

How are Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism Different?

Once your child receives a diagnosis, you will have many questions and be looking for the answers. One question that you may have is how is AS different and similar to other autism spectrum disorders? Asperger Syndrome exists as part of the autism spectrum but differs in early development of language from classic autism and other pervasive developmental disorders. After the diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder, it is important to explain and understand both similarities and differences between disorders on the spectrum.

Asperger Syndrome and high functioning autism (HFA) are often referred to as the same diagnosis. While they currently exist as two separate diagnoses, there is an ongoing debate about whether that is necessary. It is possible that, in the future, they may be combined into one category. Individuals with HFA and AS have average or above average intelligence but may struggle with issues related to social interaction and communication. The diagnosis of either High Functioning Autism or Asperger Syndrome can oftentimes feel frustrating to a parent and the child as it may seem that the terms are not clearly defined. It is essential to remember that both AS and HFA do present themselves largely the same way, and as a result may be treated in a similar way. The primary difference is that a diagnosis of HFA requires that, early in development, the child had delayed language whereas in AS, the child did not show a significant delay in language development.

How Asperger Syndrome is Similar to Classic Autism

According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), children with Asperger Syndrome find it difficult to identify and express their feelings, just like those with HFA. They find it challenging to connect with others, often don't hold eye contact and have trouble reading other people's faces and gestures. Many children with AS flap their hands, a behavior often associated with classic autism; speak without much emotion (or have otherwise unusual speech patterns), need to follow schedules rigidly, and are intensely, even obsessively, interested in one specific subject, so much that they become veritable experts in that field. They also exhibit sensitivities to various stimuli, from sounds to clothing to food items.

How do AS/HFA Diagnoses differ from Classic Autism?

Compared with classic autism, children with Asperger Syndrome/HFA have IQs that fall in the normal or even superior range. To many, they may seem just like other children but not quite: children with AS are socially awkward in a manner that's not easily understood.

This explains why healthcare providers may miss seeing Asperger Syndrome/HFA symptoms in their young patients, or may misdiagnose it completely. The late onset of complex social skills, such as peer interaction, also explains why some parents don't seek help until much later compared to those whose kids display a more profound or more obvious set of symptoms from a very young age.

