

Preface

One of evolution's greatest, and most important, gifts to our species is our capacity to socialize. Over thousands of generations, those of our ancestors demonstrating an affinity for socialization likely found an advantage for procreation. Evolution moved our species from isolated families into groups comprising many families, each supporting the others. Perhaps as a species we derive no greater benefits than those from socialization. The capacity to socialize provides us with the support of others, enhances our survival, serves as a source of pleasure—the sharing of knowledge, friendship, and love—and advances the procreation of the species. There is little doubt that our species evolved successfully through the support of and socialization with one another.

Thus, as a developmental disorder beginning during the prenatal period and continuing through the lifespan, autism represents one of the greatest challenges to any individual. Despite the significant increase in our understanding and knowledge of autism, it continues to be a complex, often difficult concept for professionals and the public alike to appreciate. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), once thought to reflect the adverse outcome of cold and unaccepting parenting, is now recognized as a condition with strong genetic and biological roots. And as with all genetic phenomena, it is very clearly malleable through environmental experience. For individuals with ASD, genetics and biology, while affecting probability, do not speak to destiny. We now recognize the strong biological and genetic predisposition toward autism and the biopsychosocial forces that ultimately contribute to the individual course of the condition and life outcome.

From the time of its initial descriptions—Itard’s reports of the wild boy of Aveyron’s failure to use language or other forms of communication (Lane, 1977), Henry Maudsley’s description in 1967, and Leo Kanner’s first full scientific description in 1943—autism and the spectrum have fascinated researchers, mental health professionals, and the general public. Though it is a condition that occurs at a lower incidence than the common childhood conditions of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, learning disability, depression, and anxiety, the atypical nature of the behavior, mannerisms, habits, cognitive development, and, most importantly, socialization of individuals with ASD continues to challenge many of the basic theories of child development and human behavior that guide our educational systems and methods of raising children. Many theories have come and gone, and autism is still enigmatic and perplexing with patterns of behavior, rates of development, and at times significant improvement or worsening of the condition that can be difficult to understand and explain.

As Kanner and Eisenberg (1956) pointed out over half a century ago, autism is a reflection of an inborn dysfunction underlying affective engagement that is now accepted as a lifelong condition. It is no longer a matter of helping the child with ASD through a particular developmental period but rather directing and engineering a child’s transition through life to prepare him or her to function as an adult. It is thus more important now than ever that we possess valid, reliable, reasoned, and reasonable means of diagnosing, evaluating, and monitoring children with autism.

The first edition of this book arose from our interest in providing such an approach to the evaluation of autism. It focused on the assessment of autism and the spectrum of disorders that have been associated with it, reflecting dramatic growth in the field. That edition was the first text completely devoted to the evaluation of autism, providing a resource for understanding and assessment. With this much expanded and updated second edition, we believe we have set an important standard for researchers, clinicians, and caregivers, as well as a strong foundation for a consistent process of assessment and a thoughtful application of diagnostic criteria. Such a process ensures proper diagnosis and, most importantly, avoids the overstigmatization and pathologizing of normal variations in children’s behavior.

The second edition includes five entirely new chapters, including one on the current diagnostic criteria of the fifth edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), as well as a chapter on the complex issue of assessment and diagnosis of early autism. We have also added a chapter on science and pseudoscience in autism, given the large volume of misinformation that still prevails concerning the disorder, as well as a chapter detailing comprehensive case studies and one on future directions in the assessment and treatment

of ASD. As with the first edition, we have sought to bring together many of the best-known thinkers, scientists, and clinicians throughout the world in the field of autism. We are pleased that many of the authors of our first edition have added to and expanded their original chapters. Unfortunately, with the passing of the autism pioneer Dr. Lorna Wing, her epidemiology chapter addressing prevalence in our first edition could not be updated, and therefore is not included in this second edition. Incidence and prevalence issues are covered in other chapters.

One of the key goals in our initial volume was to bridge the available science to clinical practice. Since the publication of that edition, research on the assessment of ASD has continued in earnest. It is our intent in this second edition to emphasize valid and reliable methods of assessing this complex, often difficult-to-understand, condition. We have again broadly covered myriad comorbid conditions and problems that are present in many individuals on the spectrum. A broad assessment of comorbid conditions and development is critical given the high incidence of comorbidity between ASD and other behavioral, emotional, and developmental conditions. It is often these conditions that act catalytically in predicting the trajectory of a particular child's development.

The framework for *Assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorder* reflects Cohen and Volkmar's (1977) observation that there are "enormous differences among individuals with autism in their abilities and needs; among families, in their strengths and resources; and among communities and nations, in their own viewpoints and histories" (p. xvii). The second edition begins with a historical overview of autism. Our authors then address psychometric issues and current scales for assessing ASD. Since the publication of the first edition, a number of new scales have come to the marketplace; older scales have been revised and updated as well.

This volume continues by asking an important foundational question: Can a complex developmental disorder such as ASD be reliably and validly measured? We believe we answer this question affirmatively and then, along with our esteemed colleagues, proceed with chapters providing discussions of DSM-5, age-related issues and measurement of autism in very young children, assessment of social behavior, communication, and intellectual functioning. We then present chapters addressing the neuropsychological functioning of children with autism and, importantly, issues related to comorbid psychiatric conditions. The text continues with chapters addressing assessment of autism in the schools and a framework for applying assessment data to develop appropriate and individually targeted interventions.

This second edition concludes with three new chapters: the first addressing the diagnosis and assessment of ASD through case studies; a second chapter on distinguishing science and pseudoscience; and, finally, a third on future directions in the assessment and treatment of ASD.

This volume should serve the needs of a broad range of readers, from those new to the field (e.g., graduate students) to experienced clinicians and scientists across multiple disciplines. We believe this volume is also user-friendly for allied professionals and parents interested in learning about the valid and reliable assessment of autism. Along with our colleagues, it is our intent to provide a scholarly addition to the field. It is our hope that this volume will be widely used across multiple disciplines evaluating and treating ASD.

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