

## What is Asperger's Syndrome?

Dr Hans Asperger, an Austrian paediatrician, originally described Asperger's Syndrome in 1944. The syndrome has more recently been classified as an "autistic spectrum disorder" (A.S.D.) Children and adults with Asperger's Syndrome are often highly intelligent, but have a distinct profile of abilities that has been apparent since early childhood. **Each person is different. They might have all or only some of the described behaviors to have a diagnosis of AS. These behaviors include the following:-**

### Difficulties with Social Interaction and Subtle Communication Skills:

- Difficulty in developing age-appropriate peer relationships. (e.g. AS children may be more comfortable with adults than with other children).
- Difficulty judging personal space; some motor (physical) clumsiness.
- Speech and language skills impaired in the area of semantics, pragmatics, and prosody (volume control, intonation, inflection, and rhythm). "Stage whispers" at inappropriate moments; many speak with an unusual prosody (tone/expression of voice), eg., a stilted, flatter tone than usual or more undulating, sing-song tone than usual.
- Often with fluent and intelligent speech, they have difficulties with conversation skills and a tendency to be pedantic, often with a formal, set style of speaking; often called "little professor", verbose (wordy).
- Extreme difficulty reading and/or interpreting social cues.
- Difficulty understanding others' feelings, lacking in appropriate empathy.
- Socially and emotionally inappropriate responses.
- Unable to identify social cues and conventions.
- Tendency to interpret language too literally. Difficulty comprehending implied meanings.
- Extensive vocabulary. Reading often (not always) commences at an early age (hyperlexia).
- Stereotyped or repetitive motor (physical) mannerisms.
- Difficulty with appropriate "give and take" of conversation
- Impaired use of non-verbal communication such as eye gaze, facial expression and body language and gestures to regulate a social interaction. Difficulty using these themselves and difficulty reading these in others.

### Narrow/obsessive Interests:

- Often a preoccupation with a particular subject to the exclusion of all others - developing special interests that are often unusual in their intensity and focus. Amasses many related facts. Specific topics may alter

as time passes, but each topic is approached with great intensity.

- Inflexible adherence to routines and a preference for consistency, although they can still prefer a degree of variety within the overall framework of routine.
- “Perseveration”, i.e., they are particularly resistant to being moved on from one activity to a new one, leading to big problems with organisational and time management skills.
- Often (not always) a fascination with maps, globes, routes and statistics.
- Often (not always) a superior rote memory.

The disorder can also sometimes include sensitivity to the environment, loud noises, clothing and food textures, and odors. The exact prevalence rates have yet to be determined, but research suggests that it may be as common as one in 250. It is probably due to factors that affect brain development and not due to emotional deprivation or other psychogenic factors.

**A ‘PERSONALISED’ DESCRIPTION OF ASPERGER’S SYNDROME FROM DR. TONY ATTWOOD, internationally renowned authority on autistic spectrum disorders and author of many helpful books on the topic:-**

**“As a result of my extensive clinical experience, I would like to provide a personalised description of Asperger’s Syndrome that also incorporates the person’s qualities as well as their difficulties.** From my clinical experience I consider that children and adults with Asperger’s Syndrome have a different, not defective, way of thinking.

The person with Asperger’s Syndrome can have difficulty with the management and expression of emotions. Some children and adults with Asperger’s syndrome may have levels of anxiety, sadness or anger that indicate a secondary mood disorder (*editor’s note*: while others have successfully worked these through). There may be problems expressing the degree of love, affection and gratitude expected by others. Fortunately, we now have successful psychological treatment programs to help manage and express emotions.

The person usually has a strong desire to seek knowledge, truth and perfection with a different set of priorities than would be expected with other people. The overriding priority may be to solve a problem rather than satisfy the social or emotional needs of others. The person values being creative rather than co-operative!

There is also a different perception of situations and sensory experiences. The person with Asperger’s syndrome may perceive errors that are not apparent to others, giving considerable attention to detail, rather than noticing the ‘big picture’.

The person is usually renowned for being direct, speaking their mind and being honest and determined and having a strong sense of social justice. The person may actively seek and enjoy solitude, but be a loyal friend and have a distinct sense of humour.”

Dr. Tony Attwood.