

CHAPTER 9



AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

DEFINITIONS

The diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) was recently redefined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). For a diagnosis of autism, clients must demonstrate deficits in the areas of social communication and interaction across a variety of contexts, as well as repetitive or restrictive patterns of behavior. Severity of autism ranges from level 1, requiring support; to level 2, requiring “substantial” support; to level 3, requiring “very substantial support.” After it has been determined that they meet the diagnostic criteria for autism and have been assessed for severity level, those with autism are determined to present with or without intellectual impairment and with or without language impairment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Although some may be diagnosed without language impairment, it is important to keep in mind how the language impairment (or lack thereof) is defined. For example, by the definition in the DSM-5, if language impairment were to include social pragmatic difficulties, then 100% of those diagnosed with ASD would have an accompanying language impairment. If language impairment were defined by only difficulties with semantics or syntax, then not all with ASD would have language impairment. Additionally, the definition of a language impairment may include only those identified by standardized tests, or it may include both those identified by standardized measures and by authentic language/discourse samples. If it is defined by standardized measures only, then not all with autism will present with a language impairment. But if it is also defined by difficulties with discourse, then nearly—if not all—with autism could be considered to present with a language impairment (Hale & Tager-Flusberg, 2005). Often a client is diagnosed with ASD by a neurodevelopmental pediatrician, psychologist, neuropsychologist, or psychiatrist. When you begin working with a client who has received the diagnosis of autism, I advise you to use your clinical judgment about whether intervention and goals are required in the area of language.