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Asperger's Syndrome Guide For Teachers

Written by the parents of OASIS Asperger Syndrome Forum
Compiled and Edited by Elly Tucker

The following guide was prepared so that families could have a short description of AS and its behaviors to share with their children's teachers. Since all children are different please feel free to use those items which are appropriate for your child and/or make changes and additions as necessary. Cut and paste all or part, make it your own. The parents of AS children who put together this list hope that it will help teachers to better understand some of the characteristics of our children.

Asperger's Syndrome Guide for Teachers

Written by the Members of the OASIS Asperger Syndrome Forum
Compiled and Edited by Elly Tucker

Hello, we are _____'s parents. Our child has been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, which is a neurobiological disorder on the autistic spectrum. Children with AS may have difficulty using and understanding nonverbal behaviors and developing appropriate peer relationships, in part, because their interactions often lack spontaneous exchange. While they often have keen interests and skills in certain subjects, they also may have a great deal of difficulty with organization. AS children may appear to lack in empathy, have difficulty with sensory issues and very often strongly rely on routine.

You will learn that our child has many strengths. However, listed below are some issues that may become apparent to you as you work with _____. Many of the behaviors you will see are **NOT** under his or her control and they are not a result of malice or willful misbehavior. At times our child simply does not innately know how to appropriately respond. No doubt, you will learn other strategies which will be helpful and we would appreciate your sharing with us. Please call us at any time if you have questions about our child or Asperger Syndrome. We can be reached at:

General Behaviors

- This syndrome is characterized by a sort of "swiss cheese" type of development: that is, some things are learned age-appropriately, while other things may lag behind or be absent. Furthermore, children may have skills years ahead of normal development (for example, a child may understand complex mathematics principles, yet not be able to remember to bring their homework home).
- It is important to remember that just because the child learns something in one situation this doesn't automatically mean that they remember or are able to generalize the learning to new situations.
- Our child reacts well to positive and patient styles of teaching.
- Generally speaking an adult speaking in a calm voice will reap many benefits
- At times, our child may experience "meltdowns" when nothing may help behavior. At times like this, please allow a "safe and quiet spot" where our child will be allowed to "cool off" Try to take note of what occurred before the meltdown (was it an unexpected change in routine, for example) and it's best to talk "after" the situation has calmed down.
- When it reaches a point that things in the classroom are going well, it means that we've gotten it RIGHT. It

doesn't mean that our child is "cured", "never had a problem" or that "it's time to remove support". Increase demands gradually.

- Our child may have vocal outbursts or shriek. Be prepared for them, especially when having a difficult time. Also, please let the other children know that this is a way of dealing with stress or fear.
- When you see anger or other outbursts, our child is not being deliberately difficult. Instead, this is in a "fight/fright/flight" reaction. Think of this as an "electrical circuit overload" (Prevention can sometimes head off situations if you see the warning signs coming).
- Our child may need help with problem-solving situations. Please be willing to take the time to help with this.
- When dividing up assignments, please ASSIGN teams rather than have the other children "choose members", because this increases the chances that our child will be left out or teased.
- Note strengths often and visually. This will give our child the courage to keep on plugging.
- Foster a classroom atmosphere that supports the acceptance of differences and diversity.

Perseverations

- Our child may repeat the same thing over and over again, and you may find this increases as stress increases.
- It is more helpful if you avoid being pulled into this by answering the same thing over and over or raising your voice or pointing out that the question is being repeated. Instead, try to redirect our child's attention or find an alternative way so he/she can save face.
- Allowing our child to write down the question or thought and providing a response in writing may break the stresses/cycle.

Transitions

- Our child may have a great deal of difficulty with transitions. Having a picture or word schedule may be helpful.
- Please try to give as much advance notice as possible if there is going to be a change or disruption in the schedule.
- Giving one or two warnings before a change of activity or schedule may be helpful

Sensory Motor Skills/Auditory Processing

- Our child has difficulty understanding a string of directions or too many words at one time
- Breaking directions down into simple steps is quite helpful
- Using picture cues or directions may also help
- Speaking slower and in smaller phrases can help.
- Directions are more easily understood if they are repeated clearly, simply and in a variety of ways.
- Our child may act in a very clumsy way; she may also react very strongly to certain tastes, textures, smells and sounds.

