



ASPERGER
CENTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Getting a Diagnosis
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What is Asperger Syndrome?

Asperger Syndrome (AS) is a neurobiological condition of great variability, considered to be part of the Autism Spectrum, which has a current prevalence rate of 1 in 166 people. Individuals with other conditions on the Autism Spectrum, such as Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified and Autism, share many of the social and behavioral challenges found in Asperger Syndrome. Current scientific evidence suggests that all of these conditions are closely related.

Individuals with Asperger Syndrome have average to above average cognitive abilities, yet are challenged by a wide array of social, sensory, and communication issues. They may exhibit some of these typical characteristics:

Socialization

- Few if any peer relationships, often despite a genuine desire to fit in
- Socially inappropriate behaviors
- Difficulty with eye contact
- Poor use and appreciation of body language
- Lack of ability to interpret the non-verbal "cues" that are so much a part of conversation and social interaction
- Difficulty comprehending feelings of others, but appropriate level of compassion when made aware

Behavior and Thought

- Repetitive or perseverative behaviors or thoughts
- Broad range of skills and abilities that may be widely disparate
- Vast stores of factual information but lesser ability to integrate details into abstract
- Obsessive interests, sometimes to the exclusion of other activities
- Difficulty generating spontaneous solutions to situations that arise
- Unconventional thinking and problem-solving styles

Communication

- Unusual speech patterns, including unusual voice characteristics, inappropriate volume or tonality, formal pedantic style, or use of irrelevant remarks
- Trouble maintaining reciprocity in conversations
- Overly literal, difficulty with sarcasm and idioms
- Exceptional verbal abilities that often mislead others into assuming more competence than actually exists

Associated characteristics

- Physical clumsiness or lack of spatial awareness
- Difficulty modulating or regulating behaviors and emotions
- Organizational skills deficits
- Co-occurrence of attention, anxiety, and/or mood problems
- Sensory (sounds, light, tastes, touch, odors, pain) sensitivities or processing difficulties
- Poor academic performance, despite demonstrated cognitive skills
- Poor daily living skills, in spite of obvious intellectual abilities
- Difficulty gaining and maintaining employment
- Isolated and/or overly dependent adulthood

On the other hand, people with Asperger Syndrome can be...

- Extremely honest, trustworthy, and committed to their principles
- Straightforward and logical
- Detail-oriented, with an exceptional memory for facts and figures
- Willing and able to devote extraordinary amounts of time and energy to unique and sometimes very important areas of knowledge and effort
- Loyal friends and employees
- Dependable workers if given the opportunity to utilize their talents

Is someone you know like one of these individuals with Asperger Syndrome? Perhaps a formal diagnosis would help start them on the path to appropriate interventions and support.

Noah is a three year old boy. He has been expelled from nursery school because of tantrums and aggression toward other children. When it is too noisy, Noah holds his hands over his ears and hums loudly. If his teacher tries to lead him away from difficult situations, he pulls away from her and throws himself on the floor. The teachers he has had have advised his parents to use more discipline. They are at a loss, as he behaves very well at home.

Philippe is a six year old boy. He has a great deal of difficulty when things do not go his way. It makes him feel panicked when his plans do not work out, even for small things such as a late dinner or if he can't go to Toys R Us on the first day a new toy is out. When he plays in the neighborhood, he has to be in charge of the playing or he leaves. He does not easily share his

toys and when the play does not go his way he sometimes hits out or has a tantrum. The other neighbors wonder why Philippe's parents cannot control him better.

Jose is a ten year old fourth grade boy, an excellent student who always does well on tests. Recently, he has been experiencing difficulty accomplishing long term or group assignments. He cannot seem to get started or plan his time to finish before due dates. Other students are tolerant of him, but do not voluntarily work or play with him. Jose is very anxious and has little ability to interact socially. He talks incessantly about dolphins and tries to shape his schoolwork to include this topic, even when it is irrelevant. His peers tire quickly when he starts to obsess. An increase in anxiety seem to coincide with tantrum behavior, which is viewed by teachers and students as immature and sometimes frightening.

Angela is a twelve year old middle school student. Although she is academically able, she has tremendous difficulty organizing herself, turning in her work, remembering what to bring home or to each class, and planning her time to complete assignments. She has no close friends and the group she has known since elementary school is beginning to be embarrassed by her inappropriate social skills. Sometimes she has to sit alone on the bus or in the cafeteria and she feels that everyone is looking at her. She is beginning to think she feels sick many mornings before school.

Ny is a nineteen year old college student diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome. She lives away from home and has difficulty with the other students in her dorm. They either ignore her or play nasty jokes on her. She has never had a date. She gets good grades, but her professors and the other students object to her domination of class time with her constant talking. When she tries to get a job on campus, she is never chosen, so she has had no work experience and wonders what she is going to do with a degree in French.

Charlie is a thirty-five year old accountant in an insurance firm. He does his job well, but seems to always be in trouble with his coworkers. He stands too close to women and looks at them with penetrating stares. As he is such a good worker, his supervisor has tried to help him be more appropriate so he will not be accused of sexual harassment. Charlie calls everyone at work his "friend" but is never included in social interaction outside of the office. He spends all of his time outside of work alone in his apartment.

Rich is forty-five years old and still lives with his parents. Although he has a master's degree in political science, he has never had a job. He has been on dozens of interviews, but is never chosen. Neither he nor his parents understand what he does that leads him to never being hired and, of course, no potential employer will tell him. His parents worry about what will happen to him when they are no longer there to help him, as he relies on them completely for companionship, financial security, and day to day management.