

THE ASC GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

St. Nicholas Academy for Autism Trust
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WELCOME TO THE ASC GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

Welcome to the eleventh issue of *The ASC Good Practice Guide*, a free monthly resource for individuals with an autistic spectrum condition, professionals, and parents.

Which organisation does this Guide come from?

The Guide is written under the banner of the St. Nicholas Academy for Autism Trust, a non-denominational North-London based ASC and special needs charity.

Who writes and edits the Guide?

The Guide is written by Christine Haugh, and edited by Chris Mitchell.

Christine Haugh's two sons are diagnosed with autistic spectrum conditions. She works at Middlesex University as Disability Development Officer for Aimhigher London North Partnership, a DfES-funded organisation. Her duties include Project Management of the Partnership's activities for learners with special educational needs, including autistic spectrum conditions. Christine is currently completing her MEd Autism (Distance-Learning) at University of Birmingham.

Chris Mitchell was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome at University, at the age of twenty. For the first twenty years of his life, Chris felt that he was someone who didn't exist, trying to fit into a social environment he couldn't understand. However, once diagnosed, he found a reason for who he was and his self-confidence returned. Since his diagnosis, Chris has completed his MA (Hons) in Information and Library Management at the University of Northumbria. He has also become an advocate for Asperger Syndrome. Most recently, he has published the autobiography *Glass Half-Empty, Glass Half-Full*. Currently, he works as a clerical assistant with Durham County Council's Special Educational Needs Department. He also speaks about his experiences of Asperger Syndrome at various events and conferences throughout the UK, including the 2005 Aimhigher "Transition to University" Summerschool for students with autistic spectrum conditions, where Chris and Christine met, and at an annual lecture at the University of Northumbria. Additionally, Chris coordinates training workshops for professionals who work with ASC.

To enquire if Chris is available to become involved as a trainer or a speaker at your event, please visit his new website, at www.chrismitchell.org.uk, or contact him at ChrisMitchell@mitchell17.wanadoo.co.uk

To ensure accuracy and relevance, prior to its publication, the Guide was read and feedback was contributed by a range of individuals including relevant education and health professionals from a number of different Boroughs, individuals with autistic spectrum conditions, and parents. Each issue of the Guide will continue to be "proof-read" in this way.

What is the purpose of the Guide? The purpose of this Guide is to provide practical support in the form of a one-stop-shop of information on existing good practice in the field of Autistic Spectrum Conditions, in relation especially to Transitions. "Transitions" is a broad term, encompassing phase transfer to nursery, primary, or secondary schools, as well as to further and higher education and even adult learning opportunities. "Transitions" also covers the area of transition between types of placement, for instance from specialist to mainstream, or from home education to school-based provision. Information provided in this guide will come from a range of reputable, identifiable sources, such as the DfES. Whenever possible, links to relevant websites will be included alongside the information provided. Always, the intention is to empower the audience by keeping them informed of existing good practice.

How can you subscribe to the Guide? To receive the free monthly Guide, simply email ahaughc@aol.com with the words "Subscribe to Guide" as the subject! If you would like the Guide posted rather than sent via email, simply include name and postal address in your email.

How can you help this Guide? Any reader, whether a professional, an individual diagnosed with an autistic spectrum condition or a parent, who is aware of any existing best practice relating to autistic spectrum conditions and who would like to share this information with others, is welcomed to contribute an article to this Guide! Please email Christine on ahaughc@aol.com if you would like to contribute an article. Also feel free to email if you wish to get involved with the Guide in another way, such as helping to reformat or distribute it! All help is greatly appreciated!

CORRECTION!!!

CORRECTION TO DECEMBER EDITION OF THE GUIDE

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks reader Karen for pointing out the following error in the December 2006 Edition.

"On page 9 of your guide you say that disabled people who are in receipt of the Highest Rate Care Component of the Disability Living Allowance (LA) do not have to pay vehicle excise duty (car tax). I am sorry but I think that you have made a error here as it is the Highest Rate Mobility Component that exempts you from this tax."

Thanks again, Karen- to clarify, individuals in receipt of the High Rate **Mobility** Component of the DLA are exempt from vehicle excise duty (car tax). We are very sorry for any inconvenience the misprint might have caused.

