

Autism Misdiagnosis: Is it really autism? Or is it something else?

Can Autism Be Cured?

Children can be misdiagnosed as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and not actually be autistic. It is concerning enough for a parent to be told their child is on the Autism Spectrum, but for a child to be misdiagnosed as having autism can cause unnecessary stress and worry for the family.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the child's capacity for regulating behavior, effectively communicating, and processing information.

Typical symptoms of ASD include repetitive behaviors, impaired social communication, and restricted interests. ASD often presents early but can be difficult to diagnose in some cases. There are other brain disorders that

mimic autism symptoms, like ADHD and anxiety disorders, including selective mutism. Autism can be misdiagnosed as another disorder with some shared symptoms.

For over 40 years, the Drake Institute has been utilizing advanced treatment technologies to help patients with brain-based disorders like depression, anxiety, ADHD, autism, and more. All of our treatments are non-invasive and non-drug, making them safe for children, teens, and adults.

I hope the following information will be helpful for you as I will discuss symptoms or characteristics of autism that actually may be part of another disorder, not Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Brain Mapping & Neurofeedback for Autism: How Does It Work?

What Is Autism?

Autism Spectrum Disorder includes a series of neurodevelopmental

disorders including Asperger's, childhood disintegration disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS).

ASD/autism results from how the brain develops early on in life. Atypical brain development can affect behavior, learning, social skills, communication, and more. Autism appears more often in boys than girls, and it is estimated that around 1 in 68 children in the US is on the spectrum. While autism is most often diagnosed in early childhood, teenagers and adults can also be diagnosed. [i]

What Are The Signs & Symptoms Of Autism?

Individuals with autism can show different degrees of similar symptoms. However, there are several signs and symptoms that can help your doctor determine if it is autism or something else. The more symptoms present, the more substantial the likelihood of a correct autism diagnosis. Because conditions similar to autism may have some of the same symptoms, keeping your child's doctor up to date with the child's development will help them avoid misdiagnosed autism.

According to the [CDC](#), the signs of autism include:

Communication Symptoms In Children

- Avoids eye contact
- Doesn't respond to name by 9 months of age
- Lack of facial expressions (e.g., happy, sad, angry, etc.) by 9 months of age
- Doesn't play simple interactive games (e.g., pat-e-cake) by 12 months of age
- Uses few or no hand gestures (e.g., doesn't wave hello or goodbye) by 12 months of age

- Does not share interests with others (e.g., doesn't show you their favorite toy) by 15 months of age
- Doesn't point to show you something interesting by 18 months of age
- Doesn't notice when others are hurt or upset by 24 months of age
- Doesn't notice other children and play with them by 36 months of age
- Doesn't pretend to be someone else (e.g., teacher, superhero, etc.) by 48 months of age
- Doesn't sing, act, or dance for you by 60 months of age

Behavioral Symptoms Of Autism In Children

- Gets upset when the "order" of their toys or other belongings is disturbed
- Repeats words or phrases
- Plays with toys the same way every time
- Focuses on parts of objects (e.g., wheels on a car)
- Gets upset by minor changes
- Has obsessive interests
- Follows specific routines
- Has unusual reactions to the way things taste, sound, look, or feel

Autism-Like Symptoms, But Not Autism

A few brain disorders similar to autism can lead to an autism misdiagnosis. The signs and symptoms may appear to indicate ASD when in reality, another disorder is present. Keeping your child's doctor aware of development and changes in your child is an excellent way to identify when there are autism-like symptoms, but it's not autism.

Poor eye contact and impaired social interaction

ADHD children may have impaired social interactions due to their impulsivity.

They could exhibit poor eye contact as a result of their distractibility. But they are not autistic as they will start and sustain social interactions and can have back-and-forth (reciprocal) interactions.

Conversely, the child with Autism Spectrum Disorder may not be able to start nor sustain a conversation unless it is a topic of special interest to them. The social reciprocity or back-and-forth interaction is missing with autism but is there with ADHD children.

