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# DIAGNOSTIC EVALUATION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER: “WHERE ON THE SPECTRUM IS MY CHILD?”

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# AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

## Social Communication and Social Interaction

- Social-Emotional reciprocity
- Nonverbal communicative behaviors
- Developing, maintaining, understanding relationships

## Restricted Repetitive Behaviors

- Stereotyped/repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
- Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, ritualized patterns of behavior
- Highly restricted, fixated interests
- Sensory sensitivities/hyper or hypo-reactivity

# WHERE ON THE SPECTRUM DOES MY CHILD FALL?

- “Mild, Moderate, Severe” ASD
- High versus low functioning
- Levels of Support

# A DISCUSSION ON “SEVERITY”...

- Why does severity matter?
  - Families
  - Clinicians
- What is severity?
  - Language ability
  - Intellectual Functioning
  - Challenging Behaviors
  - Social Communication Impairment
  - Repetitive/Restricted Interests and Behavior
- Intensity of symptoms versus functionality

Bernier, R. (2012). How do we measure autism severity? SFARI Viewpoints. Retrieved February 2019 from <http://sfari.org/news-and-opinion/viewpoint/2012/how-do-we-measure-autism-severity>.

# DEVELOPMENT

- Individual variability in development
  - Inter and intra-individual variability
- Spectrum is heterogeneous
- Change in symptom presentation over time

# MEASUREMENT

- Multiple measurement approach
- ADOS calibrated severity score
- Adaptive measures
- IQ?

# THE ROLE OF CLINICAL JUDGEMENT

- Diagnosis relies on behavioral observations of behavioral manifestations<sup>1</sup>
- Variability in symptom severity
  - Unfolding of symptoms
  - Differing developmental trajectories
- Baseline to measure progress

<sup>1</sup>Guthrie, W., Swineford, L. B., Nottke, C., & Wetherby, A. M. (2013). Early diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder: stability and change in clinical diagnosis and symptom presentation. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry, and allied disciplines*, 54(5), 582-90.

Level 1 “Requiring Support”	
Social Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Without supports in place, deficits in social communication cause noticeable impairments.</li> <li>• Difficulty initiating social interactions, and clear examples of atypical or unsuccessful response to social overtures of others.</li> <li>• May appear to have decreased interest in social interactions. For example, a person who is able to speak in full sentences and engages in communication but whose to- and-fro conversation with others fails, and whose attempts to make friends are odd and typically unsuccessful.</li> </ul>
Restricted and Repetitive Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inflexibility of behavior causes significant interference with functioning in one or more contexts.</li> <li>• Difficulty switching between activities.</li> <li>• Problems of organization and planning hamper independence</li> </ul>



## Level 2 “Requiring Substantial Support”

### Social Communication

- Marked deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication skills
- social impairments apparent even with supports in place
- limited initiation of social interactions
- and reduced or abnormal responses to social overtures from others.
- For example, a person who speaks simple sentences, whose interaction is limited to narrow special interests, and who has markedly odd nonverbal communication.

### Restricted and Repetitive Behaviors

- Inflexibility of behavior, difficulty coping with change, or other restricted/repetitive behaviors appear frequently enough to be obvious to the casual observer and interfere with functioning in a variety of contexts.
- Distress and/or difficulty changing focus or action.

### Level 3 “Requiring Very Substantial Support”

#### Social Communication

- Severe deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication skills cause severe impairments in functioning, very limited initiation of social interactions, and minimal response to social overtures from others.
- For example, a person with few words of intelligible speech who rarely initiates interaction and, when he or she does, makes unusual approaches to meet needs only and responds to only very direct social approaches

#### Restricted and Repetitive Behaviors

- Inflexibility of behavior, extreme difficulty coping with change, or other restricted/repetitive behaviors markedly interfere with functioning in all spheres.
- Great distress/difficulty changing focus or action.

# CASE EXAMPLE

- “Ben”
- 4 years old
- ADOS module 2 CSS Score=10 “High”
  - Social Affect=15
  - RRB=6
- Full Scale IQ=71 “Borderline”
- General Adaptive Composite=63 “Extremely Low”
  - Conceptual=63
  - Social=73
  - Practical=67
- Challenging Behaviors
  - SIB
  - Tantrums
  - Incontinence

**CLINICIAN-RATED SEVERITY OF  
AUTISM SPECTRUM AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION DISORDERS**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex:  Male  Female Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:**  
This clinician-rated severity measure is used for the assessment of the **level of interference in functioning and support required as a result of:**

- a) Any social communication problems AND
- b) Any restricted interests and repetitive behaviors

for the individual diagnosed with (please select [ ✓ ] the disorder that applies to the individual receiving care):

Autism Spectrum Disorder  
OR  
 Social Communication Disorder

Based on all the information you have on the individual receiving care and using your clinical judgment, please rate (✓) the social communication problems and restricted interests and repetitive behaviors as experienced by the individual **in the past seven (7) days.**

	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<p><b>SOCIAL COMMUNICATION:</b></p> <p>Rate the level of interference in functioning and support required as a result of <b>SOCIAL COMMUNICATION</b> deficits for this individual.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> None	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Mild</b> <i>Requiring support</i> (i.e., Without supports in place, deficits in social communication cause noticeable impairments. Has difficulty initiating social interactions and demonstrates clear examples of atypical or unsuccessful responses to social overtures of others. May appear to have decreased interest in social interactions.)	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Moderate</b> <i>Requiring SUBSTANTIAL support</i> (i.e., Marked deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication skills; social impairments apparent even with supports in place; limited initiation of social interactions and reduced or abnormal response to social overtures from others.)	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Severe</b> <i>Requiring VERY SUBSTANTIAL support</i> (i.e., Severe deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication skills cause severe impairments in functioning; very limited initiation of social interactions and minimal response to social overtures from others.)
<p><b>RESTRICTED INTERESTS and REPETITIVE BEHAVIORS:</b></p> <p>Rate the level of interference in functioning and support required as a result of <b>RESTRICTED INTERESTS and REPETITIVE BEHAVIORS</b> for this individual.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> None	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Mild</b> <i>Requiring support</i> (i.e., Rituals and repetitive behaviors [RRBs] cause significant interference with functioning in one or more contexts. Resists attempts by others to interrupt RRBs or to be redirected from fixated interest.)	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Moderate</b> <i>Requiring SUBSTANTIAL support</i> (i.e., RRBs and/or preoccupations and/or fixated interests appear frequently enough to be obvious to the casual observer and interfere with functioning in a variety of contexts. Distress or frustration is apparent when RRBs are interrupted; difficult to redirect from fixated interest.)	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Severe</b> <i>Requiring VERY SUBSTANTIAL support</i> (i.e., Preoccupations, fixed rituals and/or repetitive behaviors markedly interfere with functioning in all spheres. Marked distress when rituals or routines are interrupted; very difficult to redirect from fixated interest or returns to it quickly.)

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# RESOURCES

- [Clinician-Rated Severity of Autism Spectrum and Social Communication Disorders](#)

# Questions?

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