CALL FOR INFORMATION: ASPERGER SYNDROME FOUNDATION

CALL FOR INFORMATION ON LOCAL SUPPORT GROUPS: ASPERGER SYNDROME FOUNDATION

In response to an ever-growing number of queries from persons wanting to access accurate and up to date information on local support groups throughout the UK, the Asperger Syndrome Foundation are kindly requesting that any persons who are aware of any local support groups might kindly forward details of these organisations to the Asperger Syndrome Foundation. These details can then be included on the Foundation's database and possibly even made available on the Foundation's website, so that details can be passed on to interested parents/carers/professionals/persons with AS.

Details can be forwarded either via email to info@aspergerfoundation.org.uk, or via post to:
Asperger Syndrome Foundation
The Kensington Charity Centre
4th Floor, Charles House
375 Kensington High Street
London W14 8QH

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Asperger Syndrome Foundation's Founder, Beatrice Buisseret, for undertaking this extremely important task.

NEWS

"THE TRANSPORTERS" (NATIONWIDE PROJECT, TARGETING 2-8 YEAR OLDS WITH ASC)

A nationwide project- in the form of a DVD animation series- has been launched, the aim of which is to help increase the emotional understanding of children who have an autistic spectrum condition.

The name of the animation series is "The Transporters." The characters are vehicles, a subject of interest to a large number of autistic children. The vehicles are cartoon characters, with human faces. Narrated by the actor Stephen Fry, each episode of "The Transporters" introduces a different emotion, such as happiness. Also included in the series is an interactive quiz, to help children consolidate the "emotional skills" the DVD has taught them.

The DVDs were commissioned by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. For further information on the BBC's coverage of "The Transporters", please visit:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/6241733.stm>

"The Transporters" was initially piloted with a handful of young children with ASC. For a very limited time, FREE copies of the DVD as well as a User's Guide are available to order, for children who might benefit and are aged between 2 to 8 years of age. For further information on "The Transporters" and how to receive a free copy of the DVD, please visit:

<http://www.transporters.tv/getcopy.html>

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks the handful of readers and organisations who have emailed information on "The Transporters". The information is greatly appreciated.

AMERICAN NEWS

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Dinah Murray for the following information:

"The US govt is open to feedback on its policies to be developed post the "Combating Autism Act" which was recently voted in. The US National Institute of Health will control the direction of research for huge amounts of funding in coming years in the US. What they decide is also likely to affect policy making in other countries."

Dinah notes that a petition was set up very quickly in response, which she explains, was "trying to stop research agendas being distorted by negative assumptions (aka prejudices) about the capacities and potential of autistic people." The deadline for feedback was allegedly 17th January, but for further information please visit:

<http://www.autism-hub.co.uk/nih-response/> and

<http://autismdiva.blogspot.com/2007/01/steering-autism-research.html>"

SKILL/BARCLAYS BANK: CAREERS OPPORTUNITIES DAY FOR DISABLED PERSONS INTERESTED IN JOINING THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY

SKILL is the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities.

SKILL is currently planning an event to be held on 28th February 2007 with Barclays bank to investigate careers opportunities for disabled students in financial services. The day will focus around investigating careers opportunities and interviewing staff who work for Barclays to find out about the world of banking, and what support and access Barclays provide for disabled employees.

There will be a small number of places for students studying relevant courses in further and higher education to attend this event. Anyone interested should contact jo@skill.org.uk or call 020 7450 0637 (voice) to find out more as soon as possible!

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks SKILL'S Jo Marriott for contributing this information.

CONFERENCES, LECTURES, SEMINARS AND SESSIONS

THE ASPERGER SYNDROME FOUNDATION SEMINAR SERIES PRESENTS PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR DIFFICULT MOMENTS: "SENSORY ISSUES AND ANGER MANAGEMENT"

Presented by Luke Beardon and Stephen Allen

Luke Beardon is Senior Lecturer in Autism, The Autism Centre, Sheffield Hallam University. He will offer practical strategies relating to sensory issues and anger management, which work with individuals who have Asperger's Syndrome. Stephen Allen is a young adult with Asperger Syndrome, currently completing a Computing degree at Birkbeck University. Stephen will discuss the impact that sensory issues and anger management have from the perspective of an individual with Asperger Syndrome

AIMED AT: Professionals in Education, Parents and Carers

DATE: Friday 11th May 2007, 10am-3:30pm, registration from 9:30am

VENUE: RIBA LONDON, 66 Portland Place, London W1B 1AD

SPEAKERS: Luke Beardon and Stephen Allen

COST: £25 professionals, £15 parent/carers, free for individuals with Asperger Syndrome (please make cheques payable to the "Asperger Syndrome Foundation")
Sandwich lunches and refreshments are included in the cost.

