

Suggestions:

—Because individuals with AS may not pick up on subtle, non-verbal cues, hints, sarcasm, etc, they may need to have things explained to them very clearly and quite explicitly. A direct approach can avoid confusion; tact will often be too ambiguous. Persons with AS who appear to be very controlling may just be trying to keep a sense of order to allay their own anxiety. Tragically and ironically, when others overhear a family member using this direct and appropriate, but apparently tactless approach, they will, naturally, consider the family member to be rude, and the individual with AS to be the victim of abuse.

—Often AS persons may be uncomfortable asking for help when they do not understand something said to them, as it may make them appear 'slow'. Writing things down may provide them easier understanding than verbal instructions. They may be unable to cope with criticism.

—Anxiety can arise over unexpected changes. A consistent and clear structure is helpful to make the environment more predictable. A calm and consistent approach can help to prevent misinterpretation of physical signals, body language, tone of voice, and mood. For example, the Individual with AS may misinterpret your feelings of concern or fear as feelings of annoyance or anger. It is helpful to use a firm voice when behaviors are not acceptable.

—When a person with AS appears to be aggressive or hostile, it is likely that he/she does not realize it. It may result from not understanding the social rules and inadvertently breaking them.

—Learn to be very aware of literal meanings, implied meaning and metaphorical speech so that you know when your affected family member may have misinterpreted or misunderstood. Learn to be aware when he/she is getting stressed, or when there are conditions likely to cause flash points, so calming strategies can be implemented as soon as possible.

—If you are hurt by something that has been said, make an exaggerated flinch and say 'Ow, that hurt!'; so the AS person can gradually learn that words hurt too, and that you have been hurt.

—Draw up a list of unacceptable behavior which irritates you the most, (keep a diary for a week or a month) and prioritize which issues to work on first. Take small steps to modify that behavior, steps that are carefully worked out on the basis of the underlying causes for the behavior.

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Recommended Reading:

"Asperger's Syndrome in Adults...Is Anyone Listening", Karen Rodman, JKP Publishing

"Asperger's in Love", Maxine Aston, JKP Publishing

"The Other Half of Asperger's Syndrome", Maxine Aston, National Autistic Society, UK

"The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome", Tony Attwood, JKP Publishing

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Contributions can be sent to:

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A 501c(3) Non-profit Organization

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ADULTS WITH ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

One of the main problems encountered by family members of Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) is that the individual appears to be functioning independently, which hides his/her 'hidden disabilities' from outsiders. A person with AS can often manage well in certain areas while having unexpected gaps in ability in other areas. As a result, his/her level of independence is often over-estimated by others who cannot understand why a seemingly articulate and intelligent person should have trouble with simple tasks. The public and many professionals find it hard to believe that someone could be so able and yet so disabled at the same time. For the family, it is bewildering, frustrating, and confusing. It also often prevents the family from being able to do the right thing to protect the individual, their children and others from harm.

Asperger's Syndrome is significantly different from a general learning disability, manifesting itself in unpredictable ways. Without public awareness of the syndrome, behavior of individuals with AS is often misinterpreted as deliberately rude or anti-social.

AS is a communication disorder with an impairment in the areas of social interaction, social communication and imaginative thinking. Each person is uniquely affected and the permutations are extensive. AS generally results in difficulties with:

People with AS may exhibit signs of the following:

Speech and Language

- Speak with odd, obtuse, pedantic, and/or stereotyped language.
- Be difficult to understand..
- Have problems comprehending instructions.
- Not know how to change tone or style for differing circumstances.
- Interpret meaning literally and miss the implications. Misunderstand others' intentions, motivations, meaning, and tone.
- Fail to appreciate tact or politeness.
- Change the subject when asked a direct question.

Non-Verbal Communication

- Have little facial expression, 'wooden', inappropriate or unusual reactions, and gestures.
- Not like others to gesticulate.
- Laugh or smile inappropriately for the context.

Executive Function

- Have trouble managing time.
- Have unconventional ways of dressing.
- Be vulnerable to depression.
- Find it difficult to plan ahead, see consequences, implications, and cause and effect.

Social Interaction

- Lack empathy, remorse.
- Appear selfish, rude, indifferent, and callous.
- Have a very short grieving period, and/or show little, if any grief.
- Lack social initiative, sense of social obligation, social conscience.
- Appear secretive, malicious.
- Lack common sense.
- Have little understanding of others' feelings, emotions, and thoughts.
- Not realize when others need help.
- Not realize that they have done or said something which makes it difficult for others.
- Not pick up on social cues or hints.
- Not realize when they are not wanted or when they bore a listener.

- Leave others feeling nonplussed, taken aback, badly used.
- Appears audacious, galling, or to have a lot of nerve.
- Not realize when they are being 'conned'.
- Have childish reactions to problems, ignoring them or walking away.
- Fail to modify behavior to take into account others' social status, age gender, or emotional state.
- Have unrealistic expectations of others' abilities, whether children or adults.
- Have difficulty making or keeping friends or understanding what the role of a friend is.
- Be extremely friendly and generous beyond reasonable bounds.
- Be unaware of conventional personal hygiene or domestic hygiene.
- Find others' behavior puzzling and confusing.

Resistance to Change

- Be bound by routine, time, or lists; enjoy repetitive activities.
- Only feel comfortable with what is known, familiar, predictable (even with food and clothing).

Sensory and Motor Co-ordination

- Appear clumsy, have an odd posture, unusual gait, or lax joints.
- Take exceptionally long to learn to ride a bike, drive a car, or play the piano.
- Appear hypersensitive to sound, smell, touch, taste, vision.

Skills and Interests

- Display substantial talents or gifts.
- Have irrational attitudes about money – either careless or miserly.
- Have difficulty learning from past experiences or transferring understanding to new situations (generalizing).
- Require repeated instructions or explanations beyond the norm.
- Have unusual, time-consuming hobbies.
- Not realize how skills from one occupation could be transferred to another.

Coping Strategies

Those who accept the diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome may learn about the condition and be able to co-operate with their families in working out coping strategies and thus reduce anxieties for all of the family. They can learn how and why the disorder affects them, and they can understand that it is not their fault. They often find that they have new opportunities and find support to achieve the things they desire. A diagnosis is good news for many people because it explains to them why they have had problems and provides a means of receiving help to overcome them. An accurate diagnosis is essential to prevent incorrect, potentially counterproductive or hazardous treatments.

Those who cannot accept their diagnosis can be helped by their families who are learning about the condition and understanding how it affects them. Parents and partners can join a support group and talk to other people in the same situation.

Little information is available about adults with Asperger's Syndrome who are in the mild to moderate end of the spectrum; it is a fairly new area of research. Several books have been written by people who have been diagnosed as adults, and these are invaluable in helping people with AS to recognize their own difficulties, enabling their families to understand what it is like to suffer from a communication impairment, and explaining the reasons for the disturbing behaviors. Understanding the reasons behind behavior provides great stress relief.