

**Children also get depressed: how to detect autism, ADHD, anxiety and other mental disorders in childhood early, by Dr. Nuria Núñez**

**Los niños también se deprimen: cómo detectar a tiempo el autismo, el TDAH, la ansiedad y otros trastornos mentales en la infancia, de la Dra. Nuria Núñez**  
**As crianças também ficam deprimidas: como detectar precocemente o autismo, a PHDA, a ansiedade e outras perturbações mentais na infância, por Dra. Nuria Núñez**

**Carolina Gutiérrez Gómez**

Universidad de Málaga

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7577-8568>

Caro200508@gmail.com

**Abstract**

This book is divided into four sections, in which the author discusses mental health, the importance of diagnosing certain childhood disorders, and respectful parenting at all developmental stages of children: birth, early childhood, preschool, and school age. This psychiatrist emphasizes the importance of establishing a secure attachment with our children from birth, and how much this will influence their psychological well-being. She also stresses the importance of being mindful of young children's emotions and the various factors that can lead to mental health problems, such as screen time or unwanted pregnancies.

**Keywords:** Childhood anxiety, autism, childhood depression, pedagogy, ADHD, childhood mental disorders.

**Resumen**

Este libro se divide en cuatro bloques, en los cuales la autora habla sobre salud mental, la importancia del diagnóstico de ciertos trastornos en la infancia, y la crianza respetuosa en todas las etapas evolutivas de los niños y las niñas: nacimiento, primera infancia, etapa preescolar y etapa escolar. Esta psiquiatra destaca la relevancia de conseguir crear un apego seguro con nuestros/as hijos/as desde que nacen, y lo mucho que influirá esto en el bienestar psicológico de estas/os niñas/os, de tener en cuenta las emociones de los/as más pequeños/as, y las diversas causas que pueden llevar a estos/as chicos/as a tener problemas en su salud mental, como, por ejemplo, el uso de pantallas o los embarazos no deseados.

**Palabras clave:** Ansiedad infantil, autismo, depresión infantil, pedagogía, TDAH, trastornos mentales

de la infancia.

## Resumo

Este livro está dividido em quatro secções, nas quais a autora aborda a saúde mental, a importância do diagnóstico de certas perturbações infantis e a parentalidade respeitadora em todas as fases do desenvolvimento infantil: nascimento, primeira infância, pré-escolar e idade escolar. Esta psiquiatra realça a importância de estabelecer um vínculo seguro com os filhos desde o nascimento e como isso influencia o seu bem-estar psicológico. Realça ainda a importância de estarmos atentos às emoções das crianças pequenas e aos diversos fatores que podem levar a problemas de saúde mental, como o tempo excessivo em frente aos ecrãs ou gravidezes indesejadas.

**Palavras-chave:** Ansiedade infantil, autismo, depressão infantil, pedagogia, PHDA, perturbações mentais na infância.

The importance and necessity of secure attachment for babies is the subject of the first part of this work. This type of attachment ensures that the child's needs and stimuli are properly met by their parents; this is also related to mirror neurons and the neuroplasticity of the baby's brain. By always being attended to, babies learn that when they cry, they will be able to calm down, and they will experience the feeling of being loved and belonging to a family (Núñez, 2024, p. 41).

Ideally, this secure attachment should be accompanied by a parenting style known as assertive parenting, which emphasizes dialogue, reasoning, and unconditional support for these children. Through all of this, we make them aware that they are worthy of receiving love, in addition to improving their socio-emotional skills (Duarte-Rico et al., 2016). This is very important and will help them have much healthier future relationships with others. Furthermore, it creates girls and boys who are much more self-confident and have higher self-esteem (Núñez, 2024, p. 28).

There are other parenting styles; the opposite of the one mentioned above is authoritarian parenting, with which young children tend to develop an avoidant attachment style. This parenting style, according to various researchers (Duarte-Rico et al., 2016), places great value on discipline, obedience, and maintaining order at home... however, from a respectful parenting perspective, it is a clear example of how to correct children without negative consequences for them (Mantilla, 2023): it causes children to fear their own parents, creates a disconnection from their own emotions, makes them very self-sufficient, makes them feel they don't deserve love or "don't need it..." hence they avoid anything related to emotions, and believe they are worthy of attention only if they achieve great things, such as good grades. Because of all this, they can suffer from anxiety and eating disorders, among other things, since they physically express what they keep silent about emotionally (Núñez, 2024, p. 30).

UNICEF (2025) shows that a large percentage of adolescents report having mental health problems, a major issue in our society that could be partially mitigated with respectful teaching and parenting methods. Starting here, we could achieve small changes.

When many parents consult specialists, worried about their children and the reason for their visit, they often prefer to focus solely on the present and what is happening now. However, this author emphasizes the importance of understanding other aspects that may seem irrelevant but are not, such as their experience of the pregnancy, whether it was planned, if they suffered from postpartum depression, and what kind of upbringing they received as children (Núñez, 2024, p. 47). These aspects are important to understand because (Duarte-Rico et al., 2016) families' behavior and beliefs reflect how children behave.

All of these issues can help determine if a safe home environment exists and understand the emotional state of caregivers, since being aware of parents' history can be a significant indicator of some of the symptoms many children present with. Therefore, it is important to understand our own experiences and choose what we want to pass on to our children and what we should discard (Núñez, 2024, p. 48).

Part II of this book focuses on early childhood and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is only now beginning to receive the attention it truly deserves. Dating back to the 20th century, there are older books that describe cases that may coincide with cases of ASD, which were then called "childhood schizophrenia," "wild children," or "sacred idiots" (Rivera-Domínguez & Concepción-García, 2024)... it was also thought that this was a consequence of cold and distant mothers, and even, in 1935, Hans Asperger spoke of "psychologically abnormal children."