Please email seminars@aspergerfoundation.org.uk OR download a booking form from the Asperger Syndrome Foundation website www.aspergerfoundation.org.uk. This form needs to be returned to the Asperger Syndrome Foundation along with cheque payment, to reserve a place at the Seminar. The Foundation's address is:

Asperger Syndrome Foundation
The Kensington Charity Centre
4th Floor, Charles House
375 Kensington High Street
London W14 8QH

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Asperger Syndrome Foundation's Founder, Beatrice Buisseret, for contributing this information.

THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY SOUTH EAST REGION MEMBERS' MEETING AND SEMINAR

WHEN: Saturday 3rd March, 2007

WHERE: University of Westminster, Regents Street, London

AGENDA

10.00 Tea/Coffee and Registration (*Bookstall will be available*)

- 10.30 Welcome and Introductions – *Jane Vaughan, Regional Co-ordinator*
(there will be time allocation for questions from members after each speaker)
- 10.40 Development Plans for the Region - *Robert Pritchett, Regional Director*
- 11.00 Update on NAS Schools in SE Region - *Chloe Phillips, Principal*
- 11.30 Adult Services in SE Region - *Carol Povey, Head of Adult Services*
- 11.50 Membership - *Matthew Downie, Head of Branches & Membership*
- 12.05 Make school make sense campaign update -
Clare Corbett, Campaigns Team, Jane Vaughan, Coordination Team
- 12.30 Plenary
- 12.40 A sister's perspective – *Lauren Kedar*

1.00pm Finish - Tea/coffee (Lunch can be obtained from nearby cafes)

1.30pm - 4pm **“Supporting the Siblings of your child with ASD”**
- to be lead by *Andrew Powell, NAS Help! Development Manager*

The cost of the AFTERNOON Seminar is £5 for NAS Members, £10 Non-Members. Payment should be made via a cheque payable to: The National Autistic Society. Contact details should also be provided. (Please indicate whether attendance will be for morning only, afternoon only, or full day)

Please return **by 15th February** to: Judy Lynch, National Autistic Society SE Region
Unit 9, The Ivories, 6-8 Northampton Street,
London N1 2HY
Tel: 020 7704 3800 judy.lynch@nas.org.uk

WENDY LAWSON- UK BOOKINGS IN 2007

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Wendy Lawson for sharing her 2007 tour dates with our readers. Wendy's range of presentations and audiences- from a talk with parents to training for County Council staff- is amazing! The list below does not include Wendy's Singapore, Australian, or other international tour dates, although details are available upon request.

UK Spring

- Feb 26 (Redcar-Cleveland) Elizabeth.Foster@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk 2 talks (repeated sessions) 1-3pm & 4.30-6.30pm.
- February 28th, (Birmingham) All day School Staff training, Contact: steve.tuft@pines.bham.sch.uk
- March 5 (Ramsgate) Evening talk to parents' support group, SPOT: Supporting People On The Spectrum. Contact: b.decomarmond@onetel.net
- March 6th (Gravesend Kent) Evening talk for schools. Contact: elee@ifield.kent.sch.uk
- March 21st (North Tyneside). Conference. Contact: Patricia Ramshaw trishramshaw@hotmail.com A Keynote address & 1 workshop Newcastle united football stadium
- March 23-25 (Birmingham) University of Birmingham Residential weekend

- April 17 (Shillingstone, Dorset) All day training & 18th. (2hr. public morning session) Gay.Waters@cambiagroup.com Forum school.
- April 18 (Portsmouth) Autism Support Group talk, in the evening. Contact: jendp4@yahoo.co.uk
- April 19-21 (Wales) Two half day seminars on 19th and 20th April

19th April (Cardiff) – subject ‘Understanding and working with ASD – take a walk in our shoes’ (11am – 2pm)

20th April (Wrexham) – subject ‘Life and Learning with Autism and Aspergers’ (11am – 2pm) Contact: jennie@autismcymru.org

- April 23rd (Nottingham) Training for Notts County Council staff. Contact: Susie Holt sen.training@education.nottscc.gov.uk
- April 24th (Cheadle) Workshop at the Together Trust Centre. Contact: Joanne Halliwell inca@togethertrust.org
- April 25 leave UK for Singapore
- April 27-28 Singapore talks

Autumn

- October 15th (Cornwall) Contact: Judy Shoten jshorten@cornwall.gov.uk
- October 19th (Middlesbrough) Anna Wood themainproject@hotmail.co.uk

RESEARCH: CAN YOU HELP?

