

What Is Asperger Syndrome?

By Thaashida L. Hutton, M.S., CCC-SLP

Asperger syndrome, also called Asperger's, is a disorder where individuals demonstrate social-language difficulties and behaviors similar to those seen in children with autism. Asperger's is often referred to as "High Functioning Autism" because it may be a milder version of autistic spectrum disorders or pervasive developmental disorders. Children with Asperger's often have normal intelligence, an exceptional talent or skill, and/or an extraordinary vocabulary. Their language development appears to be typical; however, these individuals often have difficulty understanding and using nonverbal cues (gestures, body language) for social interactions.



What Causes Asperger Syndrome?

At this point there is no known cause of Asperger syndrome. Many researchers believe that the cause of Asperger's is brain abnormalities. Some studies show structural differences in the brains of typical children versus those of children with Asperger's. A strong genetic component may also be a contributing factor.

What Are Some Characteristics of Asperger Syndrome?

- Obsessive routines (dislikes transition/change)
- Hypersensitivity (dislikes certain sounds, tastes, smells, and/or sights)
- Reduced or restricted range of interest (obsesses over a particular subject)
- Difficulty determining proper personal space (stands/sits too close or too far from others)
- Dislike of physical contact (prefers not to be touched)
- Unusual tone and/or rate of speech (speaks in a high-pitched voice or very quickly/slowly)
- Low self-esteem (has negative thoughts about oneself)
- Difficulty understanding figurative language (misinterprets jokes, is very literal)

How Is Asperger Syndrome Diagnosed in Children?



The diagnosis of Asperger's is a two-stage process. Stage One includes a developmental screening with the family doctor or pediatrician. Stage Two includes a comprehensive team evaluation. This team is usually made up of a neurologist, psychologist, speech-language pathologist, and other related professionals. The assessments look at neurology and genetics, cognition and language, learning styles, and independent living skills. The communication portion evaluates nonverbal communication (eye-gaze, gestures), nonliteral language (idioms, jokes), pragmatics (turn-taking, topic maintenance), patterns of inflection (vocal stress and volume), and content (information sharing). The physician looks at the overall test results and the child's developmental history in order to make recommendations and/or a diagnosis.

What Treatment Options Are Available?

There is no "one-size-fits-all" treatment package for children with Asperger's; however, specialists generally agree that early intervention is best. Effective treatment programs teach tasks in a step-by-step format, engage the child's attention, and offer continuing reinforcement for behavior. Following a predictable schedule can help reduce fear of change/transition. A treatment program may include:

- **Parent education and training**—teach parents techniques to use at home
- **Behavior modification**—use step-by-step techniques for problem solving and improving behavior
- **Social skills training**—work in groups to reinforce the necessary skills for successful social interactions in different environments
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy**—help the child process feelings and learn how to manage emotions while reducing obsessive/compulsive behaviors
- **Medications**—treat coexisting conditions (hyperactivity, depression, compulsions)
- **Occupational therapy**—treat hypersensitivity and poor motor coordination
- **Educational interventions**—use visuals, pre-teach information, and/or use simple directions

If you suspect that your child may have Asperger's, please contact your physician or pediatrician for an evaluation or referral to a professional for assessments. For more information, contact any of the following organizations or associations listed below:

Autism Network International (ANI)

P.O. Box 35448

Syracuse, NY 13235-5448

jjincl@mailbox.syr.edu

<http://ani.autistics.org>

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

National Institutes of Health, DHHS

6001 Executive Blvd. Rm. 8184, MSC 9663

Bethesda, MD 20892-9663

nimhinfo@nih.gov

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

Tel: 301-443-4513/866-615-NIMH (-6464)

TTY: 301-443-8431

Fax: 301-443-4279



MAAP Services for Autism, Asperger Syndrome, and PDD

P.O. Box 524

Crown Point, IN 46308

info@maapservices.org

<http://www.maapservices.org>

Tel: 219-662-1311

Fax: 219-662-0638

Resources

Kirby, Barbara L. What is Asperger syndrome? *Online Asperger syndrome information and support*. Retrieved October 27, 2008, from <http://www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/aswhatisit.html>

Kowalski, T. P. What is Asperger's? Retrieved October 27, 2008, from <http://web.mac.com/socialpragmatics/Site/Asperger.html>

Asperger syndrome fact sheet. *National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke*. Retrieved October 27, 2008, from http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/asperger/detail_asperger.htm



Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below may be helpful when working with children who have Asperger syndrome. Visit www.superduperinc.com or call 1-800-277-8737. Click the links below to see the product description.

Webber® Photo Cards—Emotions

Ask for item #WFC-264 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=WFC264&stid=>

What Do You Say...What Do You Do...™ At Home?

Ask for item #GB-242 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=GB242&stid=>

What Do You Say...What Do You Do...™ At School?

Ask for item #GB-241 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=GB241>