

What was the difference between autism and Asperger's Disorder?

by Claire Erny, Marketing & Communications Intern, The Children's Home

In the past, people who had been diagnosed with autism or Asperger's Syndrome shared similar characteristics; like the sensitivity when it came to textures and lights, the need to follow a routine or a certain schedule. Today, there is no longer a diagnosis for Asperger's. Debbie Gingrich, vice president for Behavioral Health at Best Point by The Children's Home describes why.

"In 2013, the DSM-5 eliminated diagnoses of Asperger's Disorder and pervasive developmental delay. Instead, those disorders became grouped under the general diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASD exists along a continuum ranging from mild to severe symptoms and impact on daily functioning. Asperger's would be what we now generally refer to as a mild presentation of Autism."

Individuals who were once diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and individuals who were diagnosed with autism faced very similar challenges in their everyday lives and they also benefited from similar treatment approaches along with benefitting from an early intervention.

There were two main distinctions between Asperger's and autism. Asperger's had less severe symptoms and there was an absence of language delays. Typically, individuals who were diagnosed with Asperger's spoke more formal, too loud, too high pitched or their speech patterns may have appeared to be unusual, but overall had good language and cognitive skills. To an outside observer, an individual with Asperger's would appear to others as if he or she is behaving a little differently, clumsier or more awkward, but had no problem with interacting with people around them.

Finally, another major distinction between Asperger's and autism related to cognitive ability. While there were some individuals diagnosed with autism that had intellectual disabilities, by definition, people who were once diagnosed with Asperger's possessed average to above-average intelligence.

People who may have previously received an Asperger's diagnosis now, instead, receive an autism diagnosis. While autism may be diagnosed early in life, Asperger's was not detected until later in childhood and it is possible it would not have been diagnosed until early adulthood.

"The autism experience and how we label it has changed consistently and dramatically in the time I have worked in this field, but the need for quality and individualized services has not," says Amanda Tipkemper, autism services director at the Heidt Center of Excellence by The Children's Home. "Our Intake and Engagement Center is dedicated to making sure that families are connected with resources they are seeking and that they don't walk away empty handed."

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Autism vs. Asperger's Syndrome

AUTISM

- ♡ Language delay
- ♡ Sensitivities to the environment
- ♡ Low interests in social interactions
- ♡ Strong repetitive behaviors
- ♡ Specific interests
- ♡ Excel in math, art and science

ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

- ♡ Functional language and cognitive skills
- ♡ Tend to want to fit in
- ♡ Are high-focused and like to collect things
- ♡ More likely to have mental health issues such as depression and anxiety
- ♡ Often confused with ADHD/ADD
- ♡ Diagnosis happens at different ages (can go into their teen years and adulthood before receiving a diagnosis)

SIMILARITIES

- ♡ Restricted interest
- ♡ Difficulties with social interactions
- ♡ Issues maintaining eye contact
- ♡ Inflexible schedules/way of doing things
- ♡ Hypersensitivity to sounds
- ♡ Unusual attachment to certain objects
- ♡ Abnormal tone