

What is 'autism spectrum,' exactly?

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.**

If I tell people that I have two autistic brothers, I often get asked some variation of the same question: "Where are they on the spectrum?" There are better and worse ways that people ask. "How bad are they?" is a worse way. So is any form of asking whether they're "high-functioning or low-functioning."

"How much support do they need?" is much better. But no matter how the question is asked, it is always really hard to answer. My brothers' behaviors have changed drastically over time. I don't feel like I know enough other autistic people to compare them on a line. And I don't even know what that line would measure.

The terms "high-functioning" and "low-functioning" have no medical meaning. Nearly every expert I talked to referenced a common mantra in autism: *When you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism.* Which sounds nice, but is not particularly helpful when looking for meaning.

"With the spectrum, there's a wide range, we're still trying to figure out what that wide range means," said Stephen Edelson, the director of the Autism Research Institute. "I don't have a great answer. Scientific understanding of autism certainly continues to evolve," said Paul Wang, the head of medical research at Autism Speaks.

**Read full, original post:** [Is a 'Spectrum the Best Way to Talk About Autism?](#)