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**Maybe It's Not Autism**

**By Adam Cox**

Maybe It's Not Autism?

Most would agree that public awareness and access to medical information is critical to public health. Destigmatizing mental illness and focusing attention on under-diagnosed problems has been a particularly important stride of the past 30 years. Yet sometimes, publicity leads to anxiety. As an acquaintance said, "if the disease-of-the-week doesn't kill me, the worry will."

Recently, a parent contacted me with concerns about his 7 year-old son, who was quiet, introverted, and highly focused on a few hobbies. "Could he be autistic?," he asked. While the boy did not meet the diagnostic criteria for autism, or an autism-spectrum disorder, his father was voicing a concern psychologists and pediatricians are hearing more commonly these days. News of the nation's autism epidemic is everywhere. On a recent drive, I noted almost as many "Autism-Awareness" auto decals as those saying, "Support Our Troops."

Don't get me wrong—I'm glad that there is increased public awareness about autism and there is indeed cause for concern. In some states, there are several times more children being diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders than just a decade ago. Asperger's Syndrome (sometimes known as high-functioning autism) seems to be particularly prevalent, with estimates of its occurrence ranging from 1 in every 166 to 500 births. Although there are several theories as to why we are seeing such an epidemic, as of yet, no single theory has achieved scientific consensus among researchers.

Lack of social communication skills is a core trait of all types of autism. However, I wonder if we are too quick to assign communication problems such serious diagnostic labels. A brief checklist of the communication problems common to boys included on my website and in my recent book *Boys of Few Words: Raising Our Sons to Communicate and Connect* may help you decide if your son is simply struggling with the kinds of expressive challenges found among many different types of boys.

By all means have your child professionally evaluated if you have serious concerns. But make sure the professional you visit understands the psychology of boys, and can tell the difference between a syndrome like high-functioning autism and something more manageable, like a nonverbal learning disability. More than once, I have encountered a child who seemed locked in his own thoughts,

unwilling or unable to join the social world around him. But not every case was an autism–spectrum disorder—a thorough evaluation can reveal a wide range of potential causes for lack of social interest and communication skills.

The good news is that with time, relationship, and strategic encouragement, the great majority of kids can learn to connect with others, and even enjoy it! Finding the key that unlocks a child's mind and heart requires patience and a steadfast belief in the power of your own love and concern. And of course, one practical expression of that concern is to strive to get an accurate assessment of the challenges your child faces, so your interventions will help.

I believe the autism epidemic is real and deserves the analysis of the country's best medical minds. Children who have autism or a related problem benefit from early professional diagnosis and intensive intervention. Yet I also believe that the constant buzz about autism has led to many of us being

hypersensitized about whether our child "has it." Just as an energetic 5 year–old may be misconstrued as hyperactive, a stoic 7 year–old may be thought of as having some variant of autism. Yet stoic boys are no more a new phenomenon than energetic pre–schoolers.

As our world changes, so do our expectations of children. The problem is people take longer to change and evolve than society. That difference in tempo should not be the reason for a neurological diagnosis. It's a little like getting mad at a computer that doesn't run fast enough to operate new software. The computer is running as fast as it can - as fast as it was made to do - yet software is evolving too quickly for the computer's capabilities.

For more information about autism and Asperger's syndrome, you might want to contact The Autism Society of America, The National Institute of Mental Health, or check my website's Resources section for links to these and other organizations that can provide more information about Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, and other child development concerns. If you have questions about a child, please seek qualified professional advice. Help begins with accurate diagnosis and early intervention.

Adam J. Cox, PhD, ABPP is a Board–certified licensed psychologist and author of *Boys of Few Words: Raising Our Sons to Communicate and Connect*

<http://www.dradamcox.com>

## **Understanding Autism In Children**

**By Rachel Evans**

Do you know autism affects male children four times more than female children? The characteristic feature of autism in children includes non–verbal and impaired verbal communication. In addition to this the autism in children creates imaginative social interaction and activity. Infantile autism in children develops at about 30 months of age. Autism in children is a condition in which they find it difficult to build normal relationships with others. This can easily be diagnosed by disturbances normal

characteristic behaviors.

It has been found that autism in children is occurring at a rate of 4 in 10,000 children. Moreover, autism in children is considered a lifelong disease. The occurrence of the disease ranges from mild to severe. In mild form, the child with autism can live independently, whereas in severe form the autism requires medical supervision and support throughout his/her life.

The risk factors and causes of autism include viral infection. Viral infection, mainly rubella virus during the first term of pregnancy, may predispose the occurrence of autism in children. Genetic, traumatic and infectious factors are the physical bases considered to be the main culprits for the occurrence of autism in children. In early stages, it has been considered that the autism in children is mainly induced by the parents, but it is not true.

Autism in children can occur in two forms: Patients exhibit the symptoms of autism within the first few months of life, or the child would be apparently normal up to 18 to 24 months of age, and then the symptoms would occur suddenly.

The symptoms of autism in children include nonverbal and verbal communication skills, along with odd facial expressions and speech difficulties. The language used by the children in the autism is often immature, unimaginative and not concrete. The language will be stilted in nature. Keep in mind that all of these symptoms may not be present in all children with autism.

Children with autism can also be less aware of stimulus in the external environment. In some cases, they are unable to recognize their parents after the first few months of life. Autism in children can lead to toilet training problems. The autism in children can hamper the child's ability to smile and show emotion and can end with behavioral abnormalities, such as walking on tiptoe, tantrums, unpredictable behavior, strange postures, staring at hands, and rocking.

They may also prefer playing alone, remain aloof, and become segregated from other children. Autism in children may cause the affected child to become obsessed with one action or topic, and extreme confrontation to change of any kind. The children with autism may want to set a separate environment for themselves and also may establish their own behavioral patterns.

Rachel Evans. Get information & sign up for a Free Autism Newsletter at

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