STUDY ON AS ADOLESCENTS’ UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR DIAGNOSIS

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Beth Johnson for contributing the following information:

“I am a Trainee Clinical Psychologist at Southampton University. As part of my doctorate in Clinical Psychology, I am conducting a study, which looks at how adolescents come to know about and understand their diagnosis of Asperger’s Syndrome and how it affects their lives. By carrying out this study, I hope to inform professionals (such as Doctors, Educational Psychologists, Teachers and Clinical Psychologists) so that they have a greater understanding of the issues faced by adolescents with Asperger’s Syndrome, which may then serve to improve service provision.”

Can any persons interested in participating in this study please contact:

Beth Johnson
 Trainee Clinical Psychologist
 Doctoral Programme in Clinical Psychology University of Southampton
 34 Bassett Crescent East
 Highfield
 Southampton
 SO16 7PB
 E-Mail: bj104@soton.ac.uk

READER FEATURE!!!

DRIVING AND ASPERGER SYNDROME

This leaflet has been written by Jenny Lushington and John Harrison. **Jenny Lushington** is a recently retired teacher who specialised in working with autistic children for 25 years. She is also an experienced driver and recently passed her Advanced Driving Test. **John Harrison** is a town planner by profession. He passed his Advanced Driving Test aged 28 and aged 51 was diagnosed as having mild Asperger Syndrome. The authors met through Autism London and the North East London and Essex Group of the Institute of Advanced Motorists. The

authors would like to thank those who have provided help in preparing this leaflet including Autism London, members of the Autism London Asperger Group, DANDA, the Institute of Advanced Motorists, members of the London Borough of Waltham Forest Road Safety Section and the National Autistic Society.

Jenny and John have very kindly agreed to allow their leaflet to be printed in *The ASC Good Practice Guide*, for the benefit of our many readers. They would like, however, to have their excellent resource printed in hard copy format and also to be included on as many relevant websites as possible, so that as many people affected by Asperger Syndrome as possible can benefit from access to this leaflet.

If any individual/organization is able to provide John and Jenny with advice or support on this matter, can they please contact them, via *The ASC Good Practice Guide*. Many thanks in advance for your support!

Driving and Asperger Syndrome

Part 1

Tips and tactics for people with Asperger Syndrome who want to learn to drive or improve their driving skills

In a society where a driving licence is considered to be a "right" there is an expectation that one will be able to drive. Someone with Aspergers has to realise that this is one of several ways in which the syndrome can prove to be debilitating and that they may not be able to succeed in passing the driving test. This leaflet aims to help alleviate some of the problems that people with Aspergers experience when learning to drive and hopefully maximise their chances of getting through the test. It will also be helpful to an Asperger who can already drive in understanding how their condition may impact on driving. It will enable them to drive better and possibly take an advanced driving test

Though Asperger Syndrome is a disability, it can also in many ways be an asset. One advantage is determination. Aspergers are people who are reluctant to give up a cause. Thus, if an Asperger really wants to drive, though it may prove to be hard graft because of the problems referred to in this leaflet, they will usually succeed in the end. Like most people with Asperger Syndrome, once you have learned something you do not forget it.

Difficulties likely to arise and tips to help overcome them:-

Dispraxia - Driving uses many physical skills such as coordinating hands and feet to move at the same time when changing gear. You may find complex movements such as this difficult or even impossible to carry out. As a result, it may take you a long time to learn to drive or you may find you cannot manage it at all.

Tip: It may help to learn to drive in an automatic car from the outset or to switch to an automatic if after a few driving lessons handling a manual gear change is proving too difficult.

