



CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS WITH ASPERGER SYNDROME

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Social Impairments 1

- Atypical social skills that have a lifelong impact
- Socially isolated, but aware of and interested in others
- Poor "friendship" skills
- Poor incidental social learners
- Limited understanding of social customs and rules
- Rigid application of rules can cause social problems
- Inability to perceive the needs and thoughts of others (Theory of Mind deficits)

Communication Impairments

- Normal language development, except pragmatics
- Good grammar and vocabulary
- Difficulty with conversational discourse
- Unusual prosody (rate and volume)
- Peculiar sense of humor
- Literal interpretations of figurative speech, sarcasm, irony, and words with multiple meanings
- Difficulty reading and using nonverbal communication
 - Facial expressions
 - Body gestures, body language
 - Eye gaze

Restricted Interests

- All-absorbing, encompassing, narrow preoccupation (focus) on a topic
- Pursued with great intensity to the exclusion of other activities
- Repetitive adherence is necessary and becomes the content of social interactions
- Pursuits are solitary, idiosyncratic
- Amass large amounts of factual information related to topic, but more rote than meaningful
- Topic can change over time, but will dominate life of the child (and family)

Insistence on Sameness/Rigidity

- Imposition of routines on self and others
- Routines may be nonfunctional
- Rigidity can be observed as:
 - Insistence on a set order of events
 - Compulsion to finish what was started
 - Insistence on rules

Cognitive Profile

- Average or above intellectual abilities
- Tendency to perform better on VIQ, but:
 - Overall differences are small
 - There are large with-in group differences

- WISC-III Verbal
Higher scores on Information, Similarities, Vocabulary; lower scores on Arithmetic, Comprehension
- WISC-III Performance
Highest score on Block Design; lowest score on Coding
- Difficulty generalizing
- Executive Function deficits
 - The skills required preparing for and executing complex behavior.
 - The ability to: initiate, sustain attention, inhibit impulses, shift sets (mental flexibility), plan

Motor Clumsiness

- Gross and fine motor and visual motor coordination are often observed
- Physical awkwardness; odd gait and/or posture
- Lack of grace or skill in the execution of complex motor movements

Emotional Vulnerability

- Misunderstanding and confusion about other's emotions
- Difficulty expressing own emotions
- Become easily overwhelmed when things do not turn out as rigid thoughts dictate
- Anxiety may be expressed in "waves" of intense panic moving to relative calm
- Greater risk for depression, anxiety, and suicide

Sensory Sensitivities

- Prone to peculiar sensory stimuli responses
- Sensitivity to food taste or texture
- Tactile sensitivity
 - Clothing issue: desire to wear limited wardrobe, overly annoyed by tags, elastic
- Sound sensitivity
- Visual sensitivity, particularly lights
- Sensitivity to pain or temperature (hyper or hypo)
 - Can show limited distress in response to levels of pain
 - Wear heavy jacket on hot days, summer clothes in winter

Academic Difficulties

- Attention difficulties may interfere with learning
- Attend to their own internal agenda
- Poor problem solving skills
- Difficulty understanding abstract concepts
- Literal understanding may interfere with reading comprehension
- Fine motor deficits may interfere with written expression

Behavioral Challenges

- Narrow understanding of social phenomena
- High stress level
- Limited awareness of emotional state
- Lack of control over the environment
- Single-minded pursuit of interest
- Outbursts can range from mild to extreme, withdrawal to aggression