

Asperger's Syndrome, Autism, or PDD-NOS?

A quick reference chart to help distinguish between the three forms of high-functioning autism spectrum disorders

MARILYN J. MONTEIRO, PH.D.

	ASPERGER'S	AUTISM	PDD-NOS
LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION	Language skills well developed with Asperger's Syndrome; usually have developed one or more areas of passionate interest; conversation with others focuses on conveying facts and details about preferred topics	Often display a well developed vocabulary for labeling; use of language is rote and self-directed with frequent use of scripted language	Language skills typically less developed than in children with Asperger's Syndrome; use of language is prompt-dependent on adults; may have developed one or more areas of passionate interest but have difficulty sharing details with others
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONAL RESPONSES	Usually initiate and extend social exchanges even though they do so on their agenda; most comfortable with adults or younger children; peer relationships are often a source of anxiety; may have difficulty regulating emotional states	Become anxious with social exchanges and do not generally initiate or sustain social interactions; tend to remove themselves from social exchanges; most comfortable with others when sharing sensory interests and limited language is used	Prompt-dependent on adults to structure social exchanges; will initiate and extend as long as structure is present; lack flexibility in their play routines; may become anxious and agitated during loosely structured language and social interactions
SENSORY USE AND INTERESTS	Have developed one or more areas of passionate interest; sensory-driven quality to their narrative when sharing information with others about preferred topics; may resist touching sensory toys; unusual body movements are subtle but repetitive	Tend to focus intently on the sensory aspects of the toys; seek out manipulative materials with visual and tactile features; create repetitive sensory routines as a means to self-regulate anxiety; frequently display distinctive unusual body movements and mannerisms	Display some drive to establish sensory-driven play but can be redirected by the examiners; during social play, tend to create rigid and inflexible play routines infrequent display of unusual body movements and mannerisms
COGNITIVE PATTERN:	In average range; verbal may be higher than nonverbal; WISC-IV Working Memory sometimes lower than other areas; written expression is frequently an area of challenge	Cognitive pattern of development is uneven; typically show higher nonverbal and lower verbal abilities	Cognitive pattern of development is uneven; typically show higher nonverbal and lower verbal abilities