

Asperger Syndrome

Asperger Syndrome is a disorder on the autistic spectrum that causes restrictions to normal functioning in communication, in socialisation, in imagination - the ability to behave and think with any level of flexibility, and, often, in physical co-ordination and sensory perception (our information sheet on Autism explains this in greater detail). It affects boys and girls, but affects boys in significantly higher numbers. An Austrian psychiatrist, Hans Asperger, originally described it in 1944.

Children with autism exhibit, to a greater or lesser degree, a Triad of Impairment that is the defining characteristic of autism:

- **Communication:** Language impairment across all modes of communication: speech, intonation, gesture, facial expression, two-way conversation and other body language.
- **Imagination:** Rigidity and inflexibility of thought process: resistance to change, obsessional and ritualistic behaviour.
- **Socialisation:** Difficulties with social relationships, poor social timing, lack of social empathy, rejection of normal body contact, inappropriate eye contact. *(Dr Lorna Wing)*

Like many autistic spectrum disorders, Asperger Syndrome is a very individual syndrome. There will be wide variations in the physical and mental symptoms, in the degree of difficulties it presents, and in any early signs that parents noted. The presence of other disorders (see below) may confuse the issue. In brief -

- People with AS are sometimes described as having High Functioning Autism but the two are usually diagnosed as separate conditions.
- Usually, no significant language delay is noted during the early years.
- AS people are usually of average intelligence and above, who have good verbal skills – but the content of speech may be abnormal, with lengthy discussions on a favourite subject, words may be invented, words repeated over and over.
- Good verbal skills mask a tendency to rely on literal meaning (e.g. hop off the bus) and an inability to read body language and facial expressions. Subtle verbal jokes may not be understood.
- There may be little facial expression, gestures may be limited, and intonation can be monotonous.
- Poor physical and visual motor skills, clumsiness and poor co-ordination are seen as characteristics of AS. There are cases where these difficulties are not present.
- People with AS usually have a narrow range of interests and become very knowledgeable, sometimes to the exclusion of all else; an adherence to specific rituals and a pronounced lack of flexibility and imagination.
- They have excellent rote memories.
- People with AS do not like change. They like 'sameness'. They are comfortable in their routines.

- People with AS make better efforts to adapt socially than do those with autism. They have a genuine desire to make social contact but there are problems with two-way social interaction and not understanding social behaviour rules, problems can occur in relationships as adolescents/adults.
- Anxiety features significantly in the lives of those affected. Often the anxiety is related to low self-esteem, fear of failure; fear of being misunderstood and of not understanding others. There is also the anxiety associated with an awareness of being different and not fitting in.
- People with AS can be very egotistical and chauvinistic, and create impossibly high standards for themselves in all that they do.

Problems

Typically, a child with AS may appear to be coping academically in primary school but have a high level of anxiety and lack of friends. He is also likely to be exhibiting some disruptive behaviour, either at home, or at school, or both. This behaviour may have been odd and noticed at home from an earlier age, but may have been discounted by professionals as not being significant.

Sometimes the transfer to secondary school takes place before real problems surface. The difficulties may not be academic (he is frequently top of the class). They are more likely to be because he does not understand the behaviour and intentions of those around him, the meanings of the instructions and lessons, or is unable to interpret the wide variety of verbal and non-verbal language used by his teachers and peers.

They can be prone to being bullied due to their lack of social skills and for their reactions. The implications of AS are widespread in the social setting of the home or school.

Asperger Syndrome is known to coexist with other syndromes, such as

Attention Deficit / Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) - a condition giving rise to inattention and impulsivity, often combined with extreme levels of motor activity.

Dyspraxia - a problem with gross and/or fine motor skills.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder - when ritualistic actions such as constant hand washing etc. have to be performed, sometimes many hundreds of times a day, before the sufferer can move on.

Speech and Language problems (e.g. SPD – Semantic Pragmatic Disorder) - lack of understanding idioms, inability to use appropriate speech in appropriate places and a tendency to take everything literally. Plus possibly -

Anxieties and phobias - people with AS are often nervous and anxious of any change in their lives; they can also be unnaturally afraid of quite ordinary things.

Depression - people with AS can become depressed about their lack of a social life, their inability to function independently at school or college, if they feel rejected by potential friends or employers.

Useful Contacts

The National Autistic Society the largest autism charity in the UK can help with local support groups; information on Asperger Syndrome for individuals, parents, professionals; befriending; training; links and much more.

