

The autistic spectrum

What is the autistic spectrum?

The 'autistic spectrum' is a blanket expression currently used by many professionals. It describes the characteristics of a group of children who show, to varying degrees, similar styles of behaviour, thought and communication. This spectrum includes terms such as 'autism,' 'Asperger syndrome' and 'semantic-pragmatic disorders'.

Some children do fit the definition of particular terms quite well. Many others appear on the borderline. The use of 'spectrum' draws attention to the blurring of boundaries across the terms. However, 'spectrum' is misleading if it is seen as a simple progression of impairment, with semantic-pragmatic difficulties at one end and the most severe autistic behaviour at the other – the diversity of individuals is more complicated than that and the specific characteristics of each child's difficulties need to be identified and addressed on an individual basis.

'PDD' and the 'autistic spectrum' are, respectively, the American and European expressions for the same range of conditions.

References

Attwood, T (1998), *Asperger's syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley

Cumine, V, Leach, J, & Stevenson, G (1998), *Asperger syndrome: A practical guide for teachers*. London: David Fulton

Frith, U (1991), *Autism and Asperger syndrome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Happé, F (1994), *Autism: An introduction to psychological theory*. London: UCL Press

Jordan, R, & Powell, S (1995), *Understanding and teaching children with autism*. Chichester: John Wiley.

Morgan, H (1996), *Adults with autism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Seach, D (1998), *Autistic spectrum disorder: Positive approaches for teaching children with ASD*. Tamworth: National Association for Special Educational Needs

Trevarthen, C, Aitken, K, Papoudi, D, & Robarts, J (1998), *Children with autism: Diagnosis and interventions to meet their needs (2nd ed.)*. London: Jessica Kingsley

Wing, L (1996), *The autistic spectrum*. London: Constable

Please note: Afasic does not hold copies of any referenced material. However, it may be obtained via academic libraries.

Other relevant Glossary Sheets

- Semantic and pragmatic disorders (5)
- Autism (7)
- Asperger's syndrome (11)
- Pervasive developmental disorders (16)
- Dyspraxia/apraxia (19)

Other organisations which can help

National Autistic Society
393 City Road
London
EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7833 2299

Written by Gilbert MacKay, Bob Daines, educational psychologist, with thanks to Elizabeth Auger, specialist language teacher



Telephone
Helplines
Association

quality and confidence for callers to helplines

© Afasic 2004

Afasic
1st Floor
20 Bowling Green Lane
London EC1R 0BD
Phone 020 7490 9410
Fax 020 7251 2834
Email info@afasic.org.uk
www.afasic.org.uk
Helpline 0845 3 55 55 77

Registered charity no. 1045617