

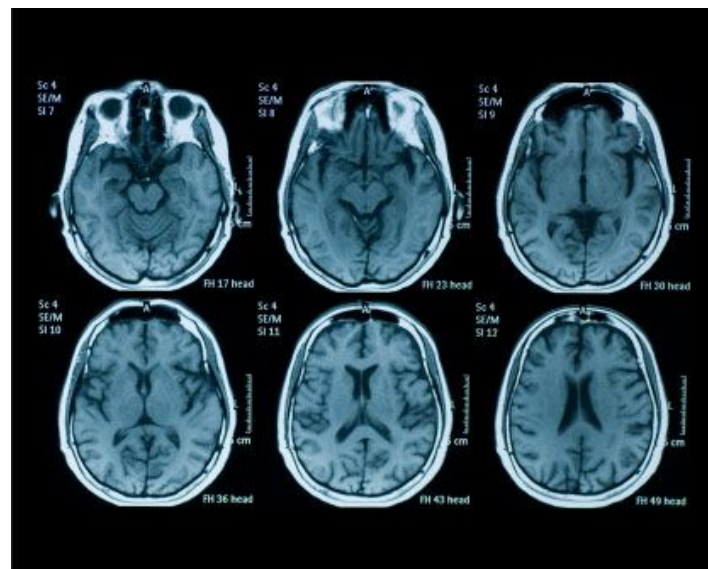
Autism and Society's View

Autism Spectrum Disorder, otherwise known as ASD or Autism, is a condition that has been diagnosed in 1 in 68 children (Shen & Piven, et al 2017). Behaviors associated with the disorder include, but are not limited to perseveration, repetitive speech, cognitive delay, lack in emotional function, social disturbances, disruptive behaviors and trouble communicating. Diagnosis of the disorder is not easy to obtain, as there are many other disorders that may be present in a person who suffers from autism that present in a similar way. Nonetheless, the disorder still affects many people around us in many different ways. It is important to discuss this developmental disability in order to obtain better understanding for those who suffer from the effects.

Autism is more than a diagnosis. It is a complex disorder that can cause deficiencies in motor skills, visual reception, language, and eye gaze patterns of social scenes and faces (Shen & Piven, et al 2017). In addition, individuals with autism show deficits in social behavior and inter-communication skills. The different regions of the brain are responsible for different functions. The frontal lobe controls motor behavior, expressive language, and social functioning. The temporal lobe controls language, memory, and emotions. The parietal lobe manages intellectual processing, integration of sensory information, verbal processing, and visual/spatial processing. Finally, the occipital lobe manages vision (Hutchinson, et al 2015). It is believed that

autism disorder affects the entire brain, not just portions. There is much evidence available that shows that in early brain scans of infants, the white matter in the brain is actually abnormal for those who have early autism diagnosis in comparison to infants without the suspect of autism. In fact, through additional scans, it has also been determined that the brain itself is oversized in the typically sized skull, and that there is also a significant amount of cerebrospinal fluid in the brain as well (Shen & Piven, et al 2017).

Conflicting reviews of additional brain scans show that there is no difference in the brain scans of a child with autism, ADHD, or typical controls (Wright, et al 2012). They were unable to find much difference in the scans and therefore determined that the utilization of scans is ineffective in being able to accurately diagnose the disorder. There is much to be said about the differences in findings between these two case studies. However, one thing that has been a common factor in findings is the behaviors present in a person with autism.



Because different areas of the brain control different functions, it is easy to see how it is believed that autism affects all areas of the brain. When comparing children with autism to their

neurotypical peers, we can determine where some of these deficits lie. Supportive information has documented that while those with autism disorder scored comparably to their peers on the IQ scale, they scored much lower in comparison when asked to complete complex tasks. In addition, they could remember fine details to a story, but showed a deficiency in comprehension of what the story meant. (Boyles, et al 2006).

Those individuals diagnosed with autism also are also believed to have more trouble with self regulation of emotions and behaviors. Consequently, more than a quarter of those diagnosed with autism disorder have also been diagnosed with disruptive behavior disorder (Yale University, et al 2019) and at least 15% of those were also diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Leonard, et al 2019). While autism disorder clearly affects behavior, how do these additional diagnoses measure in comparison?