Web: www.autism.org.uk

Helpline: 0845 070 4004 (10am-4pm)

Parent to Parent line: 0800 9520 520

Advocacy for Edu Service: 0845 070 4002

Befriending Scheme: 0115 911 3369

Social Programmes: 0115 8473540

They also have an assessment and diagnostic centre in Kent.

Tel: 020 8466 0098

Resources for Autism aims to fill the gaps in practical services for those on the spectrum by providing music and art therapy, adult art and social groups, play, youth and holiday scheme provision and home based family support.

Web: www.resourcesforautism.org.uk

Email: admin@resourcesforautism.org.uk

Tel: 020 8458 3259

Autism Independent UK offers information on their website, a diagnostic & assessment resource centre, helpline, training (mostly for professionals but also for parents), library of books and videos and are developing group homes.

Web: www.autismuk.com

Email: autism@autismuk.com

Tel: 01536 523274

Autism London provides support for those affected by autism & Asperger syndrome, living in London.

Tel: 0845 603 7954

Web: www.autismlondon.org.uk

Email: info@autismlondon.org.uk

Autism Research Centre

Based at Cambridge University, ARC does research to understand the causes of autism and develop new methods for assessment and intervention. You can download from their website various tests for autism and Asperger syndrome.

Web: www.autismresearchcentre.com

Tel: 01223 746057

Contact a Family provides support, information and advice to families with disabled children or those with a medical condition.

Web: www.cafamily.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 808 3555

Autism NI (PAPA) The Northern Ireland Autism Charity

Tel: 028 90 401729

Web: www.autismni.org

The Scottish Society for Autism

Web: www.autism-in-scotland.org.uk

Tel: 01259 720044

Irish Autism Action

Organisation of parents for parents, with first hand knowledge of discovering & coping with autism.

Web: www.autismireland.ie

Email: info@autismireland.ie

Tel: 044 933 1609

Helpline: 1890 818 518

Reading

See also OASIS information sheet '**Books – where to find them**'

OASIS publishes **A First Guide to Asperger Syndrome (2nd edition)** in its First Guide series (Price £6.00 plus p&p or you can download it free from our website). Publications list/order form available on our website, or email/telephone for one to be sent to you. **OASIS free Information Sheets:** including others on aspects of AS, please contact OASIS for the full list or download them on the website **www.oasis.co.uk**.

Information for parents - autistic spectrum disorders a free booklet with lots of advice and contacts available from DFES Publications, **Tel: 0845 602 2260** or download from **www.earlysupport.org.uk** (go to 'Materials' and then 'Information for Parents').

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

Routledge Education (member of the Taylor Francis Group)

Tel: 020 7017 6563 (Marketing)

Website: www.routledgeeducation.com (academic and research based) or www.routledge teachers.com for teachers.

Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Web: www.jkp.com

Email: post@jkp.com

Tel: 020 7833 2307

The NAS - The NAS books are supplied by Central Books. You can order online or telephone them.

Web: www.autism.org.uk

Tel: 0845 458 9911

SEN Marketing: Books and software for special educational needs.

Web: www.senbooks.co.uk

Tel: 01924 871697

The internet book shop **www.amazon.co.uk**

Internet sites

If you have Internet access try the following for a wide range of articles:

www.aspergerfoundation.org.uk is a practical website with info sheets, training details and a bi-monthly newsletter (ASC Guide).

www.autism-help.org a site set up by an Australian social worker/parent of an autistic child. It has a huge amount of information.

www.faaas.org is a site for families of adults with AS.

www.maapservices.org a US site for more advanced individuals with Autism, AS and Pervasive Developmental Disorder.

www.tonyattwood.com.au Dr Tony Attwood's website has a mine of information and articles for parents and people with AS.

www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/ a very informative and full American site, run by OASIS (On-Line AS Information & Support).

www.users.dircon.co.uk/~cns/ for University Students with Autism and AS.

For more organisations look at our separate OASIS Information Sheet on Useful Contacts and Websites.



www.cambianeducation.com

Cambian is the largest provider of specialist residential education and care for young people with Autism, Asperger Syndrome and other associated complex needs in the United Kingdom. Cambian is trusted by hundreds of parents and over 70 Local Education Authorities

OASIS publications

- SEN Information Sheets
- First Guide to ...
- Cards explaining 9 learning disabilities
- Legal advice Information Sheets
- SEN 'How to' guides

All OASIS publications can be downloaded from **www.oasis.co.uk**