



OAASIS INFORMATION SHEET

Asperger Syndrome and Driving

Office for
Advice
Assistance
Support
and
Information
on
Special needs

Helpline:
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www.oasis.co.uk

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OAASIS
A part of
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Services



People with Asperger Syndrome (AS) are not precluded from driving solely because of their diagnosis.

Driving is a skill: it may take as few as six lessons to learn how to do it safely in real-life situations; or it may take as many as 100 lessons!

It may take someone with AS a lot longer to learn all the *implications* of driving, but it should not affect how long it takes to learn the rules and facts in The Highway Code, nor the correct physical handling of the controls of a vehicle.

What may be a problem is the ability to judge what other road users, pedestrians, animals etc *might* do and how this should affect their own driving; understanding that not all drivers and other road users obey all of the rules all of the time; that it is not their place to judge and sentence other, less able, road users ('road rage'). Learning to ride a bike as a child and passing the Cycling Proficiency Test would be a very good foundation for anyone with AS as this will help them become more aware of the possible actions of other drivers and pedestrians. Also having an instructor who is aware of the anxieties and other issues that someone with AS will have will go a long way towards calm, positive lessons where what is taught and being learnt is remembered and recalled.

An extract taken from Marc Segar's (1974-1997) book: **Coping: A Survival Guide for People with Asperger Syndrome. Driving:**

- "Driving is quite a bizarre skill to learn. How fast you pick up driving often has nothing at all to do with your intelligence in other things. Some real dimwits are still able to drive in as few as five lessons whereas some really intelligent people can need as many as fifty lessons.
- I myself went through sheer hell learning to drive. The most difficult thing for me was planning in advance and thinking ahead. I also had a very heavy telling-off from one of my driving instructors.
- Try to find a sensitive instructor if you can. Some driving instructors can be opinionated, randy, impulsive or impatient.
- As already pointed out, try not to compare yourself with other people. Other people might be exaggerating about how few lessons they needed and might be lying when they say they passed first time.
- Slow progress is still progress."

(The full book can be viewed at www.asperger-marriage.info, click on 'Survival Guide'.)

FIRST THINGS FIRST - Will a provisional licence be granted?

Before any application for a provisional licence is made, it would be advisable to discuss the plan to learn to drive with a GP. The doctor will have access to the DVLA guidelines for people with disabilities wishing to learn to drive. The DVLA employs its own fully qualified Medical Advisers to establish whether drivers who have medical conditions satisfy the conditions for safe driving. If in any doubt, contact: *Drivers Medical Group, DVLA, Swansea SA99 1DL* who will be able to offer guidance or visit their website at www.dvla.gov.uk, where you will find a page on the Medical Conditions which require notification, and one of them is Asperger Syndrome (www.dvla.gov.uk/media/pdf/medical/aagvl.pdf - page 31)

If a parent is contacting the Medical Adviser on behalf of their son or daughter, his advice will be useful when reporting back to them. This is a delicate area: if the Medical Adviser has indicated that a provisional licence may not be granted, the disappointment / resentment will need careful handling.

APPLYING FOR A PROVISIONAL LICENCE

When applying for a Provisional Licence, the application form includes a series of health questions and the applicant **must** declare his Asperger Syndrome in the relevant section of the form. A medical questionnaire will then be sent, however the appropriate medical questionnaire can be downloaded from the DVLA website and sent together with the application form to the address above, this will speed up the application. If possible a decision will be made from the information provided and it may be advisable to supply current medical reports to support the application, otherwise reports may be requested from his doctor.

Once a provisional licence has been granted, there will be no indication on it that the holder has AS.

To be granted a full licence, the learner driver must pass both sections of the driving test, meeting the standards set by the national driving test centres. If he is told that he has passed, and he is therefore able to apply for a full licence, then it must be supposed that he has fully met the necessary *test standards*.

Once a full licence is granted, there will be no indication on it that the driver has an autistic spectrum disorder.

