

Differential Diagnosis of Autism

Simple Activity: Select a partner.

- Look for something or someone in the room that you have an emotional reaction to.
- In a minute, get your partner to look at what you see, and feel what you feel.
- Share your excitement, appreciation, humor, sadness or any other emotional appreciation of what you observe with your partner.
- Now receive the same message from another person.
- Can you do that freely so that you really communicate the emotions that are being shared?

Then you don't have Autism.

Joint Attention

- If you want a differential diagnosis, find out whether the child can initiate joint attention.

Communication Disorders:

- Is language processing so compromised that the child cannot communicate?

Severe Attention and Motor Agitation:

- Is the child so active, or uncoordinated that he cannot connect socially?

Anxiety Disorder:

- Is the student always anxious about changes in routines?
- Does the child perservatively count objects, and rehearse routines of action?

Mood Disorder:

- Is the student rageful, with frequent mood shifts?
- Reactive around people, he will appear to be socially uncoordinated, and always at the center of peer conflict.

Loss of Memory or Language:

- Has the student's academic functioning started out working well, but has become somewhat rote, and has been declining in motor function?
- Does the child now speak in odd sentence fragments?

Sensory Integration Disorder:

- Does the student scream and yell when the air conditioner goes on?
- Does the child refuse to tuck in his shirt and plugs up his ears?

Irlen's Syndrome:

Do you have a the student who:

- blinks all the time
- reads in the dark
- is very disorganized
- falls asleep frequently?

Non Verbal Learning Disorder:

- Does the student shut down when any kind of learning task requiring reading and writing is presented?

Tourette's Syndrome

- Do you have a student whose impulse and inhibition system is so inconsistent and explosive that he cannot maintain social contact?
- Is he irritated and irritable socially, driven by a lack of inhibition controls?

Severe motor problems

- Does the student have enough motor ability to successfully complete and communicate his intentions and purposes?

Depression

- Is the child chronically withdrawn, apathetic, with a very low affect?

Differential Diagnosis?

- Can the student be taught to share emotions?
- Can the environment be adapted so that the student can share emotions?
- Joint attention is the essential social skill.