



PARENT LINK- INFORMATION SHEET no. 2

Asperger Syndrome

(Autistic Spectrum Disorder :ASD)

1. What is it?

Asperger Syndrome is the name which is used to describe the more able of those within the autistic spectrum. Diagnosis may be more difficult as pupils do not have such an obvious learning disability. They may have been considered merely "odd" or "a loner" by their teachers and peers. However, pupils with Asperger syndrome will share, to a greater or lesser degree, the same Triad of Impairment that is the defining characteristic of autism.

- Difficulty in communication
- Difficulty in social relationships
- Difficulty with imagination/social understanding

There is often delayed motor development, with poor co-ordination and clumsiness or awkwardness.

Pupils often develop obsessive special interests, rather than obsessive behaviours.

2. Implications

Asperger Syndrome shares many of the same characteristics as autism, with similar implications.

Social relationships

The pupil with Asperger Syndrome may -

- try hard to be sociable but often in an inappropriate way

- find it difficult to understand non-verbal signals, including facial expression, gesture, eye-contact or appropriate body contact

Communication

The pupil with Asperger Syndrome may

- Mask language difficulties with good verbal skills
- Speak very fluently, but without taking any account of the listener
- Take language literally - speech may sound over-precise, stilted or over-literal.
- Appear insensitive to the listener's feelings

Lack of imagination

The pupil with Asperger Syndrome may

- Have difficulty with abstract concepts and social understanding
- Be unable to play with others

- Pupils will prefer routines. Any alteration, such as a change of timetable or teacher, can be upsetting and cause great anxiety.
- Pupils will lack flexibility, and have a narrow range of interests.
- Remember that pupils with Asperger syndrome are usually of average intelligence or above, with good verbal skills. They may excel at learning facts and figures.

3. Strategies

(see Autism and Asperger Syndrome - 3. Strategies)

*You will need to access specialist advice. See 4. More Information

Many pupils with Asperger syndrome are educated in mainstream schools. They may be more aware of their difficulties or uncomfortable with social relationships, and this can lead to anxiety, distress and anger.

Pupils need structure in all that they do. This is especially important during unstructured free time. If the pupil's behaviour, at home or at school, is giving rise to concern, identify when the behaviour is occurring.

This may help determine why it is occurring. Use concrete and visual teaching wherever possible.

The pupil will need -

- A safe, quiet place to go to at break or playtimes, and lunchtime
- Understanding from teachers and peers. Circle time can help others understand how the pupil with Asperger syndrome feels (but take advice from the educational psychologist first and always consult parents)
- Practical help with communication skills
- A person who understands his difficulties and who can listen sympathetically
- The use of well structured, visual teaching approaches

Behaviour

In primary schools, teach "stranger danger". Even a young child should be aware of what is and what is not acceptable. Praise appropriate behaviour, and be consistent - do not give mixed or confused messages.

In secondary schools, adolescents with Asperger Syndrome are not always aware that they may display inappropriate (sexual) behaviour. It is wise to stop any inappropriate behaviour whenever it occurs.

Tell the pupil whenever he or she does something inappropriate, each time it occurs and demonstrate (visually) how to respond more appropriately.

Explain what behaviour is appropriate in an adult, and give accepted rules, for example if we are talking with or listening to a younger child, they sit next to us, not on our laps.

4. More information

The National Autistic Society

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www.oneworld.org.uk

Teaching Pupils with Autism and Asperger syndrome

Guidelines for Schools

East Sussex County Council - Education