



Asperger's Syndrome Information for schools

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For copies of this publication, please call our office

Asperger Syndrome - Information for Schools.

Asperger Syndrome (also known as AS) is a form of Autism.

Children with Asperger Syndrome generally have difficulties in the following areas:

Communication

- Spoken language - may have difficulty putting thoughts into words, may speak loudly, may correct the language of others, may take what seems like a long time to respond to a question
- Understanding of language - may have difficulty understanding others (even though he/she speaks well or has above average vocabulary) may have difficulty with humor, sarcasm, idioms, abstract language, etc.
- Non-verbal understanding of others - may not remember faces or understand facial expressions, may not see or understand body language, may not be aware of commonly understood social rules
- Non-verbal self expression – may not make eye contact, may stare, may make unusual facial expressions or grimaces, may stand too close

Social relationships

- Often have difficulty maintaining relationships with same age peers
- May not understand the give and take of social relationships
- May not understand that others have different thoughts or feelings or have a different point of view

Restricted, repetitive interests, routines, rituals or motor mannerisms (often related to anxiety)

- may flap hands, rock body, etc.
- may insist on doing things in a certain order
- may talk about only one topic

Additional Common Difficulties:

- Anxiety – many children have anxiety disorders including generalized anxiety disorder, phobias, panic attacks or obsessive compulsive disorder.
- Heightened or Suppressed Emotional States – may become extremely upset, angry, excited or happy and have difficulty settling or shifting gears, or alternately, may seem unresponsive and withdrawn.
- Sensory Irregularities – over-sensitive or under-sensitive to sound, light, touch, smell and/or taste including difficulties with balance and awareness of his/her body in space.
- Difficulty with change of any kind, transitions from one activity to the next, new situations, surprises, disappointments, etc.
- Motor difficulties – may have difficulty learning to print or write.
- Organization – may have difficulty managing personal belongings, homework, time management, planning etc.

- Learning disabilities - may have a wide range of difficulties including auditory or visual processing, short term memory, etc.
- Attention problems – may have difficulty knowing what he/she is supposed to be focusing on, may have difficulty maintaining focus.
- Depression – some children become depressed at a very young age, many children experience depression as they age, depression may express itself in sadness, crying, sleep difficulties, withdrawing, self-abusive behavior, or aggression.

Typical Positive Qualities of Children with Asperger Syndrome (AS)

- Intelligent and creative
- Committed and loyal in relationships
- Honest
- Logical thinkers
- Advanced knowledge in their areas of interest
- Precise, attention to detail
- May have excellent rote memory

Asperger Syndrome – An Autism Spectrum Disorder

Each child diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome is different and each child will be affected differently across each of the many characteristics listed above. An approach which works with one child will not necessarily work with another.

Children with Asperger syndrome may:

- withdraw or be demanding
- excel academically or have severe learning disabilities
- withdraw in the face of fear, or become aggressive
- display repetitive movements or not display any.

Asperger Syndrome is a complex disorder and children's behavior is often misunderstood. What may look like laziness, disrespect or willful defiance, may actually be:

- anxiety
- difficulty understanding what has been asked
- difficulty changing from one activity to the next
- inability to figure out how to do what has been asked.

Children with AS may appear to be more competent than they actually are. Often the children have had years of involvement with speech and language pathologists, medical specialists, special education teachers, behavioral therapists, and other professionals. Over time children often make significant advances in their development and behavior. However, the disorder is a lifelong one and it limits the child's functioning and his/her ability to learn and behave in typical ways.

While there is no cure for Autism Spectrum Disorders, we know a great deal about how to help children live full and happy lives and how to help teachers and parents bring out the best in the children.

As individual parents, we want to share the impact Asperger Syndrome has on our child, and what interventions have been most successful. We want to be part of the learning team, and be involved in planning for our child. We ask that you review this information, creatively apply it to various classroom situations, and contact us for more information specific to our child and/or for additional resources.

Characteristics of Asperger Syndrome that Directly Impact the Behavior of Children

Children with Asperger syndrome:

- Have social and emotional development which is normally significantly delayed, for example: a 9 year old may be understanding and communicating at a 6 year old level, or a 15 year old may be performing at a 10 year old level, emotionally and socially.
- May not generalize information from one situation to another, even if the situation is only slightly different. For example a “no running” rule may need to be taught for the classroom, re-taught for the hall and re-taught for the library.
- Tend to interpret rules rigidly and may confront those who do not follow the stated rules.
- Tend to have a strong sense of justice, and may confront others on behalf of their friends, or of themselves, for perceived unfairness.

