

AUTISM: EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION VS. MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS

There are two ways to receive a label of autism: one is through the school system and the other is through the medical system. Each one is a little bit different, and you'll want to understand who gives each label, how each one works, and what kind of services you'll get access to through each.

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS

Who gives the label?	A team of multidisciplinary school professionals.	A therapist or mental health professional.
What services does the label give you access to?	Special education services, specifically an Individualized Education Program (IEP) containing goals and objectives, along with accommodations, modifications, and supports.	Services covered by insurance, like individual therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, or medication.
What criteria does it use?	Criteria provided by the Minnesota Department of Education. Includes the requirement that the student <i>must</i> need special services in school.	The DSM-5, which is used to diagnose mental health conditions in the United States.
Who is eligible for this label?	Children ages 3-21, may be younger for Early Intervention services.	People of any age and background.
When/why would you pursue this label?	Parents or teachers will ask for this label if a child is struggling in school and needs support. Even if a child already has a medical diagnosis, it does not guarantee that they will receive an educational qualification.	People pursue medical diagnosis to get access to insurance coverage for services, to qualify for state/county disability supports, to be legally protected under the ADA in housing, employment, etc. or for personal understanding.