

ASPERGER SYNDROME



Cambian

Cambian Educational Information Sheet

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Asperger Syndrome, commonly known as Asperger's or simply AS, is a life-long neurodevelopmental disorder that affects how people process the world around them and the way they communicate.

Nowadays, Asperger's is considered to be another element of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) rather than a singular condition; however, you may still see it being referred to individually as 'Asperger Syndrome'. Whilst Asperger's shares other characteristics of ASD, those with the condition tend not to have the learning difficulties that may be present with those who have a higher severity of autism.

This often means people with Asperger's are of average or above average intelligence. However, that said, it is not uncommon for those with Asperger's to also have other conditions, including: Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Moreover, like others on the autistic spectrum, there may be hypersensitivity present, making noise, touch, or sensory information overwhelming for those with Asperger's.

Autism Spectrum Disorder, and therefore, Asperger's, can be understood through a Triad of Impairment.



Interaction Social differences may mean poor social timing, lack of empathy, rejection of body contact and off-set eye contact.



Communication Speech, vocal tone, gesture, expression and body language may be impaired, making it harder to present one's self.



Imagination Rigid thought processes make Aspergers' people resistant to change and often present special interests and ritualistic behaviour.

Asperger's often presents itself by two years of age and is present in both sexes; research suggests it affects males to a greater degree. That said, this may be due to females being better at masking their difficulties in understanding social situations. Boys, on the other hand, tend to have more upfront behaviours that come to their guardian's attention more easily. Therefore, females may not be diagnosed as easily or as often, causing this discrepancy.

What causes Asperger Syndrome?

It is not known whether Asperger's has a cause, it's widely speculated to originate from birth but may not present itself immediately. It is often considered to have hereditary connections; that being, it is passed on through genetics. There is on-going research into many different potential causes of Autism as a whole, surrounding brain defects, dietary allergies and more. What we do know is that Autism or Asperger's is not caused by bad parenting or vaccinations; which are two common misconceptions. Research also suggests that there is no singular cause of Asperger's and it is likely due to a combination of factors, which is why Autism is so diverse.

Is there a cure?

There is no cure for Asperger's, it is a lifelong condition. There are however, many different methods of helping those with the condition to live a good life. There is also a growing community for celebrating the diversity that Autism brings and treating it as being individual, rather than a debilitating condition.

Social Communication

Whilst those with Asperger's may well have a strong vocabulary and overall good verbal skills, it is often not matched with a full understanding of social cues. The particular social nuances of conversation may be lost or difficult to understand which makes for a more literal processing of language. Metaphors, sarcasm and humour can often be missed, meaning responses may seem out of place to those without the condition.

Those with Asperger's may have:

A lack of emotive understanding

Facial expression, body language and voice (pitch, speed and intonation) are difficult to understand. They may also struggle to express their own emotions clearly.

Engagement trouble

Two-way conversation may be tricky. Those with Asperger's may feel more comfortable talking about their own interests, despite a potential lack of interest from the other person. Bringing conversation to an open/close at the right time may also be difficult.

Difficulty with conversational complexities

Those with Asperger's may struggle with greetings, joining conversation, maintaining a single topic, understanding personal space and conversational turn-taking.

Social Imagination

People with Asperger's often struggle with Theory of Mind; that being, the ability to read what another person is thinking. Now, we're not all mind-readers, but we can work out what peoples' intentions are through social imagination and context of conversation. Those with the condition often have difficulty seeing different perspectives or point of views, struggling to gauge expression and intent.

Those with Asperger's may also appear to lack imagination when it comes to play activities. For example: rather than creating stories or scenarios with their toys, play may present itself as organising and categorising.

These behaviours then later develop into other characteristics associated with Asperger's, including: ritualistic behaviour, rigid adherence to routine and resistance to change. This behaviour is widely considered to be a coping mechanism that allows a better understanding of the world around them.



Social Interaction

Those with Asperger's usually have an aptitude for adapting to social situations, as they often have a desire to meet their own social needs. Due to a relative lack of understanding when it comes to the unwritten social rules, it can be more difficult to maintain long-standing friendships and social integration. Things like: timing, eye-contact and polite responses don't necessarily come naturally. Further, responding inappropriately to a given topic may happen on occurrence, which often seems un-empathetic.