Multi-Tasking - An issue related to dyspraxia is that Aspergers frequently have difficulty multi-tasking which, of course, driving often involves. Aspergers tend to work best when they have one task to concentrate on. You may have difficulty with driving as it frequently involves doing several things at once, e.g. steering, changing gear, looking ahead, anticipating possible

hazards, etc. Such multi-tasking is not easy, especially as you have to try and develop all these skills at once when learning.

Tip: To prepare yourself before learning to drive it pays to try and pick up skills of observing traffic, judging speed and distance, looking for hazards, etc while travelling with others or on public transport, even when walking along a street. Watch the drivers; look at the situations where they make observations requiring a judgement, such as whether there is a big enough gap to pull out of a side turning or whether there is sufficient time to overtake. With young teenagers parents can develop these skills by discussing such situations when driving in the family car. Learning to cope with cycling in traffic will also help as would Cycle Proficiency Training.

Tip: Watching videos on the basics of driving skills before starting driving lessons can assist you in developing observation and judgement skills as well as highlighting where, how and what to observe, so you will have some expertise in these respects already.

Tip: Parents of very young children with Aspergers could ensure their child is given toy cars with steering mechanisms which simulate the real thing as closely as possible as there is no harm in starting very young.

Estimating - You may have difficulty estimating speed and distance, again an important skill in driving. As already indicated, this aspect of driving can be worked on before you take to the road by observing traffic and also by watching videos. Even if you have passed your test and had quite a bit of experience, estimating speed and distance can still be something of a problem.

Tip: Be cautious in situations like emerging from side turnings or overtaking - if in doubt hold back.

Tip: Learn simple cues. For example, when stopping behind another car in a line of traffic or similar situation remember to leave enough room between the two vehicles so you can see its wheels in front of your bonnet, so if it breaks down you will have room to pull round it. A way to help remember this is to say "Tyres on Tarmac" or "ToT". Similarly when driving on the open road you should leave sufficient gap between your vehicle and the one in front, so if the vehicle ahead has to do an emergency stop you have time to stop too - this should be a gap of two seconds and you can measure this by noting when the vehicle in front passes a feature such as a mark on the carriageway or a road sign and you should have time to say 'Only a fool breaks the 2 second rule' before your vehicle reaches that feature. The highlighted phrases are examples of cues which will help you remember these principles and you may be able to think of others to help you with driving processes.

Rule Application - You may find learning new skills easier when there is a clear set of guidelines and rules. Motoring is quite rule-orientated with the Highway Code and "the System ^[1]". This element of driving would seem to be straightforward, but life is not that simple. You as a driver with Aspergers will keep to the rules (as any good driver should, of course!). The problem is however that other drivers do not always keep to the rules e.g. getting in the wrong lane and changing at the last minute to get an advantage in traffic, coming out of a side turning directly in front of you etc. You may find other drivers breaking the rules very frustrating. Driving is a bit like football. There is a set of rules to comply with but there is also interaction between the players and it may be more difficult for you to get the finer points of this interaction (and also to continue the analogy have the necessary coordination to be able to handle the ball/car).

Tip: A large element of good driving is being aware that others sometimes break the rules, and being prepared for this, e.g. looking out for it and allowing room in case the other motorist should make a sudden unexpected manoeuvre contrary to the principles of the Highway Code, etc.

Tip: There are very occasionally situations when it is appropriate to break rules, e.g. going the wrong side of a "keep left" bollard when your own carriageway is blocked by an accident or driving onto the pavement when otherwise you would impede the progress of an emergency vehicle. It must be emphasised, however, that such situations are very much the exception and before carrying out such an action you must be sure it is entirely safe to do so. .

Coping with Road Rage - All drivers make mistakes, but sadly we are in a world where drivers are frequently intolerant of others' mistakes. There is an apocryphal story that there is an empty display case in the Institute of Advanced Motorists' headquarters with the label, "When we find the perfect driver we will have them stuffed and put in here"! People with Asperger Syndrome often have difficulty when criticised. Thus, you may easily get upset in this sort of situation and not know how to respond to it. If you make a mistake whilst driving, you are often likely to get verbal abuse, rude gestures or similar and coping with this can be difficult for any one.

Tip: Remember that all drivers make mistakes and somebody who overreacts to one has as much of a problem as someone who has difficulty handling criticism.

Tip: If you do make a mistake, whether it is criticised by another or not, it is not the end of the world. Try and learn from it and improve your driving. Also, if appropriate acknowledge your mistake by giving an apologetic wave or saying sorry if car windows are open so you can be heard.

