



Unit 3: AUTISM SUBTYPES AND SPECTRUM HETEROGENEITY

„Nature never draws a line without smudging it“

Lorna Wing

With the introduction of the classification systems DSM-5 (APA, 2013) and ICD-11 (WHO, 2018), the division of the former category of pervasive developmental disorders into special clinical entities such as autism, Asperger's syndrome, unspecified pervasive developmental disorder, etc. ceased to apply. There is a unique category of autism spectrum disorders in these classification systems. The idea of the autism spectrum originated with Lorne Wing in the 1980s. Even then, she realized that the numerous individual differences that exist within the autism spectrum cannot be properly understood if we try to classify individuals with autism into narrowly limited and distinctive clinical subcategories.

Contemporary autism researchers prefer to talk about the functioning profiles of people with autism, rather than separate clinical entities. It is known, for example, that autism can be accompanied by any combination of intellectual and speech-language functioning. According to ICD-11 (WHO, 2018) there are four profiles of verbal individuals on the spectrum:

1. without disorder of intellectual functioning and with mild or no impairment in functional language
2. with disorder in intellectual development and with mild or no impairment in functional language
3. without disorder of intellectual functioning and with impaired functional language
4. with disorder in intellectual development and with impaired functional language.



Impaired functional language means that a person with autism can only use single words and simple phrases for instrumental purposes. Some people on the spectrum, especially those with more severe forms of intellectual disability, never develop speech. If we take into account the large individual variations in physical and mental health, sensory profiles, family environment and life history, it is clear that we cannot expect that all potential employees diagnosed with ASD will have the same or similar support needs.

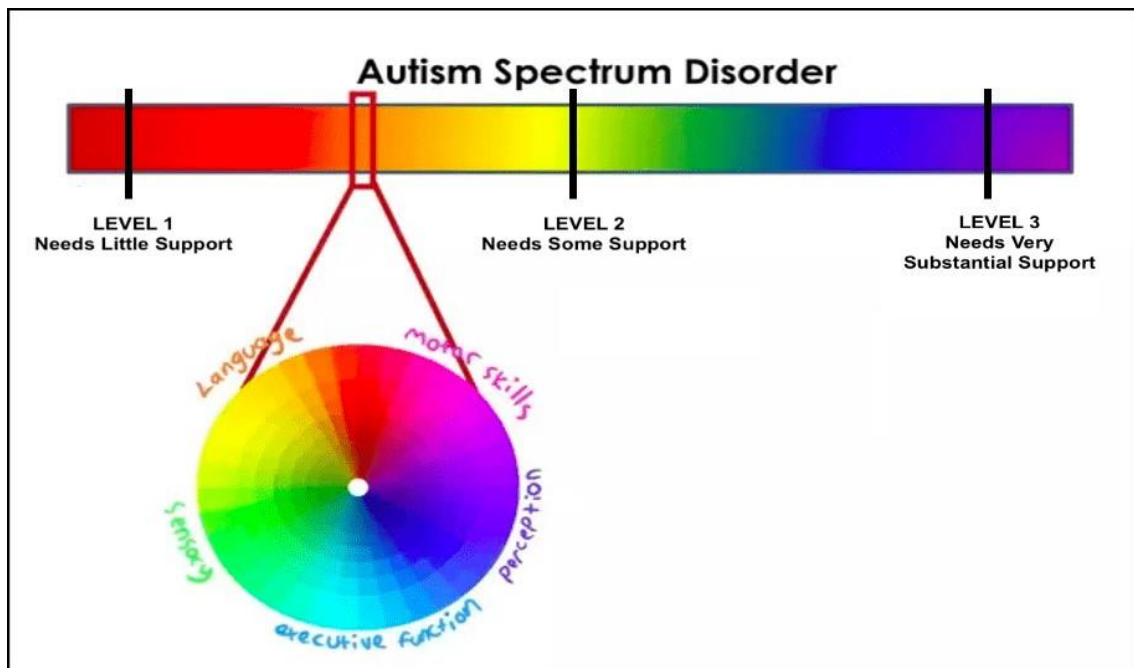


Figure 2

Autism spectrum disorder – Levels of support

The level of support needed by a person with autism depends on the context and may change over time. Based on certain parameters, it is possible to determine whether a person with autism requires minimal support (Level 1), substantial support (Level 2), or very substantial support (Level 3). The level of support needs is determined especially for the area of social communication and for the area of limited, stereotypical and repetitive activities and interests.