

## OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES INFO PAGE

### AUTISM/ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

Autism/Asperger's syndrome is a type of pervasive development disorder . Autism/Asperger's Syndrome is a group of conditions that involve delays in the development of many basic skills, most notably the ability to socialize with others, to communicate and to use imagination.

Although Autism/Asperger's syndrome is similar in some ways to autism -- another, more severe type of Autism/Asperger's Syndrome -- there are some important differences. Children with Autism/Asperger's syndrome typically function better than do those with autism. In addition, children with Autism/Asperger's syndrome generally have normal intelligence and near-normal language development, although they may develop problems communicating as they get older.

Autism/Asperger's syndrome was named for the Austrian doctor, Hans Autism/Asperger, who first described the disorder in 1944. However, Autism/Asperger's syndrome was not recognized as a unique disorder until much later.

#### **What Causes Autism/Asperger's Syndrome?**

The exact cause of Autism/Asperger's syndrome is not known. However, the fact that it tends to run in families suggests that a tendency to develop the disorder may be inherited (passed on from parent to child).

#### **How Common Is Autism/Asperger's Syndrome?**

Autism/Asperger's syndrome has only recently been recognized as a unique disorder. For that reason, the exact number of people with the disorder is unknown, although it is more common than autism. Estimates suggest Autism/Asperger's syndrome affects from 0.024% to 0.36% of children. It is more common in males than in females, and usually is first diagnosed in children between the ages of 2 and 6 years

#### **What Are the Symptoms of Autism/Asperger's Syndrome?**

The symptoms of Autism/Asperger's syndrome vary and can range from mild to severe. Common symptoms include:

- **Problems with social skills:** Students with Autism/Asperger's syndrome generally have difficulty interacting with others and often are awkward in social situations. They generally do not make friends easily.
- **Eccentric or repetitive behaviors:** Students with this condition may develop odd, repetitive movements, such as hand wringing or finger twisting.

- **Communication difficulties:** People with Autism/Asperger's syndrome may not make eye contact when speaking with someone. They may have trouble using facial expressions and gestures, and understanding body language. They also tend to have problems understanding language in context.
- **Limited range of interests:** A student with Autism/Asperger's syndrome may develop an intense, almost obsessive, interest in a few areas, such as sports schedules, weather or maps.
- **Coordination problems:** The movements of people with Autism/Asperger's syndrome may seem clumsy or awkward.
- **Skilled or talented:** Many students with Autism/Asperger's syndrome are exceptionally talented or skilled in a particular area, such as music or math.

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**Challenges in the classroom:** It is important not to generalize about the effects of Autism/Asperger's syndrome as each person may exhibit different behaviors to different degrees. However, the following is a list of factors that may occur:

- **Messy handwriting**
- **Writing too slowly**
- **Difficulty making decisions** about what is (or is not) important when reading a book or journal article
- **Easily distracted**
- **Difficulty with abstract thinking.** Students with Autism/Asperger's find it much easier when people use concrete examples.
- **Difficulty focusing on topics that are not of interest to the student.** Trouble figuring out what to focus on in exams, or how to focus on exams. Students with Autism/Asperger's typically run out of time on exams.
- **Individuals with Autism/Asperger's are often perfectionists,** which leads to complications with turning work in on time and with working cooperatively in groups.
- **Difficulty with problem solving** (e.g., inability to make decisions about particular responses).
- **Difficulty developing motivation about some topics.** Some topics can be particularly upsetting, depending on the individual.
- **Difficulty sitting still for long periods**

- **Difficulty with long-term goal setting**
- **Difficulty getting to class on time and with general organization (e.g., correct text, writing materials)**
- Tendency to have **difficulty with change** or change of subject- particularly unexpected changes.
- **Difficulty working in groups-** doesn't understand intent of words with multiple meanings or 'unspoken' rules of social distance, personal space. May make irrelevant comments, interrupt, and talk over others.