1887: British physician John Langdon Down describes a group of children that didn't show many of the hallmarks of more typical mental retardation, and called it developmental retardation. What Down described is referred to as low-functioning autism today.

1908: The Swiss psychiatrist & eugenist Eugen Bleuler uses the term autism to describe schizophrenic patients who were especially withdrawn in themselves:

- The autistic withdrawal of the patient to his fantasies, against which any influence from outside becomes an intolerable disturbance.

1926: The Soviet child psychiatrist Grunya Sukhareva describes boys with a condition she names schizoid personality disorder. What she described was what ultimately became known as Asperger syndrome.

1943: Austrian-American child psychiatrist Leo Kanner publishes a paper in which he describes 11 children who were highly intelligent, but with:

- A powerful desire for aloneness, and an obsessive insistence on persistent sameness.

1944: Leo Kanner coins the term early infantile autism to refer to the condition he described the year before.

1952: In the DSM-I, autism is categorized under the umbrella term childhood schizophrenia.

1981: English psychiatrist Lorna Wing publishes a paper where she introduces the English-speaking medical world to the work of Hans Asperger. To avoid confusion about the term 'autistic psychopathy', she suggests the term Asperger's syndrome.

1993: The ICD-10 includes the diagnosis Asperger syndrome.

2000: English clinical psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen is one of the researchers who use the term autism spectrum condition, and refrain from referring to it as a disorder.

2013: New research indicates differences between Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism, thus taking the generalization of ASD into question.

A Timeline Of Autism Classifications by Embrace ASD

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1944: Austrian paediatrician Hans Asperger publishes a paper in which he describes 4 boys with special talents, but also with:

- A lack of empathy, little ability to form friendships, one-sided conversations, intense absorption in a special interest, and clumsy movements.

Hans Asperger called the condition autistic psychopathy. ‘Psychopathy’ refers to mental disorders (psychopathology); it has nothing to do with what is understood by psychopathy today.

1980: The DSM-III lists infantile autism, separated from childhood schizophrenia.


1994: The DSM-IV includes the diagnosis Asperger syndrome.

2013: The DSM-5 adds autism spectrum disorder as an umbrella condition encompassing all previous separate autism-related diagnoses.

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