

## ASPERGER SYNDROME

Asperger Syndrome is at the higher-functioning end of the 'autism spectrum', and naturally there will be a variation of difficulties experienced by adults with Aspergers. Some may face chronic unemployment and emotional issues, while others may generally cope very well in the world and succeed in work, family life and life generally.

A common problem for adults with Asperger Syndrome is not being diagnosed. They may struggle with relationships, work and life in general, without knowing why. As society's awareness of Asperger Syndrome increases, more people are seeking a diagnosis in the adult stage of life. In most countries, there is a severe lack of support services for children on the autism spectrum, and there are even less supports for adults with Asperger Syndrome.

Persons with Asperger Syndrome may also be more vulnerable to poverty and homelessness than the general population, because of their difficulty finding (and keeping) employment, possible lack of proper education, less-developed social skills, and other factors.

### Describing the triad of impairments

Asperger Syndrome is characterised by something known as the 'triad of impairments'. This means that problems will be experienced to varying degrees with: social communication, social understanding and imagination.

#### 1. Social communication

Difficulties often crop up in the social aspects of communication. This can involve difficulty

understanding gestures, body language and facial expressions of others. This difficulty in understanding the context of social interaction means adults on the autism spectrum may not be aware of what is socially appropriate, and may have difficulty chatting or choosing topics to talk about. People with Asperger Syndrome may not be socially motivated because they find communication so difficult, so they may not have many friends and they may choose not to socialise very much.

Some of these problems can be seen in the way people with Asperger Syndrome present themselves. For example, classic traits include difficulty making eye contact, anxiety in social situations, repetitive speech and difficulties expressing themselves especially when talking about emotions.

#### 2. Social understanding

Adults with Asperger Syndrome may have difficulties in group situations. They might not choose appropriate topics to discuss, and find 'small talk' and chatting very difficult. They may take what people say very literally and have problems understanding double meanings in teasing, irony and sarcasm.

#### 3. Imagination

This does not mean adults on the autism spectrum lack creative abilities, often the reverse is true. However, they may have trouble imagining alternative outcomes to given situations, and find it hard to predict what will happen next. This often leads to anxiety and can result in obsessions with rigid routines, and severe distress can arise if routines are disrupted. These difficulties with

imagination may cause problems with making plans for the future, organising one's life sequencing tasks. Some people with Asperger Syndrome over-compensate for this by being extremely meticulous in their planning, and having extensive written or mental checklists.

### Influences of Asperger Syndrome on employment

Adults with Asperger's may find it difficult finding employment or entering undergraduate or graduate schools because of poor interview skills or a low score on standardised or personality tests. If they do become employed, they may be misunderstood, taken advantage of, paid less than those without Asperger Syndrome, and be subject to bullying and discrimination. Communication deficits may mean people at work have difficulty understanding the person with Asperger Syndrome, and problems with authority figures are common when difficult, tense relations with bosses and supervisors develop. They may focus on details so much and have such a high degree of perfection, that they cannot tolerate any shortcomings in other employees.

In some cases, the person may be highly intelligent and not be hampered by problems with socialising issues. Albert Einstein and Bill Gates of Microsoft are two well known examples of adults rumoured to have Asperger Syndrome. However, in other cases these adults can be extremely good at their jobs but do not promote it because they lack the interpersonal skills to be managers – they may be overly perfectionist, demanding and unable to create warm relationships with staff.

## Influences of Asperger Syndrome on social interaction

People with Asperger Syndrome often report a feeling of being unwillingly detached from the world around them. They may have difficulty finding a life partner or getting married due to poor social skills and poor financial status. In a similar fashion to school bullying, the person with Asperger Syndrome is vulnerable to problems in their neighbourhood, such as anti-social behaviour and harassment. Due to social isolation, they can be seen as the 'black sheep' in the community and thus may be at risk of wrongful suspicions and allegations from others.

One area of study in which more research is sorely needed concerns adults with Asperger Syndrome who do marry and subsequently become parents. Adults with Asperger Syndrome who marry often find it difficult to stay married; some initial research puts the divorce rate at approximately 80%. The resulting split can be fraught with intense or "high" conflict or domestic violence.

Custody cases, already often difficult situations, are complicated when one or both parties have Asperger Syndrome.

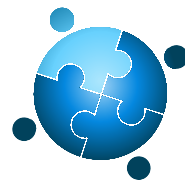
## Influences of Asperger Syndrome on parenting

It is argued that even with support, some parents with Asperger Syndrome simply may not be up to the enormous task of parenting. Raising a psychologically healthy child involves complex emotional interaction between parent and child, as well as the ability to avoid parental behaviours damaging to a child's well-being. However it can be easily argued that many 'neurotypical' parents

have very poor parenting skills, and of course there are many parents on the autistic spectrum who have excellent parenting skills.

While Asperger Syndrome can impact on parenting, some adults with Asperger Syndrome rightly point out that many parents experience parenting difficulties (regardless of whether they are parents on the autism spectrum) and that Asperger Syndrome parents should not be singled out as being unable to be effective parents. If Asperger Syndrome does affect a person's parenting skills, this simply means that appropriate support should be considered – as would be done, for example, with any parent with anger management issues, depression or any other condition that could impact on their children's lives.

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– Info Sheet –

Adults  
with Asperger  
Syndrome