People without Asperger's may take social cues, including tone of voice and expression, for granted but are key to understanding others' intentions. Due to this, people with Asperger's struggle to determine the difference between a friend and acquaintance; or perhaps, sharing friends with other people. This may also lead to them lacking the ability to handle conflict in a manageable way – muddling the ability to be self-restrictive or receive negative comments.

Mental Health

Asperger's and all its associated differences can cause a level of anxiety, which is common among the Autism community. Society is often unpredictable for them and using ritualistic behaviour is a way for them to find a sense of calm and balance.

Experiences in early life and awareness of not fitting in can make those with Asperger's socially vulnerable. Generally speaking, this could lead to further anxiousness and lower self-esteem. Mental health is something that should always be considered; even more so when it comes to people with Asperger's. Knowingly living with a socially debilitating condition can make you increasingly self-aware and lead to low mood.









Hyper / Hypo Sensory Sensitivity

Asperger's may present in signs of increased or decreased physical sensitivity. You may have heard of 'Autism Friendly' environments, which are areas of reduced sensory stimulants. They exist because Autistic people can feel very uncomfortable in places with bright lights, loud noises and other things that people without the condition might not even notice. These sensory differences can also make interpretation of surroundings more difficult, reducing perception of safety.

In education:

Typically, people with Asperger's may appear to be doing well and coping within a school setting, even often presenting above average intelligence and excelling academically. As noted above, the social domain is where they might suffer most, which can lead to disruptive or atypical behaviours. The transition to secondary school is when the difficulties become more acute – as children grow older they are increasingly socially conscious and this will come to the forefront in a secondary school setting.

There can be a number of issues, including:

-  A lack of understanding of the behaviour and intentions of others.
-  Changing from classroom to classroom, teacher to teacher.
-  Audio and light levels.
-  Unstructured and unsupported break and lunch times.
-  Following instructions, lessons and completing tasks.
-  Inability to interpret the wide variety of verbal and non-verbal language used by teachers and peers.

Some Key Things to Remember:

- Asperger's isn't incorrect in anyway, it's just different to those without the condition and what they may be used to.
- Having Asperger's doesn't mean they can't live a healthy and active life, it just means they might need some help with understanding things along the way.
- Those with the condition understand things differently. When giving instruction, keep chat to a minimum, speak clearly, concisely and give them time to process what's been said.
- Not all behaviour can be attributed to Asperger's, and those with the condition are just as likely as those without it to have other disabilities.
- The understanding of Asperger's is always developing and improving inclusivity of those with the condition in everyday society.

Website resources:

NHS

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/> is a well-rounded NHS resource with a plethora of easily understood information on Autism.

Autism Education Trust

www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk AET is dedicated to coordinating and improving education support for all children on the autism spectrum in England. Downloadable resources and toolkits for education staff.

Autism.com

www.autism.com the website of the Autism Research Institute in US which contains lots on information for families and individual.

Days Out

www.daysout.com a one stop directory for great family days out – attractions which have good facilities and access for visitors with disabilities and special needs have a specific identifying symbol.

NAS Surrey Branch

<http://www.nassurreybranch.org/home.html> is the website of The NAS (Surrey Branch), an excellent site with lots of up to date information, news, and resources wherever you are in the country.

Futher Resources and Contacts:

The National Autistic Society

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

Website: www.autism.org.uk Helpline: **0808 800 4104** Supporter Care Team: **0808 800 1050**

BIBIC (British Institute for Brain Injured Children)

They help children with conditions affecting their social, communication and learning abilities.

Website: www.bibic.org.uk Email: info@bibic.org.uk Tel: **01458 2533444**

Cerebra

For parents of children with brain injuries and neurological problems including Asperger syndrome and Autism.

Website: www.cerebra.org.uk Email: enquires@cerebra.org.uk Parent Support: **01267 244 200**

Contact a Family

UK wide advice on all aspects of caring for a child with any special need, disability or rare disorder.

Website: www.cafamily.org.uk

The Disabilities Trust

Provides a range of specialist education services, housing and support for children and adults with Autism.

Website: www.disabilities-trust.org.uk and www.autism-awareness.org.uk Tel: **01444 239123**