Social withdrawal and isolation

Anxiety disorders with extreme shyness and social withdrawal can be mistaken for Autism Spectrum Disorder. Social anxiety disorder can cause children to be "shut down" with regard to social interactions. However, the child with social anxiety disorder can interact normally if they feel comfortable and will show social reciprocity, but a child with ASD is unable to.

Selective mutism as well can be mistaken for autism as a teacher may erroneously think the child is autistic. Also, typically developing children can certainly have anxiety at times. Look for a family history of anxiety.

Reactive attachment disorder children can seem withdrawn, detached, avoid eye contact and physical touch, and be misdiagnosed with ASD. However, they are able to have typical social interactions appropriate for their age if they feel comfortable.

Repetitive behaviors, lining up toys or walking on toes

Children with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) may line up toys and not be on the Autism Spectrum. It could be due to anxiety and a need to have control. OCD children can have normal social interaction and reciprocity, unlike ASD children. Toe walking that can become a habit is commonly outgrown and does not mean automatically that the child is on

the Autism Spectrum.

How Is Autism Diagnosed?

As a neurodevelopmental disorder, autism can be challenging to diagnose. There are no physical differences or indications of autism. Instead, the child's behavior, communication, and social skills are where to look for the presence of autism. If there are delays in these areas, accompanied by other signs and symptoms of autism, there is a possibility for a diagnosis of autism.

Parents, teachers, childcare workers, and others who regularly interact with the child are usually the first to notice delayed or atypical development. Active monitoring and regular check-ins will help make sure symptoms are identified as early as possible. One common misdiagnosis of autism, such as confusing it with ADHD, can best be avoided by tracking your child's development and noting any and all symptoms.

If signs of autism are present, your pediatrician may perform an autism evaluation. They will look at your child's development and whether they are reaching milestones along with peers and may observe how the child interacts with others. These processes will help rule out the presence of other conditions similar to autism.

Early screening and information from the schools or childcare may also help foster a correct diagnosis, increasing the likelihood that it really is autism and not something else. [ii]

How The Drake Institute Treats Autism

Getting the correct diagnosis for autism is challenging in itself; treating autism can be even more complex.

Treatment methods like medication can only reduce some symptoms

temporarily. At the Drake Institute, we use non-drug, non-invasive therapies to help patients reduce the severity and frequency of their symptoms by treating underlying brain dysregulation.

With brain mapping and neurofeedback therapy, the Drake Institute has helped thousands of patients with a variety of medical conditions, including Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, stress, anxiety, PTSD, insomnia, and more.

Here's how Drake's treatments work:

Brain Mapping

Treatment at the Drake Institute begins with brain mapping. Mapping out the patient's brain activity helps us collect information about their brain functioning and how it compares to typical development.

To start, 19 sensors are placed around the scalp to measure brainwave activity.

The results are recorded and compared to an FDA-registered reference normative database of asymptomatic, same-age individuals.

This comparison can reveal dysregulated networks in the patient's brain linked to ASD symptoms, and once these networks are identified, our Medical Director can create a custom-tailored neurofeedback and/or neurostimulation treatment protocol.

Neurofeedback

After dysregulation in the brain has been identified and the protocol created, sensors are once again placed on the patient's scalp. The instantaneous brainwave activity is recorded and displayed on a screen in a form that the patient can understand and modify to a healthier pattern to reduce

symptoms.

This non-invasive, non-pharmacological procedure empowers patients by enabling them to improve their own brain functioning.

Neurostimulation

As an adjunct to neurofeedback, we may also use neurostimulation guided by qEEG brain map findings to gently stimulate the brain into healthier functional patterns. In our experience, some patients may benefit even more from neurofeedback if we also use neurostimulation. We have found this to be particularly helpful for lower functioning children on the Autism Spectrum.

Contact The Drake Institute Today!

At the Drake Institute, we understand that anxiety, stress, PTSD, autism, and other disorders can have a negative impact on daily life. If you or a family member are suffering from any of these disorders, please reach out to the Drake Institute. Simply call 1-800-700-4233 or fill out our free consultation form.

[i] <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd>

[ii] <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/screening.html>

To get the help you or a loved one needs, call now to schedule your no-cost screening consultation.