



Autism Association of the ACT Inc

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Asperger's Syndrome: Always more to learn

What is Asperger's syndrome?

Asperger's syndrome is a pervasive developmental disorder. It is one of a number of related pervasive developmental disorders called Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Asperger's Syndrome impairs the quality of life in many areas; most noticeable is the lack of friends, difficulty in integrating in job or school, despite the desire to fit in.

It is believed to result from problems in the way a person's central nervous system functions, in particular how it processes and organises information. What is true is that the style of parenting used for raising and managing children does not cause this condition. With diagnosis and appropriate educational and other intervention, the effect of this impairment upon a person's life can be reduced.

What are people who have Asperger's syndrome like?

- The typical person with Asperger's syndrome is a 'loner' who never quite fits in because of eccentric behaviour, peculiar ways of speaking and a lack of social skills.
- He or she may be interested in social relationships but lacks the ability to understand and use the rules governing social behaviour. He or she may try to make contact inappropriately, e.g. ignoring contextual cues or expressing inadequacy aggressively.
- People with Asperger's syndrome may finish regular schools and hold down jobs, but they are often disadvantaged by their odd behaviour and resistance to change.
- They have difficulty establishing relationships and children often refuse to return to their homes to play with them.
- Older children may over time withdraw from the uncomfortable interactions which characterised their early years and retreat into the safety of their family or even isolate themselves from their family.
- They may feel rejected but do not understand how their behavioural responses contributed to their isolation.

Areas of difficulty

Communication

A child with Asperger's syndrome usually speaks at the age expected. A full command of grammar is usually acquired. The content of speech may be abnormal, tending to be pedantic and often centering on one or two favourite topics. Sometimes a word or phrase is repeated over and over in stereotyped fashion. Usually there is a comprehension deficit despite apparent superior verbal skills. Non-verbal communication, both expressive and receptive is often impaired.

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Social Interaction

There tends to be impairment in two-way social interaction due in the most part to an inability to understand the rules governing social behaviour. A lack of empathy with others and little or no eye contact may be evident. Asperger's people tend to be stuck at the egocentric stage of social and emotional development. They perceive the world almost exclusively from their own point of view.

Social Behaviour

Social behaviour is often naive and peculiar. They tend to become intensely attached to particular possessions. They engage in repetitive activities and are resistant to change, coping best when life is predictable. They are rigid and prefer structure and may concentrate exclusively on matters in which they are interested. May appear non-compliant as they have difficulty taking direction and coping with negative feedback.

Common characteristics

Most people with Asperger's syndrome will exhibit the following characteristics:

❖ **Severe difficulties with social interaction**

They will be unwilling or unable to interact normally with others of their own age, and show a lack of appreciation of social cues - resulting in inappropriate, embarrassing or 'eccentric' behaviour.

❖ **Obsessive interest in a subject**

Although the particular interest may change over the years, it will always be taken to the extreme, carried out to the exclusion of most other activities, and be a subject that relies on rote memory rather than meaning and connection.

❖ **Stereotyped routines**

The person will attempt to impose such routines on many aspects of their day-to-day life.

❖ **Speech and language problems**

The can appear as either

- delayed language development;
- superficially perfect language which is formal and pedantic; or
- mild or moderate impairment of language comprehension and a tendency to take every statement literally.

❖ **Nonverbal communication problems**

The person has limited or clumsy gestures with little, or inappropriate, facial expression and experiences difficulty in reading body language and social cues.

❖ **Motor clumsiness**

Almost all children, and some adults, with Asperger's syndrome suffer from a degree of clumsiness which is out of step with their other abilities.

❖ **Impairments in understanding:**

- Language
- Feelings;
- Social behaviour

❖ **Resistant to change**

The Asperger's person finds any unexpected change a source of anxiety and even panic.

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Need more information or need support?

The Autism Association of the ACT, Inc

The Autism Association is a voluntary organisation. It works to improve the life and opportunities for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, their families and their carers. The Association is a non-profit charitable organisation. All Donations to the Association are tax deductible.

The Association provides:

- Support to people who have ASD, their families, carers, teachers and therapists;
- Information on autism;, on living with ASD, and Information on the services available in the ACT;
- Advocacy to improve services and opportunities;
- Close work with service providers to improve service delivery;
- Seminars and workshops and information forums;
- A newsletter, "Autism Awareness"
- Monthly meetings and speakers;

Membership of the Association is open to any person with ASD, their family, carers, teachers or other interested person. If you would like to join the Association or attend our meetings or assist in any other way, please contact us at the SHOUT offices.

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