government benefits intact.
3. Build a Team of Support- According to Smith, it's never too early to begin building a team of trusted caregivers and advisors who can immediately step in and help the child if a crisis occurs. Team members may include the child's legal guardians, a trusted doctor, financial advisor, estate planning attorney and dedicated family or friends. Building such a team now also helps to ensure you have the right people in place, as opposed to someone who will prey upon your child's disability in an emergency.

"Parents of special needs children must go into planning with the mindset that their child will require a lifetime of care," says the [Savannah special needs attorney](#). "Fortunately, by starting with these 3 key steps, parents will make tremendous progress in ensuring their child is physically and financially cared for in their absence."

Savannah estate planning and elder law attorney Michael H. Smith graduated from Erskine College in 1993 with a BA in history. He then attended the University of Georgia School of Law, and graduated in 1996 with a Juris Doctor degree. He spent the 1st year of his legal career in Augusta, Georgia and then enticed by the thought of spending time at the beach, moved to Savannah in 1997. After practicing with different firms over the years, Mike founded Smith Barid, LLC with his partner, Richard Barid, in November 2006 to focus on estate planning, elder law and special needs planning.

Mike was selected as one of America's Techiest Lawyers in the April 2012 edition of the ABA Journal. He was also selected as a Georgia Super Lawyers Rising Star for 2010 through a peer review process and was selected as a 40 Under 40 dynamic business leader in Savannah in 2009 by the readers and editors of The Business Report and Journal. Mike serves as an Ambassador for the Savannah Chamber of Commerce and is a member of St. Thomas Episcopal Church. Mike is a member of Wealth Counsel, Elder Counsel, the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, the National Care Planning Council, the Savannah Bar Association, the Savannah Estate Planning Council, the Greater Savannah Coalition on the Aging, the State Bar of Georgia,

and the Fiduciary Law Section. In 2011 Mike was named to the DocuBank National Advisory Board and served through 2012. In 2012, Mike was elected to serve on the Board of the Georgia Chapter of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, the Greater Savannah Sports Council, and the Alzheimer's Association Coastal Georgia Chapter.

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