

The Language Lab: Autism

Autism

You may hear the terms **Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD)**, **Autism Spectrum Disorder**, **Autism Spectrum**, **Autistic Spectrum**, or **Autism** used interchangeably to refer to a continuum of cognitive and neurobehavioral disorders

which include impairments in socialization, impaired verbal and non-verbal communication, and repetitive behavioral patterns.

The diagnostic category of **Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD)** includes

the diagnosis of **Autistic Disorder** as well as two other related conditions of Asperger's Disorder and Atypical Autism/PDD Not Otherwise Specified.

Autism is a developmental disorder, with onset prior to age three years, which manifests as qualitative impairment in social interaction and communication, and restrictive, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests and activities.

Asperger's Disorder

First recorded by a pediatrician named Asperger for patients with milder autistic behaviors and normal intelligence having "autistic psychopathy." It is identical to Autistic Disorder in its criteria for qualitative impairments in social interaction, and restrictive and repetitive patterns of behaviors and activities. However, it differs from Autistic Disorder criteria as having no evidence of "clinically significant" language delay, normal or near-normal IQ, and no significant delay in the development of self-help skills, adaptive behavior (other than social interaction), and curiosity about the environment in childhood.

Characteristics may include inability to form friendships, inappropriate or one-sided social interactions, intense preoccupation with restricted areas of interest, and difficulty recognizing the causes for their social isolation. Individuals may have poorly modulated speech, and deficits in fine and gross motor skills, such as clumsiness or unusual posture. Because these areas of deficit are not as evident in early childhood, this disorder tends to be identified somewhat later than other autistic spectrum disorders.

Developmental Disabilities: Faces, Patterns Possibilities

Atypical Autism/Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)

This type of autistic spectrum disorder includes clinically significant, but often "milder" autistic symptoms, such as deficits in reciprocal social interactions, impairment in verbal or non-verbal communication, and stereotyped behaviors, interests, or activities. People with atypical symptoms, less severe symptoms, or onset of symptoms after the age of 36 months may receive this diagnosis.

Echolalia

Repeating words or phrases in place of normal language

Self-Injurious Behavior

Self-stimulatory or stereotypic behaviors engaged in by an individual which cause tissue damage to himself, including bruises, cuts, redness, etc. Examples include head-banging, hand-biting, scratching or rubbing. It is believed that these behaviors may occur for one of a variety of reasons, including to cause internal pleasure by releasing beta-endorphins in the brain; to reduce over stimulation, arousal or frustration; or as the result of abnormal Electroencephalogram (EEG) patterns in the brain (i.e., a form of sub clinical seizures).

Social Stories

A technique which is used to help individuals with autism to understand social situations, and thus interact more appropriately in social situations.

Spectrum Disorder

Symptoms and characteristics (of autism) can present themselves in a variety of combinations and degrees of severity.

Stereotypic (Self-Stimulatory) Behavior

Repetitive body movements or repetitive movements of objects, common in autism as well as other developmental disabilities. It may involve stimulation of any one or all of the senses. Examples include: making repetitive vocalizations, clapping, scratching or picking at the skin, hitting or slapping the head, staring at lights, moving fingers in front of eyes, spinning or rocking the whole body. Research to explain why these behaviors may occur has theorized that they may satisfy a craving for sensory stimulation, provide internal pleasure by releasing beta-endorphins in the body, and help calm a person who experiences sensory overload (by focusing inward on one repetitive behavior).