Tip: If someone criticises your driving, pause for a short time, e.g. count slowly to ten, before reacting to it. If you are really upset about something, it might be an idea to park and have a break for a few minutes before driving on.

Body Language - In many situations people communicate with other drivers or pedestrians (or driving instructors) by facial expression and gesture, for example if a driver wants to know if another one is going to let them out of a side turning into a queue of traffic or if a pedestrian wants to know if a driver is going to let them cross the road. This may be one of the obvious difficulties you experience and you may need to be constantly trying to improve your awareness of facial expression, and related issues such as body language.

Tip: Be aware that this may be a potential problem and allow for it. Where appropriate, make sure your own intentions are clear, e.g. by using indicators and positioning your car correctly for the situation.

Concentration - All drivers have to try and focus on what they are doing all the time, but no human being is capable of providing 100% concentration. You, however, may have a particular ability to concentrate very well, especially when it is a task you enjoy. Thus you should be able to focus on your driving at least as well and possibly better than others. Sometimes, however, people with Aspergers have difficulty in concentrating for extended periods; if this is the case, it is advisable to take frequent breaks when driving.

Coping with particular distractions may however be a problem for you; sudden, loud or irritating noises, intermittent noise from windscreen wipers, passengers starting to talk loudly or behaving boisterously etc. This may be a big problem whilst driving.

Tip: Make sure you are familiar with all the 'noises' made by the car you are driving, then when you hear the noise you will find it easier to put it into the back of your mind and not become distracted.

Tip: If noise from passengers is likely to be a problem it is wise to advise them of this issue at the start of the journey and trust they respect your needs.

Tip: You may need to cease conversation with passengers in order to concentrate on a potentially hazardous situation on the road ahead. If as a driver you tend to do this, advise your passengers this may happen at the start of the journey as otherwise they might find this disconcerting.

Tip: If a noise problem occurs which cannot be resolved immediately, e.g. if you are being distracted by a baby in the car crying inconsolably, you should pull over and stop when it is safe to do so until the situation is dealt with.

Tip: Another possible distraction is the car radio. You will need to decide whether to use a car radio whilst driving, though this is of course a decision for all drivers, not just those with Aspergers.

Tip: A related issue is that even a reasonably experienced driver with Aspergers may concentrate on one hazard developing ahead and ignore another beyond that because of difficulties multi-tasking, e.g. you may concentrate on a car about to come out of a side turning and miss seeing a pedestrian about to cross the road beyond this. It is important to try and be aware of this possibility and do your best to avoid it by looking ahead throughout the whole field of vision and being prepared to take action in relation to any hazards developing.

Glare - Whilst glare from the sun or headlights can be a problem for all drivers, it can particularly be so for those with Aspergers as they have difficulty in adapting to sudden changes in lighting.

Tip: Try and anticipate situations where you might be faced with sudden glare, e.g. when coming out of a tunnel or from under trees into bright sunlight or at night when you can see a car approaching with its headlights on full beam. If you are having difficulty direct your eyes towards the kerb or side of the road well in front whilst using your peripheral vision to focus directly on what is happening in front of you until the glare has passed. Otherwise, slow down or stop.

Learning to Drive

Some people learn to drive more easily than others. Ability to learn to drive is not a measure of intelligence or other abilities, so if you find that you need a lot of lessons, you should not compare yourself unfavourably with others just because you have Asperger Syndrome and take a while to pass your test.

Choosing an Instructor - It is important for any learner driver to have an instructor who suits their temperament and with whom they can develop a positive relationship. This is particularly so for you as a person with Aspergers. We all have difficulty learning when we are stressed, but this may be particularly so for you. The instructor should be made aware of the issues relating to Asperger Syndrome and driving - the easiest way to do this is, of course, to give them a copy of this leaflet and one or two general leaflets on Asperger Syndrome.

Part 2

Tips for Driving Instructors

First of all it may be very helpful for you as a driving instructor about to start teaching someone who has Asperger Syndrome to find out about them personally and their condition from someone close - parent or partner. They may be able to give you some insights into their way of learning and reacting. It may also be helpful for you, the instructor, to read the previous section of this leaflet, Tips and information for people with Aspergers, as well as this other information about Aspergers.

