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## Left neglected, parents of autistic kids write to min

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**Kottayam:** As the world observes International Day of Persons with Disabilities on Sunday, pledging support to this year's theme 'Leave no one behind', Kerala's harsh reality is that it falls terribly behind when it comes to bringing autistic children to the mainstream.

Now, parents of around 100 autistic children undergoing training at an autism centre here has approached the government requesting to extend a helping hand. They have written to the education minister in this regard.

### INT'L DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Most of the schools in the state that boasts of high literacy rate are reluctant to admit autistic children, in spite of the rule that directs the institutions to take in such kids. The schools are also expected to have special trainers for autistic children. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has clearly laid out guidelines with regard to concessions and exemptions for autistic students who appear for Class X and XII examinations. Most schools are hesitant to appoint persons trai-



A child undergoing training at a centre for autistic kids. The six year old will have to join a normal school for further improvement

ned in occupational therapy, speech therapy, individual education programme, behaviour therapy and psychology for such kids.

Also, the state does not have solid data on autistic children. According to people working in this field in the state, there has been an alarming rise in the number of children born with the disorder. It is high time the government took a serious approach towards this.

Another issue is that autism is still not recognized as a separate form of disability in the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 which denies the

kids many rights, education concessions and employment opportunities.

"Majority of these children are confined within the four walls of their house or special schools. They are side-lined and are never given a chance to mingle with other children of their age," says Dr Jameson Samuel, occupational therapist and child psychologist. He also pointed out that most centres to train such kids could cater to them only till the age of six. "The child will have to join a normal school and mingle with the students of his age for further improvement," Samuel, who also runs a centre, noted.

Renymol, mother of twin boys shared her agony: "The kids are as good as, if not better than, any other child. But schools are not ready to admit them," she said. Her kids are six years old now and it is for them to join a normal school. Ajith K E, who hails from Thiruvananthapuram, has travelled across the state to find a good training centre for his five-year-old boy. "It's a reality that we are lagging far behind in addressing the issues of autistic children," he says.

The group of parents have also requested the minister to provide therapy by trained professionals in ordinary schools and make it mandatory for the schools to provide such facilities.