

Asperger's syndrome
F O U N D A T I O N

Sheet Title: An Introduction to Asperger's Syndrome / Autism without a Learning Disability

Asperger's Syndrome / Autism without a Learning Disability is characterized by difficulties within six main areas:

- 1. Social Interaction**
- 2. Social Communication**
- 3. Imagination** (e.g. trying to imagine what others are thinking)
- 4. Sensory Sensitivity** (e.g. to bright light, noise, textures, tastes, touch and smells)
- 5. Motor Skills**
- 6. Organisational Ability**

SOCIAL INTERACTION

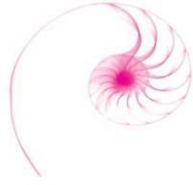
The ability to pick up non-verbal cues or 'read minds' is often lacking in people with this condition. Consequently, they may appear self-focused and lacking in empathy, when in fact, they are simply trying to navigate social situations. This means that they continually struggle to make and sustain personal and social relationships.

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

People with Asperger's Syndrome often have good language skills, but find it hard to grasp the underlying meaning of conversation and understand jokes, idioms, metaphors and sarcasm. Their voices often sound monotonous and their language pedantic and idiosyncratic. They often have narrow interests which dominate their conversations and they find it difficult to have a mutual sharing of ideas and feelings.

IMAGINATION AND FLEXIBILITY OF THOUGHT

People with Asperger's Syndrome find it hard to think flexibly and in abstract ways. This manifests itself in several ways: an inability to understand other people's points of view, taking things literally, and difficulties applying knowledge and skills across different settings with different people.



Asperger's syndrome
F O U N D A T I O N

DIFFICULTY WITH SENSORY STIMULI

People with Asperger's Syndrome are sensitive and even hyper-sensitive to certain sounds or sensory stimuli, such as noise, smell and light. This can lead to a feeling of being 'overloaded' and often results in angry outbursts.

This often means they live in fear of unexpected sensory stimuli which can lead to great anxiety. It is essential to identify these sensory stimuli in order to avoid angry outbursts and anxiety.

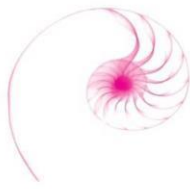
MOTOR DIFFICULTIES

Motor skill impairment is reflected in clumsy, awkward and gauche movement as well as coordination problems. These can lead to difficulties in activities such as writing, drawing and sports.

ORGANISATIONAL DIFFICULTIES

Most people with Asperger's Syndrome need a highly structured environment, relying on the help of others to create a sense of order.

Unexpected situations or changes can cause them considerable distress, whilst their poor organisational skills can cause them further confusion and anxiety as they try to manage their lives.



Asperger's syndrome
F O U N D A T I O N

Lorna Wing (Burgoine and Wing, 1983) described the main clinical features of AS as:

- Lack of empathy
- Naive, inappropriate, one-sided interaction
- Little or no ability to form friendships
- Pedantic, repetitive speech
- Poor nonverbal communication
- Intense absorption in certain subjects
- Clumsy and ill-coordinated movements and odd postures.

These are positive traits commonly associated with AS:

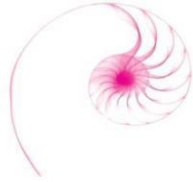
- Honesty
- Reliability
- Dedication
- Determination

Tony Attwood has described Asperger's Syndrome as, "*a different way of approaching life, one that is dominated by the pursuit of knowledge and truth*". He also says that great advances in science and art have been attributable to people with Asperger's Syndrome.

There has been a significant increase in the number of women who are diagnosed with the condition, who were previously under-diagnosed due to their differing symptom presentation. Females with Asperger's Syndrome frequently went undetected in early childhood because they were better at observing and mimicking others, enabling them to act appropriately in social situations.

Females are most commonly diagnosed during secondary school after the emergence of secondary disorders such as anxiety, depression, Borderline Personality Disorder, or Anorexia.

In adulthood, challenges with employment or relationships may lead women to seek explanations for their differences. Additionally, having a child with autism can prompt a mother's diagnosis, given the 50:50 likelihood that a child will have an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) if the mother does.



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F O U N D A T I O N

THE EFFECTS OF LIVING WITH ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

Collectively, the characteristics of Asperger's Syndrome contribute to the extreme isolation experienced by those with this condition. Often misunderstood and rejected, they have very low self-esteem which is usually expressed by anger and blame at the world around them.

Asperger's Syndrome is often not recognised or diagnosed. It is common for children to attend mainstream schools, where they find the day-to-day life complex and difficult to deal with. They find it hard to make friends because they are seen as different by their teachers and peers, and as a result, they often experience loneliness and bullying.

Children and young people with Asperger's Syndrome may also show signs of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Dyspraxia and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) as well as difficulties with impulse control and anger management.