Disruptive behavior disorder affects a child's life daily through the patterns of uncooperative and defiant behavior.

(<https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/conditions/disruptive-behavior-disorders>) Some of the behaviors present can be aggressive and hostile. A child with autism is already struggling with social and communication deficits, adding into the mix aggressive and hostile behaviors can only exacerbate the struggles of establishing appropriate relationships with their peers. Those with autism and ADHD may struggle because a child with ADHD may talk too much, and an individual with autism may fixate on a specific topic that is of no interest to anyone else (Leonard, et al 2019). Combine the two together, and you have a person who talks too much about things that are not relevant and that no one else cares about.

What does this all mean? Behaviorally, those with autism struggle daily with fitting in, communicating, and making appropriate choices. Yale University's Karim Ibrahim states, "Reduced amygdala-ventrolateral prefrontal cortex functional connectivity was uniquely associated with disruptive behavior but not with severity of social deficits or anxiety, suggesting a distinct brain network that could be separate from core autism symptoms" (Yale University, et al 2019). For this reason, it is easy to see how a person with autism would struggle with dysregulation and impulsive behaviors, especially in social situations.

Recommended interventions for autism are occupational therapy, speech therapy, applied behavioral analysis therapy, and in some cases, regular cognitive behavioral therapy. Through therapies and understanding, those with autism can actually learn how to manage their behaviors and thrive in social environments. Ultimately, a little understanding and patience can go a long way.

As a mother of an autistic child, I have first-hand experience about how life is different for not just the person who is diagnosed, but the family as well. Whenever we go places, if my son gets overstimulated or overwhelmed by the surroundings, he may end up having a meltdown. He has no filter when it comes to what is appropriate or not, understanding time and place factors for behavior, or understand the process behind "waiting your turn" for things. As a result of these meltdowns, my family has been riddled with ridicule from those around us. The reality is, there is a serious lack of understanding for those who suffer from autism, and as a result, an overabundance of judgement for those of us who are doing our best to keep the behaviors at bay.

From personal experience, I can attest to how difficult it is to manage the behaviors once they have started. Even when we put forth every effort to prevent meltdowns, they are bound to

happen. Once they start, there is no way to control the length or severity of the meltdown. The only thing left to do is let our son work through it. For someone who doesn't live with this on a regular basis, it is understandable that they judge what is happening. I can attest to being the same way before we had my son. Ignorance is bliss when you are not dealing with a situation first hand.

One thing I wish for society is for them to develop more understanding. Perhaps we should educate more. Everyone, not just those who want to listen. Instead of trying to hide our children's disabilities, we should use them as opportunities to educate those around us who do not have regular contact with them. One thing that I always say regarding my son's disability is "it is the reason he is the way he is, but it is not an excuse to allow him to act out when we go places." What this means to me is it explains why he does things that he does, but it does not make it okay. Yes, he needs to learn how to manage his behaviors. With therapy and time, he will eventually be able to. It does not excuse him from having to learn socially acceptable behavior and how to act when he doesn't get his way.

I will conclude with a piece that I wrote when we were out to dinner one night.

"I see you
Staring, looking at my son with those annoyed eyes.
Lips pressed hard together, eyes rolling, wondering why we are here.
I see you.

I see you.
I know what you are thinking.
You're thinking he is out of control, thinking he needs to be disciplined.
Thinking I am an awful parent.
I see you.

What you don't see is my pain.
You don't see the look on my face as you sit there, judging me, judging my family, judging my son.
You don't see the tears welling up in my eyes because, no matter what I've done today, it wasn't enough to keep
him happy and content.
And he has been throwing fits all day.

And I'm tired.

And I'm doing my best.
This is hard.

But I want you to know that even as you sit there, thinking you're so sly in your judgement...
I see you."

Autism is a disability that affects everyone around the person who has it, not just the person.

Social control can try and dictate the way someone should act, but in the case of those with autism, there is no such thing as social control. Autism controls the social response, and in most cases, it is not appropriate or approved. It just is what it is. It is autism.

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