

## **ASPERGER'S SYNDROME: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS**

- 1. Keep routines in the classroom clear and consistent.** Provide students with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) with additional guidance during more unstructured times and transitions. **Give as much advanced notice** as possible when you are aware of a change or disruption in the child's schedule.
- 2. Do not assume that the child is not listening or paying attention to you if they avoid eye contact.** Children with AS often have an easier time concentrating when they are not making eye contact and forcing them to look at you may actually break their concentration.
- 3. Develop a schedule with the child to keep track of homework and other assignments** since many children with AS struggle with organization. It may even be helpful to check that the homework has gotten into the child's backpack to ensure that it makes it home. Children with AS also might have difficulty taking notes. Consider giving the child a copy of the notes or allowing them to copy another willing student's notes.
- 4. Be explicit and direct** when explaining your own thoughts and feelings. Many children with AS have trouble taking the perspectives of others. Also use specific language when giving instructions (i.e. "go stand by the door until we leave" instead of "go over there"). Also **use concrete language** rather than analogies, idioms, metaphors, and sarcasm.
- 5. Talk with your other students about the fact that many or most students have challenges and that these challenges are different for different people.** Inform other students about children with AS's difficulty reading social situations. If possible, find a few empathetic students to be "buddies" with the child.
- 6. Assign groups** rather than having the child chose when working in pairs, groups, or teams for any purpose in the classroom. This will decrease the possibility of the child with AS being teased or left out.
- 7. Work with the child on decision-making strategies.** Help them reframe a situation where she/he has two choices. **Direct modeling and role-playing** are effective ways of allowing students with AS to develop their decision making and social skills, which are often lacking. Pairing students with AS with a student without AS can be very effective.
- 8. Talk to the student on a regular basis to see what he/she feels is working or not working.** Work with them to find strategies that benefit the student and to find ways to adapt to weaknesses. Also ask what other concerns the child might be having.

**9. Establish a safe place where the child can go to calm down if she/he becomes over-stimulated.** Over-stimulation can often manifest itself in angry or abrupt behaviors. It would be best to wait until the child has calmed down to talk with her or her about what you and/or the child could do differently to avoid the situation in the future.

**10. Remember that although the student may be speaking very intelligibly about a subject, she/he might not understand the meaning of what they are saying.** Children with AS are often more advanced in language production than comprehension.

**11.** Children with Asperger's Syndrome have a tendency to repeat the same statement or question over and over again. **Avoid repeating the answer over and over for the child, raising your voice, or pointing out that the question is being repeated.** Rather, try redirecting the child or finding an alternate way to respond. Also, one might consider allowing the child to write down the question and give the child a response to the particular question in writing. This may relieve some of the child's stress.

**12. Establish an agreed upon touch prompt with the child.** Children with AS often experience a lack of energy or the inability to initiate action, especially when tired, upset, or stressed. Providing the child with a touch prompt that has the right balance of verbal and tactile stimulation can bring him/her back into focus while avoiding potential embarrassment or upset in the classroom.

**13. Creatively incorporate students' intense preoccupations, interests and strengths into the teaching curriculum.** These interests can also be used as positive reinforcements for displays of appropriate behavior.

**14. Keep in constant contact with the parents** of students with AS, as they know what has worked and what has not worked in the past.

**15. Be understanding if a child with AS says something hurtful or offensive.** Chances are that the comment was made because of a lack of comprehension of social norms.

**16. Avoid singling out the student with AS.** Instead of stating an explicit command to that single student, it is preferred that you state the command in the form of a general rule for all to follow.

**15. Use visual cues.** These can include picture schedules, charts, graphs, and posters.

**16. Do not forcefully confront a student with AS.** They are often unable to comprehend others' use of authority, and their behavior can quickly escalate. Instead of maintaining the conflict, it is best to back off from the student and allow them time to calm down and collect themselves.

**17. Remember that students with AS usually cannot view a situation from anyone else's perspective other than their own.** Reading, and working through, published joke books can assist students in practicing this "shift of perspective." Comic strips can also be useful as practice in this aspect.

**18. Be aware that some students with AS may also tend to have poorer motor coordination** than students without AS. Individuals working with these students should be aware of this and games such as pool and table tennis can be used to practice coordination.

**Resources:**

Jordan, R. & Powell, S. (1995). *Understanding and Teaching Children with Autism*. England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Powell, S. (2000). *Helping Children with Autism to Learn*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Sansosti, F.J. & Powell-Smith, K.A. (2006). High-Functioning Autism and Asperger's Syndrome. *Children's Needs III*. 783-792.

Weimer, A. Schatz, A., Lincoln, A., Ballantyne, A., and Trauner, D. (2001). Motor impairment in Asperger Syndrome: Evidence for a deficit in proprioception. *Development and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 22(2): 92-101.

[www.ascendgroup.org](http://www.ascendgroup.org): The Asperger's Syndrome Alliance for Greater Philadelphia (ASCEND Group)

[www.aspennj.org](http://www.aspennj.org): Asperger's Syndrome Education Network (A.S.P.E.N.)

[www.asperger.org/index\\_asc.html](http://www.asperger.org/index_asc.html): Asperger's Syndrome Coalition of the U.S.

[www.aspergers.com](http://www.aspergers.com): Asperger's Disorder Homepage.

[www.aspergersyndrome.org](http://www.aspergersyndrome.org): Online Asperger's Syndrome Information and Support.

[www.autism.com](http://www.autism.com)

[www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)

[www.baltimorepsych.com/aspergers.htm](http://www.baltimorepsych.com/aspergers.htm): How AS Can Affect Children, Adolescents, & Adults.

[www.maapservices.org](http://www.maapservices.org): More Advanced Individuals with Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder

[www.med.yale.edu/chldstdy/autism/](http://www.med.yale.edu/chldstdy/autism/): The Yale Developmental Disabilities Clinic

[www.usautism.org](http://www.usautism.org): U.S. Autism and Asperger Association

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