

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

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Asperger's Disorder

Asperger's Disorder was a term previously used to describe one of the pervasive developmental disorders. Children and adolescents diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder had problems in the development of social skills, often experiencing difficulty interacting with peers. They also tended to display unusual, eccentric or repetitive behaviors.

Asperger's Disorder was sometimes referred to "high functioning autism." This is because many of the children diagnosed with the disorder had average or above average intelligence and near normal development of speech and language.

In 2013, the diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder was removed from the newly revised Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5). Children previously diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder were included in the broader category of Autism Spectrum Disorder. The new definition covers children who display problems with communication and social interactions. For example, they may respond inappropriately in conversations or misread non-verbal cues. They may also have difficulty building friendships appropriate to their age. In addition, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder may be overly dependent on routines, unusually sensitive to changes in their environment, or intensely focused on specific items.

The decision to combine the categories grew out of research demonstrating that Asperger's was not actually a separate "disorder." Instead, children previously diagnosed with Asperger's were better and more accurately described as having a disorder "on the autism spectrum." Researchers also hope that the improved accuracy and consistency of the diagnosis will lead to enhanced research on the cause, treatment and ultimately prevention of Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Child and adolescent psychiatrists have the training and expertise to evaluate Autism Spectrum Disorders. They can also work with families to design appropriate and effective treatment programs. Currently, the most effective treatment for Autism Spectrum Disorder involves a combination of psychotherapy, special education, behavior modification, and support for families. Some children will also benefit from treatment with medication.

The outcome for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders is related to intellectual functioning and communication skills. Children with normal or above normal intelligence and normal or near normal speech and language often finish high school and attend college. Although difficulties with social interaction and awareness may persist, they can often do well in specific work settings and develop lasting relationships with family and

friends. Access to ongoing counseling, support and assistance increases the likelihood of a positive and successful outcome.

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