



Autism/Asperger Syndrome

A Guide for Teachers
at The Wordsley School

Date of Policy: Summer 2009

Review Date: Summer 2011

What is Autism?

Autism is a life long developmental disability. Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a recognised term which encompasses people with severe learning difficulties and severe autism through to people who have mild autism and who are very able.

People with autism have difficulties with

- Social interaction - problems understanding and relating to others.
- Social Communication – both verbal and non-verbal. Ability to understand gestures, body language and facial expressions impaired.
- Social imagination – imagination and social play may be limited.

Asperger Syndrome

Asperger syndrome is part of the autistic spectrum and can be used to diagnose people at the high functioning end.

The main characteristics:

- Difficulties with social relationships. They find it difficult to read the signals which most of us take for granted and find it hard to interact with others.
- Difficulties with communication. They may speak very fluently but not take much notice of the reaction of people listening to them; they may talk on and on regardless of the listener's interest or may appear insensitive to their feelings.
- Difficulties with social imagination, imaginative play and flexible thinking. While they often excel at learning facts and figures, people with Asperger syndrome find it hard to think in abstract ways. This can cause problems for children in school where they may have difficulty with certain subjects, such as literature or religious studies.

They may be:

- Socially awkward and clumsy in relations with other children and/or adults.
- Lacking in common sense.
- Naïve and gullible.
- Unable to differentiate between fact and fiction.
- Often unaware of others feelings.
- Unable to carry on a “give and take” conversation.
- Easily upset by change.
- Inflexible in their thoughts and behaviour.
- Literal in speech and understanding.
- Overly sensitive
- Physically awkward in sports.

- Fixated on one subject or object.
- Unable to plan and manage time effectively due to anxiety when working under pressure and a perfectionist streak.
- Unable to predict the consequences of their actions.
- Unable to see the “bigger picture”.

How Can We Help?

Environment

- Keep to a structured classroom with consistent routines and rules.
- Visual lists, e.g. a daily timetable may be helpful to aid personal organisation.
- Give pupils a written list of tasks wherever possible. Pupils often get confused by changes within the lesson (e.g. three part lesson). They could be allowed to get on with main body of lesson thus avoiding the changes in pace and direction which unsettle them.
- Provide an individual work area if possible.
- Provide a place for time-out when they need it and a key person to go to. Allow use of time-out card.
- Allow pupils to leave lessons a few minutes early to avoid the noise and confusion of changeover times.

Communication

- Always refer to the pupils by name – they need to know who you are talking to.
- Keep verbal instructions brief and simple – one at a time.
- Don’t assume understanding, check it out.
- Use visual cues wherever possible to aid understanding.
- Give small, manageable tasks with visual prompts.
- Ensure pupils have time to respond – they can take longer to process information than other pupils. Perhaps allow pupils a whiteboard to write down their responses to oral questions.
- Don’t insist on pupils doing the whole of the lesson
- Be calm, avoid shouting (if possible!)

Interaction

- The pupils will usually be more confident with familiar people around them.
- Prepare them for any changes well in advance – they may get upset by sudden changes, e.g. teacher, room, timetable.
- Develop a buddy system – it can diffuse some potential problems.
- Identify likes, dislikes, strengths and weaknesses.
- Don’t insist on joining the group, allow pupils to be on the periphery.
- Acknowledge the need for personal space, e.g. allow them to sit on the end of the row in assembly.

General

- Be flexible.
- Use their ability to remember by rote to increase self-esteem.
- Remember if the pupil is not complying, he/she probably does not understand or is anxious.
- Redirect when the anxiety level rises.
- Make use of computer – they are not demanding in emotional terms, as people often are.
- Limit choice to two or three.
- Use a pupil's interests to motivate within a lesson.
- Use the technique of "FirstThen".
- Writing tasks should be "scaffolded" (provide writing frames if possible.)
- Teach concept of "finished".