Below we have detailed some of the effects of Asperger Syndrome that will have implications for the learning process, how they can be recognised in the learner and how you may be able to deal with the situation should the need arise. All of the following conditions can give rise to a higher state of anxiety for the AS learner; it is far more difficult to learn anything in this state so easing anxiety at all times is the key to you affectively teaching new skills.

Language - *Aspergers tend to take everything quite literally and do not understand colloquial expressions, irony and certain types of jokes. Thus, for example, saying "Put your foot to the floor" might be interpreted as take your foot off the accelerator or even accelerate to the maximum! Saying 'that was really good' in an ironic tone of voice (meaning it was bad) may be understood as praise!!*

*Most learners with Aspergers will not be able to take **hints** that they are doing something wrong. Instruction needs to be clear and direct and positive, though not to the point of being too blunt in view of the difficulty many Aspergers have handling criticism. They will always be trying their best.*

Dispraxia - *This is a difficulty in coordination movements especially when it involves using hands and feet at the same time - it is noticeable as a natural clumsiness. If this is a big problem for the learner driver it may be best for them to use an automatic car thus allowing them to concentrate on other aspects*

Multi-Tasking - *an issue closely related to dispraxia in that Aspergers frequently have difficulty doing more than one thing at a time, such as looking in the mirror, signalling and controlling the car in a manoeuvre. Therefore the instructions given need to be explained in advance and then given slowly in sequence at the time, just giving the learner time to comply before moving on to the next movement. After a very short while the sequence will be remembered as one whole action - especially if given the same verbal cue e.g. MSM (mirror signal manoeuvre).*

Estimating - *Aspergers often have difficulty estimating speed and distance, again an important skill in driving. The cue to wait longer rather than rush when pulling out of junctions therefore may need to be reinforced and visual cues such as being able to see the tyres of the car in front when in slow traffic and the two-second rule (Only a fool breaks the 2 second rule.) for steady driving will need to be taught.*

Generalisation - *Instructors need to be aware that the Asperger might not apply knowledge acquired in one area to another. Thus they need to ensure that skills and rules applied to one situation are generalised and used in all situations. For example, a*

driver will be told to use the horn to draw attention to their presence when a pedestrian is possibly about to step into the vehicle's path, and also when another motorist is possibly about to drive into it.

It is important for the instructor to provide the Asperger pupil with as wide a range of driving situations as possible, e.g. different traffic and weather conditions, different times of day, urban/rural, different routes to aid generalisation of learning skills. As an example, one young man known to us became a proficient driver, but did not realise until somebody told him three years later that he could use main beam headlights on open unlit roads!

Success for the Aspergers pupil will be highly likely if the instructor approaches driving in a **systematic manner**, teaching all aspects in a structured way including what might otherwise be considered to be the glaringly obvious.

Implications of signs - The Asperger pupil may be able to learn the theory aspect of driving very well but problems could arise in understanding the implication of this theory when driving. The instructor needs to ensure theoretical knowledge is applied to real-life situations. For example, as well as learning to recognise the school sign in the Highway Code, the pupil will need to know this means at certain times of day they need to watch out for children entering and leaving the school, therefore taking even more care than usual.

Rule Application - People with Asperger Syndrome work best when there is a framework of rules. Motoring is quite rule-orientated with the Highway Code and "the System" (as in the Police Driving Manual, "Roadcraft"). This would suggest this element of driving would not be a problem to them, but life is not that simple. A driver with Aspergers will always keep to the rules (as any good driver should, of course!). The problem arises when they need to recognise that other road users may not always do the same. Other drivers not keeping the rules can be very frustrating to the Asperger; e.g. when they get into the wrong lane and change at the last minute to get an advantage in traffic, The Asperger pupil will need to learn to take the positive action of being prepared for others' mistakes by allowing adequate time and space for any necessary action.

Body Language - In some situations one communicates with other drivers, pedestrians, etc by facial expression, for example if a driver wants to know if another one is going to let them out of a side turning into a queue of traffic or if a pedestrian wants to know if a driver is going to let them cross the road. Obviously this may be difficult for someone with Asperger Syndrome. They will therefore need to be taught other positive actions to indicate that they have seen/been seen by another and clearly indicate this by their actions e.g. 'stopping to give way - using their indicators or flashing lights to symbolise 'I am here' etc.