- Often don't know the unwritten rules of different social situations. For example they may speak to a teacher or the principal as they would to a classmate, they may speak out of turn, interrupt, tell the teacher he/she is wrong, etc.
- Tend to be very honest. This can be perceived by adults as impertinence or rudeness, though the student has no such intention. Honesty can also get them into difficulties with peers. For example, they may have no understanding of the social consequences of tattling on their peers.
- Often misread nonverbal communication - they may be unaware when someone is furious, bored, tired, sick etc. unless the person tells them so explicitly.
- May not be able to see another person's point of view and may have no idea how their behavior affects others. They may not realize when they embarrass their peers, parents, or teachers.
- May have difficulty taking turns, waiting, standing in line, being on the losing team, etc. for reasons related to different characteristics of autism. For example, due to hyper sensitivity to touch, the student may not be able to tolerate being bumped or jostled by classmates; due to overwhelming anxiety the student may not be able to stand still and wait.
- May interpret language literally, for example, when a child is told that he/she will have computer class tomorrow, he/she may become extremely upset when told the next day that this will not happen. The child may challenge the teacher, accuse the teacher of lying, or misunderstand the reason for the change.

- May get stuck on a topic and not be able to let it go. (perseveration) For example: a worry, a situation judged by them as unfair, or an anticipated event. They may not be able to move on without assistance.
- “Splintering” of abilities is typical. They may be able to read and understand a book on science, but not a novel. They may be very articulate, but be unable to follow a sequence of instructions.
- They are normally not equipped socially or emotionally to deal with bullying or teasing. Please see “Asperger Syndrome and Bullying” at the end of this pamphlet.
- A high percentage of children with Asperger Syndrome (AS), also have attention disorders, such as Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder.
- Depression may become a problem in elementary, junior or senior high school, as academic and social expectations change. The children may become increasingly ostracized by their peers. They need help gaining peer support and establishing healthy connections.

Some suggestions for the classroom:

- Avoid the taking behavior of the children personally. They may have little or no understanding of the impact of their behavior on others. Their behavior may be their way of communicating that they are feeling confused, anxious, afraid or overwhelmed.
- Expect unusual or even “outrageous” behavior and be prepared to: Respond calmly.....with clear expectations delivered in short sentences.
- Be prepared to teach basic social rules such as you don't enter the teacher's desk without asking permission.
- Expect inconsistent behavior and understand that what the child may be able to do one day, he/she may not be capable of doing the next day or under different conditions.
- Understand that the child's behavior is often the result of neurological differences in the way they experience the world. They are not able to change some behaviors, and may need environmental and program accommodations to enable them to experience success in school as well as in life.
- Have available a quiet place for the student to retreat to when his/her experience of the environment becomes overwhelming.

- Check your school library for two resources published by Alberta Learning:
 - 1) Essential Components of Educational Programming for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, 2006 – *practical ideas and guidelines for developing IPP's*
 - 2) "Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders" - Binder#9 of the Special Education series.
- Contact the Autism Society of Edmonton Area for a copy of "Education Matters" a series of practical articles written by special education teacher and consultant, Karen Bain.
- Establish and maintain a working relationship between the school and home as described in "The Learning Team" available from Alberta Learning. Be aware that the children may present serious problems in the classroom and few problems at home or vice, versa; children with autism respond differently in different environments.
- Suggest a workshop on Asperger Syndrome for the whole school staff. Increased understanding will help everyone support the child in the classroom and throughout the school.
- Contact the Autism Society of Edmonton Area and ask about the Teacher Information Series.
- Ask for help, if the situation is deteriorating. Request a referral for assistance from autism specialists through Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services (ERECS) at 472-4455 or call the Autism Society of Edmonton Area at 453-3971.

- Seek out other teachers who have worked with or are working with children with Asperger Syndrome to share information and ideas and for support.
- Know as parents, we are very appreciative of your efforts and commitment in working with our children and giving them the essential opportunity for an inclusive education.

High Risk Situations - ALERT

On occasion, a school community and family struggle with establishing a positive and successful educational experience for a student. Many things may have been tried, to no avail. If the student's behavior appears to be deteriorating, anxiety and/or depression may be a factor, especially where aggressive behavior is increasing.

