

I wish you knew...

About Asperger syndrome

Motor Coordination

People with Asperger syndrome may experience problems with motor coordination. Many appear ungainly when walking or running, and may have handwriting that is difficult to read.

Adolescence

The social difficulties experienced by teenagers can be magnified for people with Asperger syndrome, as they have difficulty forming relationships and often become aware that they are different from others. Many people with Asperger syndrome may experience depression at this time, which can reveal itself in withdrawal, self-criticism, and changes in sleep and appetite.

Education

Children with Asperger syndrome are usually educated in mainstream classrooms. However, learning can present many difficulties for them, and providing assistance to help overcome problems associated with literal or concrete thinking, poor organisational and motivational skills and inflexibility may be required.

School years can be extremely challenging for children with Asperger syndrome, as their lack of social skills and other aspects of their behaviour can make them seem odd to other children. Help in developing social skills will support a child in interaction with other children.

Autism SA Services

- Diagnosis
- Training & Consultancy
- Early Development
- School Support
- Day Options
- Employment Services
- Family Services
- Community Participation
- Respite Services
- Information Services

*For details refer to our
Outline of Services
brochure or website
www.autismsa.org.au*



Info Line: 1300 288 476

Email: admin@autismsa.org.au

Website: www.autismsa.org.au

Autism Association of South Australia Inc.
trading as 'Autism SA'

What is Asperger syndrome?

Asperger syndrome is a pervasive developmental disorder that is considered part of the autism spectrum, and is characterised by difficulties in communication, social behaviour and repetitive or restricted interests and activities. Asperger syndrome is thought to be present at birth, and is considered a life long condition. Asperger syndrome is named after Hans Asperger, a Viennese psychiatrist, who first described the syndrome in 1944, around the same time as Leo Kanner described autism. The term Asperger syndrome was not widely used until the late 1980s.

In his study, Asperger described children with the same social deficits and restricted patterns as those with autism, but who met early language milestones and had predominantly functional intelligence.

What is the cause of Asperger syndrome?

Currently there is no known cause of Asperger syndrome. However, research indicates that genetic, biochemical, neurological, viral or problems during pregnancy and birth may be implicated in the development of the syndrome.

How common is Asperger syndrome?

Recent international research (Fombonne & Chakarati, 2005) suggests that the best estimate for the prevalence of all Autism Spectrum Disorders is 6 per 1000 people. For Asperger syndrome alone, the research data is unclear with estimates ranging from 3.5 in 1000 to 7 in 1000 (Ehlers & Gillberg, 1993).

In Australia, one in 160 people have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (Wray 2007) making it one of the most common disabilities. It is more common than Cerebral Palsy, Cystic Fibrosis, Down syndrome, vision impairment and hearing loss.

Can Asperger syndrome be cured?

At present there is no cure for Asperger syndrome. With appropriate intervention and significant support from families and professionals, some people with Asperger syndrome are able to live independently. However, many people with Asperger syndrome require support of varying levels throughout their lives.

Communication

People with Asperger syndrome develop language at the usual age or slightly later, but use their language in a pedantic and precise manner. Features such as unusual voice characteristics, poor conversational skills, a tendency to talk at people and better expressive than receptive language skills are common in these people.

Jokes, irony, sarcasm and metaphors are difficult for people with Asperger syndrome to understand. For examples metaphors such as “I could eat a horse” may be understood as the desire to eat a horse and not as extreme hunger; and irony such as “Could you be any louder?” may be interpreted as a desire for more noise rather than wanting quiet.

The use and understanding of non-verbal communication, including eye contact, facial expression and body language, is also problematic for individuals with Asperger syndrome.

Social Behaviour

People with Asperger syndrome have difficulty understanding the rules governing social behaviour. This impairs their ability to develop peer relationships, and often makes them seem aloof, rude and socially insensitive. Because people with Asperger syndrome have difficulties understanding how their behaviour affects others, they can often appear to be self-centred.

Interpreting and expressing emotions are difficult for people with Asperger syndrome and they are often thought to be unfeeling and unsympathetic.

Restricted Patterns of Behaviour

Odd or eccentric preoccupations and a restricted range of interests are common in individuals with Asperger syndrome. People with Asperger syndrome often accumulate large amounts of information and statistics about their interests, and may question other people, and talk on their topic for long periods of time. The interest taken in solitary pursuits is typically obsessive, and it dominates the person’s life. For people with Asperger syndrome these interests provide structure to their environment.

Individuals with Asperger syndrome often insist on following non-functional routines or rituals, and can become distressed over changes in small, non-functional details of their environment ie. the need to sit in the same spot every day at school/work. Engaging in routine or ritualistic behaviour often helps them to remain calm. Stereotypical motor mannerisms, such as body stiffening and hand flapping are also often seen in people with Asperger syndrome.

Sensory Difficulties

People with Asperger syndrome may have unusual responses to sensory input, which can make it difficult for them to understand their environment and what is going on around them. Over reacting to sensory input, for example sound and tactile stimuli, may cause them to become overwhelmed, resulting in anxiety or panic. Alternatively, some people with Asperger syndrome may under-react to sensory input, tolerating unusually high levels of sensory stimulation, for example pain and temperature.