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AUTISM AND A CHILD

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Autism is known as a complex developmental disability. Experts believe that Autism presents itself during the first three years of a person's life. The condition is the result of a neurological disorder that has an effect on normal brain function, affecting development of the person's communication and social interaction skills.

People with autism have issues with non-verbal communication, a wide range of social interactions, and activities that include an element of play and/or banter [4].

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors.

With the May 2013 publication of the DSM-5 diagnostic manual, all autism disorders were merged into one umbrella diagnosis of ASD. Previously, they were recognized as distinct subtypes, including autistic disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger syndrome.

Autism statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identify around 1 in 88 American children as on the autism spectrum – a ten-fold increase in prevalence in 40 years. Careful research shows that this increase is only partly explained by improved diagnosis and awareness. Studies also show that autism is four to five times more common among boys than girls. An estimated 1 out of 54 boys and 1 in 252 girls are diagnosed with autism in the United States. ASD affects over 2 million individuals in the U.S. and tens of millions worldwide [2; 6].

Genomic research is beginning to discover that people with autism spectrum disorders probably share genetic traits with individuals with ADHD (attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder), bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or clinical depression. A team at the Cross Disorders Group of the Psychiatric Genomic Consortium suggests that the five mental disorders and illnesses have the same common inherited genetic variations.

Autism is believed to have a strong genetic basis. The cause is still unknown. Heavy metal toxicity has been found in many mothers of autistic children probably due to the exposure to chemicals such as paints, pesticides, new furniture or carpet during pregnancy [1].

The stereotypical view of autism is that portrayed by Dustin Hoffman in the movie *Rainman* – an individual unable to function well in society, with unusual mental abilities, repetitive behaviors and odd speech patterns.

A person with autism feels love, happiness, sadness and pain just like everyone else. Just because some of them may not express their feelings in the same way others do, does not mean at all that they do not have feelings – they do! It is crucial that the Myth – Autistic people have no feelings – is destroyed. The myth is a result of ignorance, not some conspiracy. Therefore, it is important that you educate people who carry this myth in a helpful and informative way.

Not all people with autism have an incredible gift or savantism for numbers or music. However, a sizeable proportion of people with an ASD have high IQs and a unique talent for computer science. German software company SAP AG has become aware of this and announced in May 2013 that it planned to employ hundreds of people with autism as software testers, programmers and data quality assurance specialists [5].

Autism in children can be diagnosed very early, as early as 12 to 18 months. The signs include the following: 1) *Language development problems*: An infant may babble and begin to acquire one-word concepts, then at some point cease to learn new words and lose the ones he or she has already required. Some autistic children never begin to develop language at all; 2) *Social retreat*: Rather than enjoy and seek out social interactions, a toddler with autism will avoid them, preferring his or her own company. A child who actively, even obsessively, avoids eye contact may be in the early stages of the condition; 3) *Sensory problems*: Autism seems to interfere with how a child processes sensory information. Tactile sensations may be overwhelming or addictive. Visual stimuli such as the rotating blades of a fan may prove an irresistible focus; 4) *Repetitive behavior*: Children with this condition often perform ritualistic or repetitive motions. Hand flapping, organizing toys rather than playing

with them, and opening and closing cabinets repeatedly for a lengthy period may all be hallmarks of autism [7].

A child with autistic disorder may already have problems with communication and social interaction. Irritability adds another layer that can cause issues at home, with family, and at school [3].

On summering, we could watch a discussion from Tony, the father of an 8 year old child with autism, about what Dr. Hans Asperger said in his sentinel paper on this video [5].

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