

The Different Faces of Autism

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, 4th Edition Text Revised (DSM IV), all forms of autism fall under the diagnostic category of Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD). This category includes: Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act (IDEIA), the term "autism" is used to represent all of the PDD diagnostic categories. While there are characteristic and behavior similarities between the three disorders, significant differences have been identified.

Autistic Disorder

Autistic Disorder, better known as Autism, describes individuals who often display the following characteristics or behaviors:

- Impaired social interaction prior to age 3
- Communication deficits prior to age 3
- Little or no imaginative play
- Stereotyped behavior
- Narrow range of interests and activities
- Adherence to rigid routines

Asperger's Syndrome

Asperger's Syndrome describes individuals who often display the following characteristics or behaviors:

- Impaired social interaction
- Restricted range of interests and activities
- Lack of emotional reciprocity
- No significant delay in language (unlike other categories of autism/PDD)
- Average to above average intelligence
- Causes significant impairment in major areas of functioning (social, occupational)

PDD-NOS

PDD-NOS is often called the "default" diagnosis for those individuals who do not meet the criteria for Autistic Disorder or Asperger's Syndrome. Individuals who receive this diagnosis often display the following behaviors:

- Late onset
- Atypical or milder symptomology (as compared to Autistic Disorder)
- Severe and pervasive impairment in specified behaviors but does not meet criteria for specific diagnosis