



“Almost Autistic”

People with Mild Pervasive Developmental/Autistic Disorders (PDD)

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PART I

Asperger Syndrome (*often referred to as High Functioning Autism or Mild Atypical Pervasive Disorder*) is characterized by:

- Deficits in social interaction
- Unusual responses to the environment similar to those in autism
- Cognitive and communicative development are in normal or near-normal range in the first years of life
- Verbal skills are often an area of relative strength
- A need for routine and sameness
- Idiosyncratic interests may take the form of an unusual and/or highly circumscribed interest, i.e.,
 - train schedules
 - snakes
 - weather
 - telegraph pole insulators, etc.

The commonly described features of Asperger Syndrome include:

- limitation in the ability to empathize
- naïve, inappropriate, one-sided social interaction, little ability to form friendships and consequent social isolation
- pediatric and monotonic speech
- poor nonverbal communication
- intense absorption in circumscribed topics which are learned in rote fashion and reflect poor understanding, conveying the impression of eccentricity
- clumsy, ill-coordinated movements and odd posture (Yale Child Study Center, 1995)

Additional insights are gained when we recall the strong connection with Nonverbal Learning Disabilities (NLD) characterized by deficits in:

- tactile perception
- psychomotor coordination
- visual spatial organization
- nonverbal problem solving

- appreciation of incongruities and humor
- mechanical arithmetic
- social perception } at risk for
- social judgment } withdrawal
- social interaction skills } and mood disorders

Qualitative impairments which often become apparent in individuals with Asperger Syndrome:

- People with Asperger Syndrome are very much aware of others and wish to become friends even though their approaches are often inappropriate or peculiar
 - may appear bored
 - leave in haste
 - need privacy
 - appear insensitive, formal or disregarding the emotions of others
 - can often describe formal expected intentions and social conventions BUT ARE UNABLE to act upon this knowledge intuitively and spontaneously in actual situations
 - appear socially naïve and behaviorally rigid
- Speech may be marked by a constricted range of intonation patterns used routinely regardless of the situation
- Speech may be tangential and circumstantial (appear as a thought disorder)
- May talk incessantly about their favorite subject, but never come to a conclusion.
- This represents their limited efforts to socialize

PART II TREATMENT AND INTERVENTION

1. Skills, concepts, appropriate procedures should be taught directly in a rote fashion with the correct sequence being emphasized verbally (simple social sequence pictures often help).
2. Specific problem-solving strategies need to be taught for handling frequently occurring troublesome situations.
3. Social awareness must be taught directly.
4. Direct teaching of visual sequences with verbal connections will strengthen visual connections and awareness.
5. Self-evaluation should be encouraged to strengthen social awareness and self-esteem.
6. Skills of self-sufficiency may need to be taught, i.e.,
 - exact sequence of social actions
 - daily scheduling of events
 - school and/or job routines
7. Needs to be taught how to recognize a novel situation and deal with it through prescribed sequences.
8. Carefully scrutinize neuropsychological profile to learn individual strengths and weaknesses.

PART III
GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

Behavior exhibited by people with Asperger Syndrome is often challenging.

- These behaviors are not willful or malicious
- Are connected to the disability and must be treated thoughtfully, therapeutically and with careful educational strategies

It is important to:

1. Set clear, consistent limits
 - a. List problematic behaviors
 - b. Devise rule-governed, consistent responses (all staff)
 - c. Repeatedly present to individual as any other curricular lesson
2. Help the Asperger Syndrome individual learn to make choices

Build on their strengths as they are helped to prepare for their future – vocationally and socially.