

Autism Evaluations—What to Expect

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Evaluations for a possible diagnosis of autism take place in a variety of settings including hospitals, specialized clinics, and doctors' offices. Depending on the setting and available resources, the evaluation may be single-discipline, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary (Sikora, 2008, p.19).



Single-Discipline Evaluation—One professional such as a physician or psychiatrist offers a diagnosis based on observation over a short period of time.

Multidisciplinary Evaluation—Different professionals (at least two) each separately evaluate the child and give a diagnostic opinion. The professionals may include a physician, psychiatrist, speech-language pathologist, social worker, psychologist, or other professional. They may or may not agree on the diagnosis.

Interdisciplinary Evaluation—Different professionals (at least two) evaluate the child separately and then come together and agree on a diagnosis before reporting back to the family. The professionals may include a physician, psychiatrist, speech-language pathologist, social worker, psychologist, or other professional.

Transdisciplinary Evaluation—Different professionals (at least two) work together during the evaluation and come to an agreement on the diagnosis before reporting to the family. The professionals may include a physician, psychiatrist, speech-language pathologist, social worker, psychologist, or other professional.

Evaluations typically include four parts (Sikora, 2008, p.20):

1. Case history—Professional(s) will interview the parent about the child's mental and emotional histories.
2. Parent Questionnaire—Parents fill out a written questionnaire that asks about specific areas of concern.
3. Direct Observation—Professional(s) will observe the child participating in structured activities.
4. Collateral Sources—Professional(s) will gather more information from other people who interact with the child, such as teachers or extended family members.

Why Is it Important to Diagnose Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Getting a diagnosis of autism is important for the following reasons (Sikora, 2008, pp. 22-23):

- Professionals and parents can more easily examine behaviors and find evidence-based treatments when the child “fits” the criteria for the label of “autism.”
- Diagnoses give families access to special education, financial support, advocacy groups, and many other programs.
- Diagnoses give families an explanation for their children’s behaviors. This can lead to better understanding and guilt relief for parents.



If you suspect your child has an autism spectrum disorder, talk to your child’s doctor or contact the local children’s hospital to help you find a diagnostic clinic or team of professionals.

Resource

Sikora, D. (2008). **Differential diagnosis—If it’s not autism, then what is it?** In G. R. Buckendorf (Ed.), *Autism: A guide for educators, clinicians, and parents* (pp. 19-23). Greenville, SC: Thinking Publications.



Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below may be helpful when working with children who have special needs. Visit www.superduperinc.com or call 1-800-277-8737. Click the links below to see the product description.

Asperger Syndrome-Strategies for Solving the Social Puzzle

Ask for item #TPX-29501 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=TPX29501>

Autism: A Guide for Educators, Clinicians, and Parents

Ask for item #TP-297 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=TP297>

"I Have Autism" – A Child's First Look at Autism

Ask for item #BK-329 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=BK329>

Say and Do® Positive Pragmatic® Game Boards Fun Sheets

Ask for item #BK-308 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=BK308>

Sensory Diet Fun Sheets

Ask for item #BK-366 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=BK366>