



Gender Differences in Autism: Awareness Helps with Early Identification

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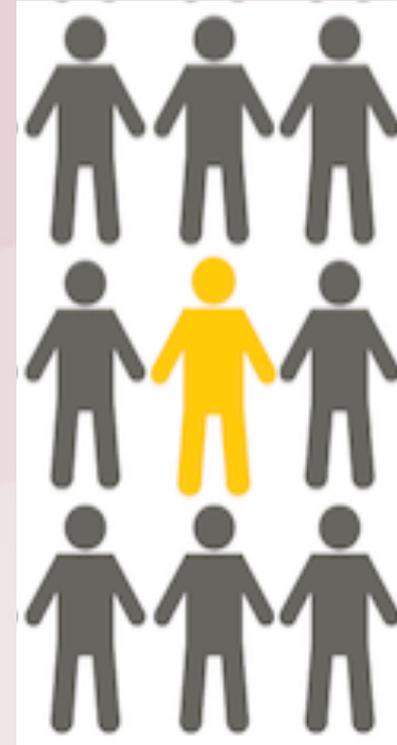
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- Ratio of boys to girls - 4:1
- May be 8:1 when IQ is greater than 70

(Ventola, 2017)





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Why is there a gender difference?

- Are girls protected from having autism?
- Are girls misdiagnosed or underdiagnosed?

Girls are diagnosed later

- Boys - 3 years
- Girls - 4 years

(Both are already too late)





The earlier children are identified, the earlier they can get the help they need.





Girls may be harder to diagnose because they present differently than boys. (Dean, et. al., 2014)

- Girls appear more socially connected
 - May be in closer proximity to other girls on playground
 - May camouflage their social interaction problems
 - Fixated on peers (want to learn about, follow and be close)
 - Later diagnosed young women, “pretend to be normal” (Bargiela, et. al.)

IQ greater than 70 (Ventola, 2017)

Boys

- Have unusual interest
- Externalize symptoms (disruptive behavior)
- More socially removed (less socially motivated)

Girls

- Have strong interests but not unusual
- Internalize symptoms
- Require more severe symptoms to get diagnosed (Bargiela, et. al.)





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- Girls may present with anxiety and depression rather than social communication problems more typically found in boys.

- While girls show stronger communication skills, they mask social understanding during diagnostic interviews (White, et. al., 2017).
- Girls also struggle with executive functioning and daily living skills.

Early Identification is Key

- Recognize early signs in boys and girls
- Involve speech-language pathologists (SLP)
 - look closely at interactions
 - document lack of engagement in conversations



No signs of

- big smiles or other warm, joyful expressions by 6 months
- back-and-forth sharing of sounds, smiles, or other facial expressions by 9 months
- back-and-forth gestures (e.g., pointing, showing, reaching or waving) by 12 months
- babbling by 12 months



- No words by 16 months
- No meaningful two-word phrases by 24 months
- Any loss of babbling, speech, or social skills at any age





Hallmark characteristics of autism

- social communication problems
- restrictive repertoire and repetitive behaviors

SLPs are often the first professionals to see children with early signs of autism

- may diagnose ASD, but typically work on teams



Early identification leads to early intervention. SLPs help with functional communication and improving quality of life.

Communication skills

- Understanding, talking with others, and early reading & writing skills

Social skills

- Sharing a common focus with others
- Playing with toys with others
- Understanding feelings
- Making and keeping friends



Eating Problems

- Children with autism may not like the way foods look, feel or smell

They may:

- Refuse new foods
- Eat a limited number of foods
- Avoid foods with different textures, colors or tastes





SLPs help children with autism interact with family, peers and others

- Ask and answer questions
- Ask for help
- Take turns in conversation
- Start and stop conversations
- Read and write
- Accept new foods



SLPs work with people using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems

- sign language
- gestures
- written words
- computers, tablets and other electronic devices, including speech generation devices (SGD)



Increase Awareness: Caregivers and Professionals

- Understand the differences in boys and girls with autism
 - Don't make assumptions that girls don't have autism
 - Recognize the differences in children with higher IQs
- Look more closely at the content of girl's communication interactions
- Recognize early signs (e.g., early screening)

Increase Awareness: Organizations

- Read and seek information
- Write articles (disseminate research)
- Give presentations
- Collaborate with other organizations on speaking and writing
- Encourage more research
- Conduct interviews with media to inform the public
- Use social media



References: Gender Differences

- [The peer relationships of girls with ASD at school: Comparison to boys and girls with and without ASD](#)
- [Autism in Girls and Women: A Panel Discussion](#)
- ['Social Camouflage' May Lead To Underdiagnosis of Autism in Girls](#)
- [Quantifying and exploring camouflaging in men and women with autism](#)
- [Sex differences in parent-reported executive functioning and adaptive behavior in children and young adults with autism spectrum disorder](#)



- [A Higher Mutational Burden in Females Supports a “Female Protective Model” in Neurodevelopmental Disorders](#)
- [The Experiences of Late-diagnosed Women with Autism Spectrum Conditions: An Investigation of the Female Autism Phenotype](#)
- [Sex and gender differences in autism spectrum disorder: summarizing evidence gaps and identifying emerging areas of priority](#)
- [Girls With Autism, ITV](#) (Documentary)



Resources: Early Detection & Identification

- [Identify The Signs of Communication Disorders](#)
- [ASHA Practice Portal Autism & Social Communication Disorder](#)
- [Autism Navigator](#)
- [First Words Project \(16by16 & Growth Charts\)](#)
- [How Does Your Child Hear and Talk](#) (brochure)
- [How Does Your Child Hear and Talk](#)