

Autism or Language Disorder? Diagnosis Based on Symptom Analysis

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Many disorders and diseases are diagnosed from symptoms only. Others are diagnosed from symptoms first and objective testing as a second step. The analysis of symptoms is very important. Autism is a symptom-based diagnosis made by observing a specific cluster of symptoms known to characterize this psychiatric disease. Usually mental health practitioners obtain a description of the symptoms by interviewing the child and parents and by observation.

The preferred practice patterns established by The American Speech Language and Hearing Association (www.ASHA.com) recommend that a parent interview, a family history and a thorough symptom analysis be the first step in evaluating a child with a language disorder.

Symptoms of Autism & Language Disorder Look Alike

Let's take a look at how the symptoms of Autism and the symptoms of a language disorder compare. Listed below are symptoms of autism from the Autism Society and symptoms of language disorder from the ODE Language Handbook. For additional information on symptom comparisons go to www.ebrainlabs.com

Autism Society

Insistence on sameness; resists change
Difficulty in mixing with others
Unresponsive to teaching methods
Sustained odd play
Tantrums

ODE Language Handbook

Can't alter behavior to the needs of situation. Perseverates, resists change.
Relates poorly to peers, reluctant to participate, has few friends.
Unresponsive to normal teaching methods.
Behaves immaturely – engages in odd play.
Behavior problems.

You will note that these symptoms can look alike but for different reasons. The cause of the symptoms can be very important in how we plan an intervention. If the cause is that the language system is under working or working erratically because of a hyper-visual system, then we need to harness the visual system first before we move forward to teaching communication.

Managing a Misfit

Our world is a very verbal place. We use communication skills to read the paper in the morning, relate to our families, learn at school and exchange ideas at work. Communication is how we share our unique souls with the world and it is the most complex function of the human brain. With deficits in the human communication systems, it can become very difficult to “fit-in” socially, to thrive academically and to develop intimacy with loved ones.

These difficulties with fitting into the verbal world can create isolation from others and threatening walls of silence. Instead of negotiating the world with verbal reasoning, a visual person often negotiates with patterns. As a result the “sameness of routines” becomes the template to make sense of the chaos of everyday life. We often ask Mavericks to adjust to changes in schedule or adjustments in plans based on how we explain by talking. These words can create more confusion and frustration as they may not be processed at the speed expected. This lag in processing time can create resistance, immature behavior, odd play, tantrums or reluctance to participate. As a result the normal teaching methods that are based on processing incoming language can fail.

Having a communication disorder can result in a very complex life, socially, academically and vocationally. Having worked with children and adults who have trouble processing and producing language for nearly 40 years, I understand how many symptoms can emerge from the frustration, anxiety, tension and disappointment that can occur every day. The first step in helping your child is to assess the root of the disorder. This then enables you to employ the most suitable intervention.

Dr. Cheri Florance is a brain scientist with training and clinical experience in how to teach the brain to replace symptoms of communication and language disorders. In her books, *Maverick Mind*, (www.penquinputnam.com) and *A Boy Beyond Reach* (www.simonschuster.com), she describes how she taught her own autistic son, Whitney to replace disability with ability and become symptom-free. To learn more

about her own personal journey and successful methods visit her complimentary Learning Library at www.ebrainlabs.com.