

Reality, Perception and Autism

Communication and Asperger's Syndrome

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Focus on Asperger's Syndrome

Autism is a brain disorder that begins in early childhood and persists throughout adulthood. It specifically affects three crucial areas of development: communication, social interaction, and creative or imaginative play.

There are many types of Autism, which exist in varying degrees, so in order to break down the information on Autism I will be focusing my research on Asperger's syndrome. The information that follows will deal with individuals with Asperger's Syndrome.

Asperger's Syndrome is a term used when a child or adult has some features of autism but may not be fully autistic. Asperger's syndrome may not be immediately noticeable, as some people with Asperger's syndrome are very successful and until recently were not diagnosed with anything, but were seen as brilliant, eccentric, absent minded, socially inept, and a little awkward physically.

Problems associated with Asperger's Syndrome

Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome have 3 main areas of behavior problems.

The first is problems with social interaction. This tends to vary from their having no interest in interacting with others to being interested but feeling they do not know what to say in a social situation. People with Asperger's Syndrome often appear not to understand other people's feelings or points of view. This can make social interaction difficult.

The second is communication problems. These individuals are often very articulate; sometimes their speech is described as "professor like". They can often memorize phrases from books, videos, etc. and tend to repeat them at inappropriate times. Often, they run into communication problems because they understand speech in a literal manner. They are unable to take cues from the facial expressions of others and often do not engage in eye contact at all.

The third problem is the fact that they have unusual interests and behaviors. Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome are able to do the same thing over and over without getting bored. They tend to show specific interests in subjects that border on obsession. Their intensity to gather information and their choice of subject matter seems odd to others and can contribute to social isolation. They often are so zeroed in on the details that they do not see the big picture. They may know everything about sweeper models and parts numbers, but when asked which would be the better sweeper, they may be unable to

distinguish which one is better. They are often unable to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information.

Realities of those with Asperger's Syndrome compared to those without Asperger's Syndrome

We will start with some comparisons of social interaction. Imitation is very important to the development of social and communicative skills. Many young children start to learn by imitating others. Such as toddlers imitating how the rest of the family uses eating utensils or how they comb their hair. Children with Asperger's Syndrome do not comprehend imitation. They are not interested in face to face contact and as a result do not learn how to accomplish tasks in this manner.

Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome are not anti-social. They are asocial. Developing relationships is very difficult for them. They do not understand the dynamics of communication and relationships. Although they have relationships with close family, who understand their condition, they do not have the skills that others have to develop relationships. For instance, we would know to use eye contact and appropriate body language when approaching someone we wanted to converse with. We also know that there are certain unwritten rules for polite conversation. Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome rarely make eye contact and the strangeness of their non verbal communication can make them seem very self-centered. Although they do not intend to come across this way, their different mannerisms and overly blunt communication can make them seem self-centered. They do not understand the back and forth flow of a conversation, and often speak to others in more of a monologue. They don't provide

feedback to the people communicating with them. If asked a question while they are talking, they will normally pause and then continue with their previous thoughts.

Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome do not understand societal and cultural rules. We would not approach someone and bluntly announce that his or her breath stank, but they would because they aren't aware that this would embarrass or offend the other person. They also do not comprehend that not all communication is literal. Let's say a child with Asperger's Syndrome was supposed to clean his room and instead is watching TV. His mother walks by and says sarcastically, "You're doing a great job". The individual with Asperger's Syndrome would simply accept that he had done a good job and would never have noticed or reacted to the tone of his mother's voice or any body language she was using. Imagine how difficult it would be to communicate with others if you only heard the words people used and weren't able to notice inflections in their voices and body signals that they used.

Those with Asperger's syndrome are less likely to develop real meaning from information that they receive. Since they tend to focus on irrelevant facts, they do not know how to make sense out of information. We are able to develop meaning by interpreting new information, deciding what is relevant, and using previous knowledge.

There are ways to communicate more easily with an individual with Asperger's Syndrome. Listed below are ways to make this process easier and more productive.

- Maintain simple language and keep facial expressions and gestures to a minimum.

- Be aware that those with Asperger's Syndrome need extra time to get used to new people.
- Remember that they do not pick up on "unwritten rules". Explain definite rules.
- Give one instruction at a time and wait for the person to respond.
- Be patient and sympathetic to their efforts to improve communication skills.

Communication always takes some understanding and patience on both sides in order to have the intended effect. We sometimes forget that not everyone sees the world from our point of view and we should always be aware of this in order to make communication an easier process for all involved.

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