

## COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION: WHAT IS ASPERGER SYNDROME?

Asperger Syndrome is a spectrum disorder which belongs to the group of autism spectrum conditions. It is a developmental disorder and is not acquired. It can only be diagnosed by a clinician, such as a neurodevelopmental paediatrician or clinical psychiatrist. It is a multi-faceted disorder, varying from individual to individual; careful assessment through a multidisciplinary team is essential for an accurate diagnosis.

It is important to note that the diagnosis was dropped from the DSMV (the main diagnostic handbook for psychiatrists), but many continue to diagnose it as a separate condition to Autism. It is defined in the ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases).

It is characterised by difficulties in three areas:

- Social interaction – difficulty in the ability to interact with others, impaired empathy and theory of mind
- Social communication – difficulty in appropriate communication with others
- Unusually intense interest or restrictive, repetitive or stereotyped behaviours

### The main facts:

1. Until recently Asperger Syndrome was thought to be a separate condition to Autism, the definitive difference relating to communication ability
2. It differs from Autism in that the individual usually is cognitively able, sometimes very bright, and always develops language skills
3. It is thought that individuals with AS would like to interact with others, but lack the skills to do so, whereas individuals with Autism are not interested in social interaction in the first place
4. There is a high correlation between AS and depression or other mental health conditions in later life
5. AS overlaps or co-occurs with a number of other conditions, such as dyspraxia, dyslexia or ADHD
6. Roughly 0.5 % of the population are considered to experience AS
7. It is a pervasive developmental disorder impacting every aspect of daily living
8. More boys than girls experience the condition, in a ratio of approximately 4:1

### The main difficulties associated with Asperger Syndrome:

| Main area of difficulty  | Things to look for:   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social interaction</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulty in understanding the rules of social interaction</li> <li>May appear impulsive – calls out in class, interrupts others,</li> <li>Struggles with turn-taking</li> <li>Socially and/or emotionally inappropriate behaviour</li> <li>A loner – isolated in the classroom or playground</li> <li>May have an intense attachment to someone</li> <li>Very clumsy social approach</li> <li>Lacks understanding of others' views and perspectives – 'always right'</li> <li>Doesn't sense the feelings of others</li> <li>Difficulty in predicting what others might say or do</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social communication</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delayed or disordered language</li> <li>Difficulty in picking up on social cues often leading to inappropriate social communication</li> <li>Superficially perfect expressive language</li> <li>Formal and pedantic language</li> <li>Difficulties picking up on innuendo and inference</li> <li>Takes language literally</li> <li>Talks too much, or too little</li> <li>Struggles with hidden meaning when reading</li> <li>Struggles with inference and deduction within the language domain, but may be good at problem-solving with abstract concepts</li> <li>Discrepancy between verbal and nonverbal performance</li> <li>Poor reading comprehension, often unexpected due to high academic skills and/or expressive language performance</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social imagination and inflexibility</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May have an intense interest on one thing/topic</li> <li>Narrow range of interests</li> <li>Struggles with changes in routine</li> <li>Difficulty making connections and generalisation</li> <li>Rules-orientated, and struggles with rule-breakers</li> <li>Difficulty in prioritising</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensitivity</li> </ul>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hypersensitivity to light, sound or touch</li> <li>Fussy eater - reluctance to try new foods</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Movement and coordination difficulties</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May have an awkward gait</li> <li>Stumbles or trips a lot</li> <li>May appear clumsy</li> <li>Organisational difficulties</li> </ul>   |

## Access arrangements in exams:

Asperger Syndrome is a complex condition. A knowledge of the individual's strengths and needs is needed before considering access arrangements in exams.

It is important that any access arrangements reflect the student's normal way of working, and are based upon what they need; they will vary from student-to-student.

### The most common arrangements needed within exams are:

- Extra time – for very slow rate of working experienced through rigidity and inflexibility
- Oral language Modifier – for severe communication and language needs
- Reader or reading pen – for poor reading comprehension, accuracy or speed
- The use of a laptop – to aid organisation of thoughts and ideas in writing, aiding fluency

### Further Information and Support:

- Afaisic: [www.afaisic.org.uk](http://www.afaisic.org.uk)
- Communication Matters: [www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk)
- I Can: [www.ican.org](http://www.ican.org)
- The Communication Trust: [www.thecommunication](http://www.thecommunication)
- Asperger Foundation: [www.aspergerfoundation.org.uk](http://www.aspergerfoundation.org.uk)