

Asperger's Syndrome

Characteristics and Educational Implications



Asperger's Syndrome

- Originally identified by Hans Asperger, a Viennese pediatrician
- Officially recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders in 1994
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder
- Neurologically based
- Spectrum disorder, symptoms range from mild to severe



Diagnostic Criteria

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)

- Qualitative impairment in social interaction*
- Restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interest and activities*
- Significant impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning
- No significant delay in language
- No significant delay in cognitive development or in the development of self-help skills and adaptive skills
- Criteria is not met for another Pervasive Developmental Disorder (Autistic Disorder, PDD-NOS, Rett's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder)



Diagnostic Criteria

Social impairments are manifested by at least two of the following:

1. Marked impairment in the use of multiple nonverbal behavior such as eye to eye gaze, facial expression, body postures and gestures to regulate social interaction
2. Failure to develop appropriate peer relationships
3. A lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests or achievement with other people
4. Lack of social or emotional reciprocity



Diagnostic Criteria

Restrictive repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests and activities as manifested by at least one of the following:

1. Encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal in intensity or focus
2. Inflexible adherence to specific routines or rituals
3. Stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms
4. Persistent preoccupation with parts of objects




Specific Difficulties Which May Affect Participation in Educational Environments

- Preoccupied with their own agenda
- Wants to fit in, but doesn't know how and will get extremely frustrated by their social awkwardness
- Unable to "read" others' needs and perspectives
- Lacks common sense
- Inflexible and difficulty coping with change
- Difficulty in accepting criticism or correction



Specific Difficulties Which May Affect Participation in Educational Environments

- Easily stressed and emotional vulnerable
- Unusual speech volume, inflection or rate
- Difficulty understanding idioms
- Will revert to favorite topic of interest in conversations
- Difficulty understanding humor
- Failure to distinguish between private and public behaviors and conversation



Specific Difficulties Which May Affect Participation in Educational Environments Specific Difficulties

- Naive trust in others
- Difficulty in understanding others' personal space
- Fine motor difficulties



Support and Accommodations

- Assist student in learning self-advocacy skills (notifying instructors, requesting accommodations)
- Access to tutors, not only for academic support but also for organizational difficulties
- Additional time to process information or organize responses
- Extended time for tests
- Assistance in locating a distraction free environment for studying and taking tests



Support and Accommodations

- Seating accommodations (arrange for student to arrive early if necessary)
- Accommodations for group work, projects and presentations
- Encourage use of systematic organizational systems for both academic and other aspects of college life (calendars, checklists etc)
- Support and assistance in selecting courses which capitalize on the student's strengths and interests or courses that draw on factual memory and/or visual perceptual skills
- Courses that require abstract verbal processing, flexible problem solving, extensive writing or social reasoning may require more support and accommodation



Support and Accommodations

- Assistance in identifying possible social connections
- Advance planning and “training” in campus life activities (using the cafeteria, using a campus ID, using a campus map, finding restrooms, using the library)



Asperger's Syndrome Resources

Students with Asperger Syndrome: A
Guide for College Personnel (Wolf,
Brown and Bork)

Autism Asperger Publishing Company

Future Horizons Publishing Company

Indiana Autism Resource Center

TEACCH



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