

## The broad autism phenotype among siblings of autistic children

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Disorders in the autism spectrum comprise a wide range of neurodevelopmental disorders. According to the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th edition, 2013), the revised definition of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) includes criteria in two major areas: chronic communication difficulties with deficits in social interactions, and restricted, repetitive behavioral patterns. The results of family and twin studies suggest that genetic factors play a role in the etiology of autism spectrum disorders.

Studies that examined additional family members of children with ASD indicate that some parents, brothers and sisters suffer from mild symptoms similar to autism. These symptoms are called "the broad autism phenotype" and refer to symptoms similar in quality to those of people with ASD but less severe.

The results of research that examined cognitive, linguistic and social-emotional abilities in siblings of autistic children testify significantly to the existence of difficulties related to the broad autism phenotype among the siblings. Because a portion of these siblings are in greater danger of developing emotional and social difficulties, educators must be made aware of the situation. It is educators' responsibility to identify such difficulties and help pupils not only with their studies but developmentally as well. Awareness of possible difficulties can aid in developing preventative plans, including early intervention in the emotional and social dimensions.