

Strengths-Based Autism Criteria

Matt Lowry is an autistic psychologist and the parent of an autistic child. He provides a powerful neurodiversity-affirming perspective on Autism and language to help individuals and their families understand the multiple dimensions of an autistic identity.

Here are a few of his recent offerings:

Strengths-Based ASD Diagnostic Criteria

To meet diagnostic criteria for ASD according to DSM-5, a child must have persistent differences in each of three areas of social communication and interaction (see A1-A3 below) plus at least two of four types of repetitive behaviors (see B1-B4 below).

A. Different social communication and interaction as evidenced by the following:

- 1- Differences in communication- tendency to go off on tangents, tendency to talk passionately about special interests, and tendency to not engage in small talk.
- 2- Differences in nonverbal communication, including stimming while talking, looking at something else while talking, and being bored with conversations
- 3- Due to the above differences in communication, autistic people tend to be shunned by neurotypicals and therefore are conditioned to believe that we're somehow less social.

B) Repetitive behavior or interests as evidenced by at least two of the following:

- 1- Stimming or engaging in echolalia
- 2- Security in routines. Autistic people do not have a sensory filter, so the world is perceived as a constant state of chaos. Routines and expectations give comfort to overwhelmed autistic people.
- 3- SPecial INterests (SPINs)- Due to hyperconnected brains, autistic people feel more passionately about what we love, so when we have a special interest, we tend to fawn over and fixate on it.
- 4- Hyper or hyporeactivity to stimuli- Again, due to hyperconnections, we feel things more intensely. Sometimes, however, we feel things less intensely because we tune them out in favor of other stimuli.

C- We're born with these traits, but learn how to mask them. Sometimes, they only show up when we're stressed and let our guards down.

D- These traits cause other people distress. Note- the DSM ONLY indicates impairment when it affects other people or jobs, but not when it's a daily issue that we learn to live with.

E- It's not due to intellectual disability.

Matt Lowry, MS, Eds, LPP
Child & Adolescent Psychological Evaluations, LLC
St. Matthews, KY