Please refer the parent to the Autism Society. We have support groups for parents, teen social groups and information, consultation and referral service.

ASPERGER SYNDROME AND BULLYING

A child with Asperger Syndrome (AS), because she/he behaves differently, is vulnerable to being excluded, to verbal abuse and to other forms of bullying by peers. The bullying can be extremely subtle, such as making a noise which bothers the student with AS. Sensitivities to sound can make this situation intolerable for the student.

Children with AS often want social involvement, but may be socially clumsy, a reality that is not well tolerated by peers, especially as the students grow older. The children are not able to handle bullying on their own. Their developmental delays, emotionally and socially, leave them without essential skills needed to survive with peers

Suggestions for Intervention

Prevention

Alert all school staff to the child's vulnerability to exclusion, verbal abuse, being taken advantage of and other forms of bullying.

Encourage sympathetic classmates to make efforts to include the student, or even better, promote the development of a circle of friends.

Arrange a presentation for the class about Asperger Syndrome and about how the students can be supportive (with the parent's and student's permission).

Monitor peer interactions closely, in the classroom as well as outside. A high percentage of bullying occurs in the classroom.

Help the child learn to articulate the problem

The child may have difficulty explaining the bullying situation, the sequence of events, etc.

Give the child time.

Provide visual clues, for example take the child to the gym, have him/her show you what happened, act it out, etc.

Provide physical protection

Put in place a concrete plan of action for when bullying may take place: who the child should talk too and what that person will do to help. Provide the student with direct teaching and practice of these behaviors and ensure that the assigned staff members are aware of the student and of the plan.

Actively engage all teachers and school staff in early identification and management of bullying, on behalf of the child and of all the children in the school.

Provide supervised "free time" as necessary.

Invite the School Liaison Officer from the Edmonton Police Services, to make a presentation to the school on bullying.

Use materials and programs such as "Safe and Caring Schools"

Provide emotional protection.

Let the child know that you believe him/her. Children with Asperger Syndrome rarely lie.

Reassure the child that you will help him/her and that it is OK to ask for help.

Investigate misbehavior carefully where peers are involved, the student's honesty may result in him/her being the only one to "fess up", consider that the student may have been "set up" by peers.

Children with Asperger Syndrome may need intensive help with bullying throughout elementary, junior high and into high school.

Bullying is a serious issue for students with Asperger Syndrome as well as for other children.

Children with Asperger Syndrome are often naïve and unsophisticated. They may need protection well into adulthood, from those who may want to take advantage of them.

Many children with Asperger Syndrome have anxiety disorders and/or depression. Unresolved bullying can lead to emotional and/or psychological breakdown.

For more information, or resources, on Asperger Syndrome please contact the Autism Society of Edmonton Area (ASEA).

Asperger's Syndrome Resources on the Internet

Asperger's Disorder Homepage
www.aspergers.com/

G.R.A.S.P. (The Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership)
www.grasp.org/

Aspie-quiz
www.rdos.net/eng/

Medline Plus Asperger's Syndrome Links
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/aspergerssyndrome.html

O.A.S.I.S. (Online Asperger's Syndrome Information and Support)
www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/

A Survival Guide for People with Asperger's Syndrome
www.autismandcomputing.org.uk/marc2.en.html

University of Southern California's Autism and Asperger's Syndrome information page
www.aspergerssyndrome.org

Autism Society of Edmonton Area (ASEA)

ASEA is a not-for-profit, charitable organization dedicated to creating a community in which individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are valued for their potential.

