

Asperger's Syndrome

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As you may know, autism is a disorder whereby an individual has severe dysfunction in areas of language development, social interactions, and behavior.

Asperger's syndrome is a term used to describe a child or an adult who have some features of autism but do not meet the full diagnosis of autism. There is some disagreement as to where the disorder fits into the spectrum of autism or Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD). There are some people with Asperger's who are very successful and were in the past simply thought to be eccentric, odd, brilliant, absent-minded or socially inept.

Unlike autism, children with Asperger's do not have a delay in language and speech; rather, they may have a

"different" way of using language. They may have a wonderful vocabulary but not truly understand the nuances of language. Their sense of humor may seem "off" and they may not respond to colloquialisms, cliches or common rules of conversation.

In social interaction, many people with Asperger's may demonstrate gaze avoidance when meeting someone. They may have difficulty understanding rules for games and social entertainment. They may prefer repetitive and simple routines, and may seem distractible or have difficulty finishing tasks. Many children **do** desire interaction and affection but have trouble knowing what to do to make it work. They are able to learn social skills much like we would learn to play the piano.

Often, a person with Asperger's will be of superior intelligence. They tend to become preoccupied with a particular interest or subject, which may lead to a successful career in that field. They seem to have a tenacious nature and may learn better through visually oriented instruction or training.

Many of the weaknesses described above can be remedied with specific types of therapy aimed at teaching social and pragmatic skills. Some anxiety and/or comorbid conditions (i.e. depression, attention deficit disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder) can be treated with medication.

Although it may be harder, adults with Asperger's can have relationships, families and happy and productive lives.

More information is available through the Autism Center at The Children's Rehab center (Cleveland Clinic Foundation) or online at O.A.S.I.S. (Online Asperger Syndrome Information and Support) <http://www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/>

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