

CHANGES TO THE AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER CRITERIA IN THE DSM-5

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) is published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and is used by mental health professionals to diagnose mental and behavioral conditions. The American Psychiatric Association recently released the 5th edition (DSM-5) in May of 2013 which included important changes to the criteria used to diagnose autism spectrum disorders.

The APA publishes updates to the DSM every few years to keep up with new research. Under the previous criteria (last updated in 2000), four separate disorders were included under the autism spectrum: autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder or pervasive developmental disorder – not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). Research found that different clinics, treatment centers and diagnosticians applied these 4 diagnoses differently. The criteria in the DSM 5 changed with the goal of improving consistency across diagnosticians.

Summary of the new criteria:

- There is only one diagnostic category under the new DSM-5, Autism Spectrum Disorder. This diagnosis will take the place of the 4 previously separate disorders – autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder and pervasive developmental disorder –not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). Those diagnosed with one of the 4 disorders from the DSM-4 should be given the new diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder.
- The new criteria have 2 domains of impairment, compared to the 3 domains that were previously used. The new domains are 1) social interaction and social communication and 2) restricted interests and repetitive behaviors.
- To receive a diagnosis, an individual must display a total of 5 out of the 7 possible impairments, compared to 6 out of the previous 12. All 3 criteria under the social interaction and social communication domain must be displayed and at least 2 out of the 4 criteria under the restricted interests and repetitive behavior domain must be displayed.
- Sensory differences were added under the restricted and repetitive behaviors domain.
- The DSM-5 requires a severity rating be given for each domain. Ratings are not intended to determine eligibility for services. Ratings include:
 - ◆ Level 3: Requiring very substantial support
 - ◆ Level 2: Requiring substantial support
 - ◆ Level 1: Requiring support
- The DSM-5 also added Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder, a new related diagnosis to the manual. This diagnosis would be given when an individual shows impairment in the social communication domain but does not display restricted interests and repetitive behaviors.

Other Resources:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder Fact Sheet
<http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/Autism%20Spectrum%20Disorder%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>
- Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder Fact Sheet
<http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/Social%20Communication%20Disorder%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>
- Answers to the Top Questions about Autism and the DSM 5
<http://autism.about.com/od/diagnosingautism/a/Answers-To-Top-Questions-About-The-Dsm-5-And-Autism.htm>
- Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about the DSM 5
<http://www.autismspeaks.org/dsm-5/faq>