

FACT SHEET

Childhood Disintegrative Disorder

What is Childhood Disintegrative Disorder?

Childhood Disintegrative Disorder or CDD is a condition occurring in 3 to 4 year- olds which is characterized by deterioration over several months of intellectual, social, and language functioning. CDD is also known as Disintegrative Psychosis or Heller’s Syndrome. This rather rare condition was described many years before autism but has only recently been “officially” recognized. Children with CDD develop a condition that resembles autism, but only after a relatively prolonged period of normal development. This condition differs from autism in the pattern of onset, course, and outcome. Although relatively rare, the condition probably has frequently been incorrectly diagnosed.

The cause of Childhood Disintegrative Disorder is unknown, but as with autism, it has been linked to neurological problems. The child with this disorder loses communication skills, has regression in non-verbal behaviours, and significant loss of previously-acquired skills. The symptoms of CDD resemble those of autism.

How is it manifested?

- loss of social skills
- loss of bowel and bladder control
- loss of expressive or receptive language
- loss of motor skills
- lack of play
- failure to develop peer relations
- impairment in nonverbal behaviours
- delay in, or lack, of spoken language
- inability to start or sustain a conversation

Who is affected?

The cause of CDD is unknown. It does seem to have some association with seizures and abnormal brain activity as seen on an EEG. Children diagnosed with CDD often have a history of an illness just prior to the appearance of the regressive behaviours. Boys outnumber girls in occurrence. It is considered a rare disease.

How is it diagnosed or detected?

The child tends to have normal development through age 3 to 5 years and then over a few months undergoes a gradual loss of previously established abilities (e.g., language, motor, or social skills). Generally the diagnosis is made with a loss of functioning in at least two areas as described above.

Additional resources:

GENEVA CENTRE FOR AUTISM - www.autism.net
Geneva Centre for Autism is a multi-service agency providing direct clinical services to families living in the Greater Toronto Area (including Peel, Halton, Simcoe and York Regions). They also provide information, resources and consultation and training services to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), parents, service providers, educators and other professionals across Ontario, Canada and internationally.

References:

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed.). American Psychiatric Association

Diagnosing Autism and Other Pervasive Development Disorders [excerpt from *Autism: Basic information* (3rd ed., pp. 6-7)]. By T. Boyle