Coping with Road Rage -an Asperger pupil may have difficulty coping with others' anger - or in some cases their own show of frustration or reaction to criticism. Therefore they will need to be given or reminded of calming strategies, e.g. deep breathing and counting to 10.

Learning to Drive - the Process

- *Some people learn to drive more easily than others. Obviously those with Aspergers are generally likely to be in the category of slower learners but (like the tortoise) may well succeed brilliantly in the end.*
- *Knowledge others acquire naturally in everyday situations may need to be specifically taught to an Asperger pupil - it pays to take nothing for granted.*
- *Some learners may have been preparing for driving lessons - picking up various skills over several years, e.g. Observing road conditions, roadsigns etc. as a passenger.*
- *It is still advisable to break down the tasks into separate clear instructions given in sequence until they are becoming automatic.*

***Getting to know the Aspergers pupil** - It is important for any learner driver to have an instructor who suits their temperament and with whom they can develop a positive relationship. This is particularly so for Aspergers. In the first few sessions developing communication, trust and confidence with the pupil will make the whole process much easier. We all have difficulty learning when we are stressed, but this is particularly so for the Asperger. You may feel that taking on a pupil with Aspergers is too much like hard work but once well taught the Asperger will always remember and apply their learning and therefore can prove to be a very good and competent driver even going on to advance their skills. It is also worth bearing in mind it might be possible to develop a niche market teaching Asperger pupils. Many people with Aspergers know others through attending groups for those with the syndrome, so success can mean you are recommended to others.*

Having read this and the accompanying leaflet should, we hope give you the instructor a head start in what can become a very rewarding process for you and your pupil. Good Luck...

Part 3 Practical Licensing Issues

The UK Forum of Mobility Centres has 17 centres where those with disabilities, including Asperger Syndrome, can have a preliminary off-road assessment to see if they are likely to be able to learn to drive successfully and those with more severe Aspergers may wish to avail themselves of this facility.

All drivers have to take the theory as well as the practical driving test. The element of the test with questions about the Highway Code, etc should usually be relatively easy for the Asperger as they have good memories and are often good at quizzes. Sometimes, however, people with Aspergers Syndrome also have problems of dyslexia. If this is the case they are entitled to ask for extra time to take the theory test or other appropriate special provision.

Passing the hazard perception test might be more difficult. You will need a clear idea of what this involves. *A hazard is a situation on the road which may cause you to have to slow down or change your direction.* The hazard perception test is concerned with testing your ability to recognise what is classed as a developing hazard. A car parked by the side of the road may mean you have to slow down or change your direction to drive past it, but this would not be classed as a developing hazard in terms of the perception test. It would be classed as one if the driver started signalling to move away or if a

vehicle was coming in the opposite direction and there might not be enough room for both to get by. Most videos on driving will explain what hazards are but the Driving Standards Agency video and accompanying booklet, "What if?" is particularly recommended as it not only explains what a hazard is, but it also shows how the hazard perception test and also the theory test are conducted. If after watching this potential you are still having difficulty recognising what a hazard is, you should seek further advice from your instructor. It is important to be aware that in the hazard perception test one only has one shot at going through it as one cannot go back and review answers unlike in the rest of the theory test, but this is, of course, how driving is in reality on the road!

Legal requirements

When applying for a driver's licence you should notify DVLA that you have the syndrome. This is on the basis that it is a condition which may affect the ability to drive safely. It is, of course, important to be aware that one might be prevented from having a licence which could be very disappointing. When someone with Asperger Syndrome is added to a car insurance policy, the insurance company should similarly be notified that they have Aspergers. Failure to do so may result in a claim being refused if the condition then comes to light and possibly also prosecution for driving without insurance.

Advancing

Being members of the Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM), the authors of this leaflet strongly believe that driving skills are something to be developed after passing the Department for Transport test. Obviously passing an advanced test such as the IAM or RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) ones are a way of measuring such development. Whilst some people go on to take an advanced test within a few weeks or months of passing their DOT test, they are the exception. Most people need some years' experience before taking a further test. For the person who has had difficulty learning to drive, whether as a result of Aspergers or otherwise, getting to this higher stage may take a while and of course they may not be able to achieve it. Whether one actually passes a test to demonstrate them, it is certainly worth working on your driving skills. This leaflet is intended to help a person with Aspergers to do this and also, for example, an IAM observer with such a candidate.

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