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Autism Evaluations—What to Expect

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Evaluations for a possible autism diagnosis take place in a variety of settings including hospitals, specialized clinics, and doctors' offices. Depending on the setting and available resources, the evaluation may be single-discipline, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary (Sikora, 2008, p.19).



Single-Discipline Evaluation

One professional such as a physician or psychiatrist offers a diagnosis based on observation over a short period of time.



Multidisciplinary Evaluation

Different professionals (at least two) each separately evaluate the child and give a diagnostic opinion. The professionals may include a physician, psychiatrist, speech-language pathologist, social worker, psychologist, or other professional. They may or may not agree on the diagnosis.



Interdisciplinary Evaluation

Different professionals (at least two) evaluate the child separately and then come together and agree on a diagnosis before reporting back to the family. The professionals may include a physician, psychiatrist, speech-language pathologist, social worker, psychologist, or other professional.



Transdisciplinary Evaluation

Different professionals (at least two) work together during the evaluation and come to an agreement on the diagnosis before reporting to the family. The professionals may include a physician, psychiatrist, speech-language pathologist, social worker, psychologist, or other professional.



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Evaluations typically include four parts (Sikora, 2008, p.20):



1. Case History

Professional(s) will interview the parent about the child's mental and emotional histories.



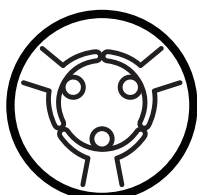
2. Parent Questionnaire

Parents fill out a written questionnaire that asks about specific areas of concern.



3. Direct Observation

Professional(s) will observe the child participating in structured activities.



4. Collateral Sources

Professional(s) will gather more information from other people who interact with the child, such as teachers or extended family members.

Diagnosing autism is important for the following reasons (Sikora, 2008, pp. 22-23):

- Professionals and parents can more easily find evidence-based treatments and accommodations.
- Diagnoses give families access to special education, financial support, advocacy groups, and many other programs.
- Diagnoses give families an explanation for their children's differences. This can lead to better understanding and guilt relief for parents.

If you suspect your child is autistic, talk to your child's doctor or contact the local children's hospital to help you find a diagnostic clinic or team of professionals.



Resources:

Sikora, D. (2008). *Differential diagnosis—If it's not autism, then what is it?* In G. R. Buckendorf (Ed.), *Autism: A guide for educators, clinicians, and parents* (pp. 19-23). Greenville, SC: Thinking Publications.

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