One thing must be quite clear: this disorder does not occur because of the mothers' attitudes in raising their children; it is something that goes beyond that and influences the brain development of children. Even so, the exact causes of this phenomenon are still unknown (Núñez, 2024, p. 70). ASD can vary greatly, hence the term neurodiversity; each person has a unique brain with different functions. Because of this, some cases are very obvious and clear, while others can be very complex to diagnose.

How can a case of ASD be detected? There are two phenomena that can strongly indicate a diagnosis: Difficulty in verbal or non-verbal language, and in social relationships... these two peculiarities must be accompanied by one or more of the following aspects: behavioral disturbances, peculiar interests, or alterations in sensory processing (Núñez, 2024, p. 73). Each case may be different, and it may even be combined with other disorders such as, for example, ADHD: 28% of people live with both (Núñez, 2024, p. 82).

Some children may not exhibit all of these symptoms; however, a crucial element in the diagnostic

process is early detection by parents. Even if they know nothing about autism, they perceive unusual behaviors in their children. Thirty percent of parents detect it before 12 months, 50% before 18 months, 80% before 24 months, and 90% before 4 years. It's important to note, however, that it's not the parents' fault whether they detect it earlier or later, as other professionals, such as teachers, also play a role in its detection (Núñez, 2024, p. 84).

The preschool stage, between the ages of two and five, occupies the third part of the work. It is now that children begin to recognize their individuality but are not yet able to develop empathy. This leads them to be in a rather egocentric stage, accompanied by tantrums and outbursts, as they still lack the vocabulary and emotional management skills to express their dissatisfaction with something. Therefore, they do so with shouting or tantrums. For this reason, the way parents act is crucial at this stage of childhood, as they have a duty to teach their children to manage their own emotions (Núñez, 2024, p. 92).

A fairly common way of dealing with tantrums today is through the use of screens (mobile phones, tablets, etc.). It is quite normal to see any baby with a mobile phone in their hands, and it is important, as parents, to be aware of all the negative consequences this can have. The images children see, so colorful and eye-catching, aim to capture their complete attention. In fact, these screens change scenes every 15 seconds or less, disconnecting them from the real world around them. A very noticeable consequence of this is these children's inability to concentrate.

All children should be able to regulate their emotions, both pleasant and unpleasant. However, if parents respond to their boredom, cries, or need for attention by giving them a mobile phone, we are depriving them of developing their capacity for self-restraint and emotional regulation. Scientific studies show that this has many negative consequences, both in the short and long term (Núñez, 2024, p. 95). According to the author, responsible screen use is necessary: no screen time for children aged 0 to 2; From ages 3 to 5, screen time should be limited to less than one hour per day and always under parental supervision; from ages 6 to 9, a usage schedule should be established based on the child's needs for schoolwork; and finally, from ages 10 to 18, children may be able to acquire their first mobile phone, but with limits and schedules (Núñez, 2024, p. 96).

A study conducted by Waisman (Rodríguez & Estrada, 2023) showed that, before the age of two, 80.3% of children watch television and 37.4% use touchscreens. All of the above can cause anxiety and sleep disorders. Regarding the latter, studies show that simply having a technological device in the bedroom alters sleep quality, especially if children use them right before going to sleep (Núñez, 2024, p. 119).

In conclusion, Part IV of this book is called the school stage, which begins at age 6 and is usually considered to end at age 12. At this time, children begin to integrate into society and prepare to

become new members of it (Núñez, 2024, p. 133). Special learning needs such as ADHD or giftedness begin to appear, as cases of school dropout or academic difficulties may start to be observed (Núñez, 2024, p. 136). In addition, other types of disorders may be present, such as depression, avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID), or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (Núñez, 2024, p. 143). They also begin to understand who they are, their place in the family, and start to reflect on themselves and their actions. They may even begin to show signs of low self-esteem. One last piece of advice, as the author of this book points out (Núñez, 2024, p. 202): never remain in doubt, and if you have a question, ask.

## References

- Duarte-Rico, L., García-Ramírez, N., Rodríguez-Cruz, E. & Bermúdez-Jaimes. M. (2016). Las prácticas de crianza y su relación con el Vínculo Afectivo. *Revista Iberoamericana de Psicología: Ciencia y Tecnología*, 9(2), 113-124. <https://reviberopsicologia.ibero.edu.co/article/view/970>
- Mantilla, M. J. (2023). Autorregulación y protagonismo en la crianza. La agencia en el modelo de crianza respetuosa en Argentina. *Anthropologica*, 41(51), 213-228. <https://doi.org/10.18800/anthropologica.202302.008>
- Núñez, N. (2024). *Los niños también se deprimen: Cómo detectar a tiempo el autismo, el TDAH, la ansiedad y otros trastornos mentales en la infancia*. La Esfera de los Libros.
- Rivera-Domínguez, O. & Concepción-García, A. (2024). Un acercamiento a la evolución histórica del autismo. *Santiago. Revista de la Universidad de Oriente*, (165), 186–201. <https://santiago.uo.edu.cu/index.php/stgo/article/view/28812>
- Rodríguez, O. & Estrada, L. C. (2023). Incidencia del uso de pantallas en niñas y niños menores de 2 años. *Revista de Psicología*, 22(1), 86-101. <https://doi.org/10.24215/2422572Xe086>
- UNICEF. (2025). *La salud mental se convierte en prioridad para la infancia y juventud*. <https://ciudadesamigas.org/salud-mental-prioridad-infancia/>