SHOULD DRIVING BE AN OPTION?

The **Forum of Mobility Centres** is a network of 17 independent organisations covering the UK where people with disabilities, including Asperger Syndrome, are taught to drive. A list of the centres can be obtained from their website www.mobility-centres.org.uk (Tel: 0800 559 3636), or Mobilise (formerly the Disabled Drivers' Association) via their website www.mobilise.info or their Helpline **01508 489449**.

The Mobility Centres offer advice and assessment to 'those with a medical condition that impacts upon their ability to make appropriate decisions with regard to safe driving' and a preliminary off-road assessment after which they will give their opinion as to the candidate's likelihood of learning to drive successfully and over what length of time.

BSM have experienced senior instructors that have an understanding of special needs. A driving simulator is used for the first lessons to master the basic driving skills and an assessment carried out before going on the road. To find your nearest centre visit their website at www.bsm.co.uk or telephone the central office on **08457 276276**.

Such assessments would be a good option to consider before sending off for a provisional licence, and before signing up for what might be a long and probably expensive period of learning to drive. Even if the DVLA feel that a provisional licence is likely to be granted, it does not follow that learning to drive is going to be an easy or enjoyable activity. So a 'trial run' might be a very good first step. It would also help the prospective driver discover if he is going to be happy and comfortable, not only being a driver in charge of a vehicle, but also spending time learning from a driving instructor.

The driving test is an assessment of a candidate's ability to control a motor vehicle during a very short drive, and his knowledge of the Highway Code. It is *not* an accurate gauge as to how good a driver that person will be under exceptional or emergency situations.

INSURANCE

When applying for motor insurance, the application form will ask if the applicant has any disability, and if the DVLA is aware of it. Again, it is essential to declare all relevant information, as failure to do so is likely to make the insurance invalid.

Some insurance companies will not quote for people who have disabilities. All companies load their premiums for 'young drivers' (those under 25), whom they consider have little or no road-use experience.

Many young people under 25, therefore, may discover to their dismay that once having successfully learnt to drive, passed their driving test and received their full driving licence, affordable insurance is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find.

OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS

Mobilise (formerly the Disabled Drivers' Assoc)	Website: www.dda.org.uk		Tel: 01508 489449
DVLA Medical Group:	Website: www.dirct.gov.uk/motoring	Drivers	Tel: 0870 600 0301
DVLA customer enquiries		Vehicles	Tel: 0870 240 0010
DVL NI (Driver & Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland)	Website: www.dvlni.gov.uk		Tel: 0845 402 4000
National Autistic Society:	Website: www.autism.org.uk		Tel: 0845 070 4004

READING - see also OAASIS information sheet 'Books – where to find them'

Check these publishers for new books on Asperger Syndrome/autistic spectrum disorders, which come out regularly:

Routledge Education – Tel: 0207 017 6000 Fax: 0207 017 6699 Website: www.routledge.com/education

Order via Taylor Francis Group – Email: webmaster.books@tandf.co.uk

Jessica Kingsley Publishers - Website: www.jkp.com Email: post@jkp.com Tel: 0207 833 2307.

The NAS - Website: www.autism.org.uk HO Publications Dept Tel: 0207 903 3595. NAS books are ordered via Central Books Ltd Tel: 0845 458 9911. Email nas@centralbooks.com.

SEN Marketing - Website: www.senbooks.uk.com. Email: info@senbooks.uk.com. Tel/Fax: 01924 871697.

And the **internet book shop** www.amazon.co.uk.

Cambian Education Services run seven residential special schools and colleges for young people with autistic spectrum disorders, Asperger Syndrome/HFA, severe learning difficulties. OAASIS can send you their prospectuses.

OAASIS produces a wide range of **free Information Sheets**. Please contact OAASIS (see front of sheet for contact details) for the full list, or view them on the website at www.oaasis.co.uk. All the sheets are checked annually; please ensure you have the current version.

OAASIS produces other, chargeable publications. Send for a list and order form or check the website.