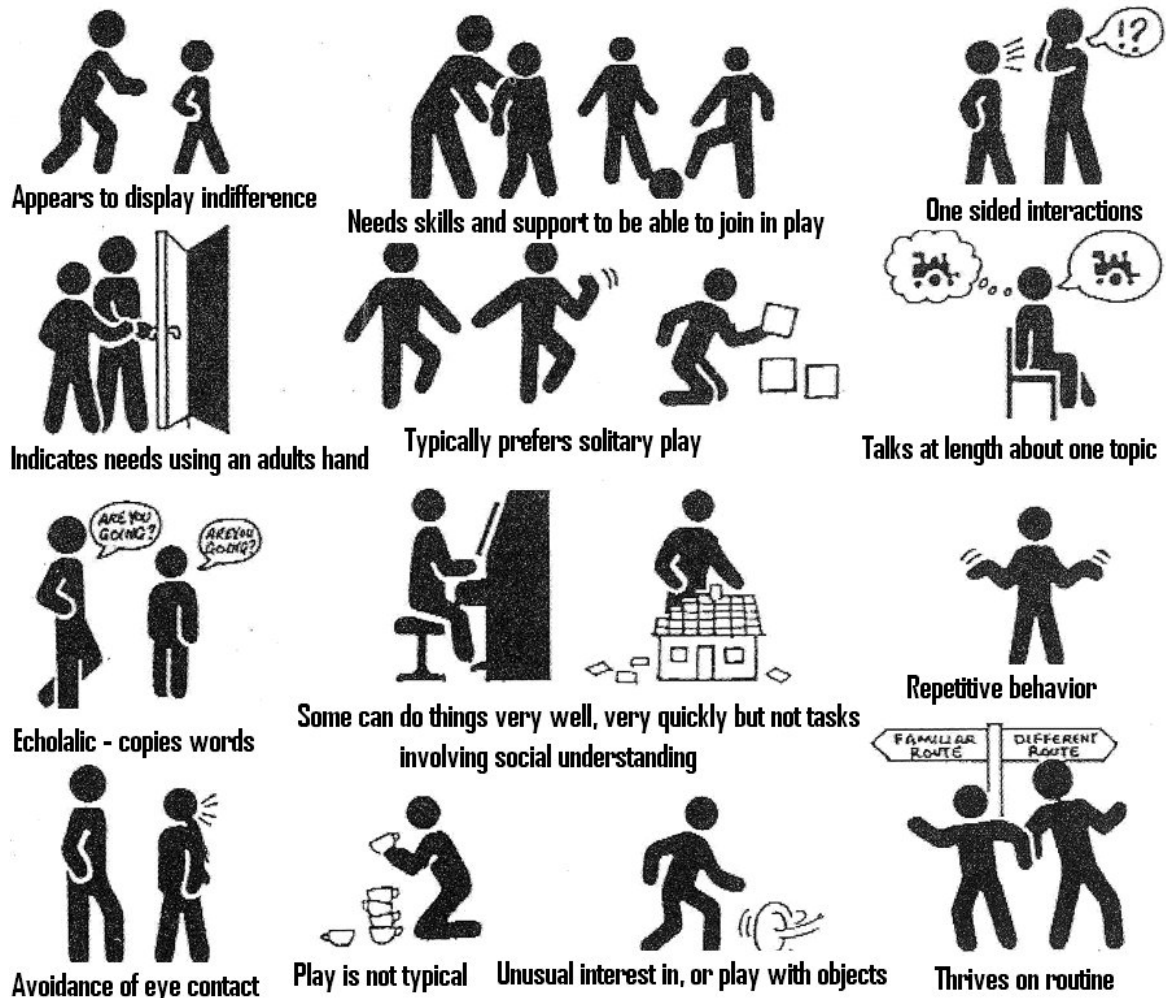
ASEA Offers:

- Parent Support Groups: for parents of individuals with Autism or Asperger Syndrome.
- Teacher information nights (TIN): held at the AACL Board Room (next door to the Autism Society of Edmonton Area) on the third Tuesday of every month.
- Parent Information Nights (PIN): talks on a variety of autism-related topics are presented once a month from September to March on the last Tuesday of the month next door to ASEA at the AACL board room.
- Library and Resource Materials: including books, periodicals, conference proceeding, articles, CD's videotapes, and DVD's.
- A Quarterly Newsletter called Autism Now
- Family Programs: a summer respite program and various social activities for people with autism/PDD-NOS/Asperger's and their families.
- Teen Social Groups – one for younger teens and one for older teens, focus on fun and friendship
- Adult Drama Group
- Advocacy: advocacy support for inclusive education placements; education program liaison with EPSB autism sites
- ASEA chairs the Autism Collaboration Team with professionals in the field; makes representation to government; and is a member of the Autism Society Alberta and Autism Society Canada

For more information contact the Autism Society of Edmonton Area at (780) 453-3971 or email autism@autismedmonton.org.

Autism is:

These figures illustrate some of the manifestations of autism. Not all persons with Autism experience each of these symptoms and they vary in severity.



Early diagnosis is essential if people with autism are to achieve their full potential. It is only when their disability is understood that they can be helped to maximize skills and minimize problems.

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