

# Maryland School Mental Health Alliance\*

## *Asperger Syndrome Information for Parents and Caregivers*

### Definition

**Autism** is a developmental disorder that usually appears during the first years of a childhood (18 to 60 months). Although there is no known cause for autism, researchers believe that it is a neurological disorder brought on by genetic and biological factors.

Children with autism have difficulty communicating and interacting with others (no eye contact, limited or no language, low motivation for typical play). They often display repetitive behaviors that reflect their desire for extreme order. For instance, a child with autism may not want to go to the bathroom until they first have their favorite book. Without the book, they refuse to use the bathroom. Children with autism have different sensitivities to the physical world. One child with autism may not hear high pitches; another may cry and moan when a siren goes by because it physically hurts them.

Unlike children with mental retardation, children with autism do not necessarily have low levels of intelligence. Some children with autism have a *splinter skill*, an ability to something very well (e.g., remembering names and dates).

**Asperger's is related to autism.** Children with Asperger's have poor social skills and tend to repeat activities. Poor social skills include failing to make eye contact when talking to another person, lack of interest in praise from parents, and difficulty in playing with other children. Children with Asperger's syndrome insist that certain experiences be repeated exactly time and again. They may become fixated on certain objects, and they may move one or both of their arms or legs continuously. They usually do not have delays in speech and have a normal intelligence level.

### Why do we care?

*When compared to their developmental peers:*

- Children with Asperger's have greater difficulty developing relationships with other children.
- Children with Asperger's have greater difficulty letting others know what they need.
- Children with Asperger's don't do well in school.
- Children with Asperger's have greater difficulty regulating their reactions to fear.
- Children with Asperger's have greater difficulty altering their daily routines.

### What can we do about it?

- Ask your child's pediatrician for information about Asperger Syndrome.
- Contact your department of education and ask to speak to someone in special education. Learn about the available sources of funding for in-home treatment and school-based services.
- Read everything you can about protecting your child's right to a free and public education (FAPE). Seek out a parent advocate at the school your child would likely attend.
- Review the basic treatment approaches for children with Asperger Syndrome. You can learn more by asking your school psychologists or social worker about parents support groups for parents of children with autism spectrum disorders.
- Contact a local public university to see if they have any qualified students who want to work with a child with Asperger's. Begin by calling the departments of psychology and education.

## **Helpful Forms and Handouts**

- AACAP Facts for Families:
  - The Child with Autism: [http://aacap.org/cs/root/facts\\_for\\_families/the\\_child\\_with\\_autism](http://aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/the_child_with_autism)
  - Asperger's: <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/69.htm>
  - Service in Schools for Children with Special Needs: <http://aacap.org/page.wv?section=Facts%20for%20Families&name=Services%20In%20School%20For%20Children%20With%20Special%20Needs:%20What%20Parents%20Need%20To%20Know>
- Center for Autism and Related Disorders: <http://www.centerforautism.com/>.
  - What is Applied Behavior Analysis? <http://www.centerforautism.com/aba/whatisaba.asp>.
  - Evaluating ABA Programs: <http://www.centerforautism.com/aba/evaluating.asp>.
- Guidelines for choosing an ABA provider: [http://www.php.com/sigsupplements/feat/Provider\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.php.com/sigsupplements/feat/Provider_Guidelines.pdf).
- Maryland Asperger Advocacy and Support Group: <http://www.aspergers.org/>.
  - What is Aspergers? [http://www.aspergers.org/what\\_is\\_aspergers\\_syndrome.htm](http://www.aspergers.org/what_is_aspergers_syndrome.htm).
  - Myths about Aspergers Syndrome: [http://www.aspergers.org/myths\\_about\\_aspergers\\_syndrome.htm](http://www.aspergers.org/myths_about_aspergers_syndrome.htm)
- Maryland State Department of Education Special Education Overview: <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/earlyinterv/>.
  - Maryland Infant and Toddlers Program: [http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/earlyinterv/infant\\_toddlers/mess\\_age.htm](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/earlyinterv/infant_toddlers/mess_age.htm).
  - Family Focus Conference: [http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/earlyinterv/items\\_interest](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/earlyinterv/items_interest).
- National Autistic Society: <http://www.nas.org.uk/>.
  - Aspergers Syndrome: <http://www.nas.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=212>.
  - How can I get a diagnosis for my child? <http://www.nas.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=255&a=3275>.

## **Additional Resources**

Attwood, T. (1998). *Asperger's syndrome: A guide for parents and professionals*. New York: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Retrieved February 8, 2008 from <http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/>.

Myles, B.S. (September, 2005). *Thinking outside the box about social supports*. Retrieved February 8, 2008 from Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network website <http://www.pattan.k12.pa.us/files/Autism/Asperger-pt2-010606.pdf>.

The National Autistic Society. *What is Asperger syndrome?* Retrieved February 8, 2008 from The National Autistic Society website <http://www.nas.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=212>.

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