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Autistic Children Have Difficulty Distinguishing Between Living and Non-Living Things

Toddlers with autism can categorize things depending on their 'surface characteristics' but are not that good at distinguishing living from non-living things

A recent study conducted by researchers at the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University provided new information on autistic children's ability to perceive and distinguish between things. If they are as able as any other healthy peer to categorize things and objects depending on their 'surface characteristics' such as shape, size, color etc., it seems that it is more difficult for children with autism to distinguish between animated and non-animated things. The report published in the Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities presents the breakthrough findings of the team, which may have unlocked the mystery of autistic people's difficulty when it comes to recognizing the goals and aims of the others. This can be all due to the fact that autistic individuals have their ability of distinguishing between living and non-living things delayed. The study was conducted on 11 autistic infants between 34 to 46 months who had to recognize and distinguish between very similar objects. If children involved in the study were able to recognize stable things, they had difficulty when it came to distinguish between objects moved in front of them by a team member (such as a toy cat) and living things which/who can move on their own. The report was co-authored by David Rakison, a psychologist at the Carnegie Mellon University and Cynthia Johnson, Director of the Autism Center at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. David Rakison wrote: "People have not really studied these conceptual deficits in very young children as the possible basis for the social and cognitive deficits in older children and adults with autism. This study opens the door for further research of preschool-age children, which could aid us in the development of possible diagnostic tools and therapies. Children with autism have the best outcomes when they are diagnosed and begin treatment at an early age."