Stimuli

- He may get overstimulated by loud noises, lights, strong tastes or textures, because of the heightened sensitivity to these things.
- With lots of other kids, chaos and noise, please try to help him find a quiet spot to which he can go for some "solace".
- Unstructured times (such as lunch, break and PE) may prove to be the most difficult for him. Please try to help provide some guidance and extra adults help during these more difficult times.
- Allow him to "move about" as sitting still for long periods of time can be very difficult (even a 5 minute walk around, with a friend or aide can help a lot).

Visual Cues

- Some AS children learn best with visual aides, such as picture schedules, written directions or drawings (other children may do better with verbal instruction)
- Hand signals may be helpful, especially to reinforce certain messages, such as "wait your turn", "stop talking" (out of turn), or "speak more slowly or softly".

Interruptions

- At times, it may take more than few seconds for my child to repond to questions. He needs to stop what he's

thinking, put that somewhere, formulate an answer and then respond. Please wait patiently for the answer and encourage others to do the same. Otherwise, he will have to start over again.

- When someone tries to help by finishing his sentences or interrupting, he often has to go back and start over to get the train of thought back.

Eye Contact

- At times, it looks as if my child is not listening to you when he really is. Don't assume that because he is not looking at you that he is not hearing you.
- Unlike most of us, sometimes forcing eye contact BREAKS her concentration
- She may actually hear and understand you better if not forced to look directly at your eyes.

Social Skills and Friendships

- **Herein lies one of the biggest challenges for AS children.** They may want to make friends very badly, yet not have a clue as to how to go about it.
- Identifying 1 or 2 empathetic students who can serve as "buddies" will help the child feel as though the world is a friendlier place
- Talking with the other members of the class may help, if done in a positive way and with the permission of the family. For example, talking about the fact that many or most of us have challenges and that the AS child's challenge is that he cannot read social situations well, just as others may need glasses or hearing aids.
- Students with Asperger's Syndrome may be at greater risk for becoming "victims" of bullying behavior by other students. This is caused by a couple of factors:
 1. There is a great likelihood that the response or "rise" that the "bully" gets from the Asperger child reinforces this kind of behavior
 2. Asperger kids want to be included and/or liked so badly that they are reluctant to "tell" on the bully, fearing rejection from the perpetrator or other students.

Routine

- This is very important to most AS children, but can be very difficult to attain on a regular basis in our world.
- Please let our child know of any anticipated changes as soon as you know them, especially with picture or word schedules.
- Let him know, if possible, when there will be a substitute teacher or a field trip occurring during regular school hours.

Language

- Although his vocabulary and use of language may seem high, AS children may not know the meaning of what they are saying even though the words sound correct.
- Sarcasm and some forms of humor are often not understood by my child. Even explanations of what is meant may not clarify, because the perspectives of AS child can be unique and, at times, immovable.

Organizational Skills

- Our child lacks the ability to remember a lot of information or how to retrieve that information for its use.
- It may be helpful to develop schedules (picture or written) for him.
- Please post schedules and homework assignments on the board and make a copy for him. Please make sure that these assignments get put into his backpack because he can't always be counted on to get everything home without some help.
- If necessary allow her to copy the notes of other children or provide her with a copy. Many AS children are also dysgraphic and they are unable to listen to you talk, read the board and take notes at the same time.

A Final Word

At times, some of my child's behaviors may be aggravating and annoying to you and to members of his class. Please know that this is normal and expected. Try not to let the difficult days color the fact that YOU are a wonderful teacher with a challenging situation and that nothing works all of the time (and some things don't even work most of the time). You will also be treated to a new and very unique view of the world that will entertain and fascinate you at times.

Please feel free to share with us whatever you would like. We have heard it before. It will not shock us or make us think poorly of you.

Communication is the key and by working together as a team we can provide the best for our child.

Thank you very much.



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