When Autistic Behavior Suggests a Disease Other than Classic Autism



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KEYWORDS

- Autism spectrum disorder Specific language impairment
- Social (pragmatic) communication disorder Anxiety disorder Selective mutism

KEY POINTS

- Most neurodevelopmental disorders are defined by their clinical symptoms and many disorders share common features.
- In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, although concerns have been raised about the accuracy of the reported prevalence rates.
- This article reviews the essential features of autism spectrum disorder and describes other
 conditions that may include similar symptoms that may be misdiagnosed as autism spectrum disorder (primary communication disorders, anxiety disorders, attachment disorders, intellectual disability, vision and hearing impairment, and normal variations).
- An approach to differential diagnosis is discussed with particular attention to evaluation of young children.

There has been a significant increase during the past decade in the number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). A disorder once thought to be exceedingly rare is now estimated to affect 1 in 45 (2.2%) US children. Public awareness campaigns by advocacy groups, testimonials by celebrities with affected children, and increased funding for treatment programs and research have also contributed to parents' and professionals' better recognition of children with this condition. However, concerns have been raised about the accuracy of the prevalence figures and the dramatic increase in autism diagnoses over time.^{1–4}

Most neurodevelopmental and behavior disorders are defined by their clinical symptoms and many disorders share common features. The key to accurate

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