



ASPERGER'S DISORDER

Georgia School Counselors Association

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PRESENTERS:

Karen D. Rowland, Ph.D., LPC, NCC
Assistant Professor,
Mercer University

DeeAnn U. Fleming, MEd.
School Counselor,
Mount Zion Elementary School
Clayton County School District

DEFINITION



- *Asperger's disorder* is classified as a developmental disorder of childhood.
- It is also called *Asperger's syndrome (AS)* and belongs to a group of childhood disorders known as *pervasive developmental disorders (PDDs)* or *autistic spectrum disorders*.
 - These disorders all involve problems with social skills and communication.
 - Asperger's syndrome is generally thought to be at the *milder end of this spectrum*.



DEFINITION

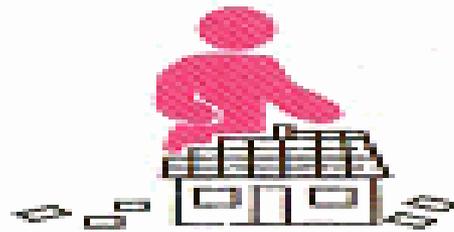


- The *DSM-IV-TR* specifies the following diagnostic criteria for AS:
 - The child's social interactions are impaired in at least two of the following ways: markedly limited use of nonverbal communication (facial expressions, for example); lack of age-appropriate peer relationships; failure to share enjoyment, interests, or accomplishment with others; lack of reciprocity (turn-taking) in social interactions.
 - The child's behavior, interests, and activities are characterized by repetitive or rigid patterns, such as an abnormal preoccupation with one or two topics, or with parts of objects; repetitive physical movements; or rigid insistence on certain routines and rituals.
 - The patient's social, occupational, or educational functioning is significantly impaired.
 - The child has normal age-appropriate language skills.
 - The child has normal age-appropriate cognitive skills, self-help abilities, and curiosity about the environment.
 - The child does not meet criteria for another specific PDD or schizophrenia.
 - To establish the diagnosis, the child psychiatrist or psychologist would observe the child, and would interview parents, possibly teachers, and the affected child (depending on the child's age), and would gather a comprehensive medical and social history.

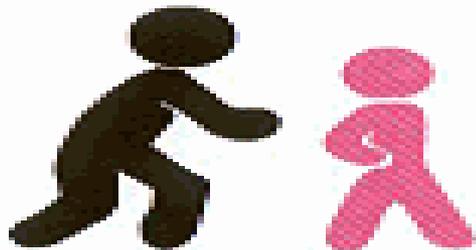
DEFINITION



Can do some things very well and quickly but not tasks involving social understanding



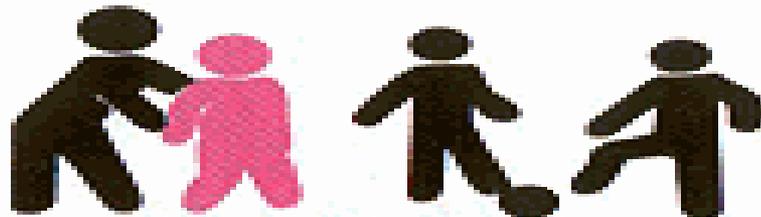
Difficulty in reading body language, facial expression and gesture



Displays indifference



Difficulty interacting with peers



Joins in only if adult insists and insists



Handles or spins objects

DEFINITION

- **Asperger's syndrome affects a child's ability to socialize and communicate effectively with others.**
- **Children with Asperger's syndrome typically exhibit social awkwardness and an all-absorbing interest in specific topics.**
- **Conservative estimates indicate that two out of every 10,000 children have Asperger's, and boys are three to four times as likely as girls to have the disorder.**
- **While there is no cure for Asperger's syndrome, treatment can help children learn how to interact more successfully with their peers.**

SYMPTOMS



- **Signs and symptoms of Asperger's syndrome include:**
 - **Engaging in one-sided, long-winded conversations, without noticing if the listener is listening or trying to change the subject**
 - **Displaying unusual nonverbal communication, such as lack of eye contact, few facial expressions, or awkward body postures and gestures**
 - **Showing an intense obsession with one or two specific, narrow subjects, such as baseball statistics, train schedules, weather or snakes**
 - **Appearing not to understand, empathize with, or be sensitive to others' feelings**
 - **Having a hard time "reading" other people or understanding humor**
 - **Speaking in a voice that is monotonous, rigid or unusually fast**
 - **Moving clumsily, with poor coordination**
 - **Having an odd posture or a rigid gait**

CAUSES

- **Doctors and researchers don't understand what causes Asperger's syndrome, although there seems to be a strong genetic component.**
- **The disorder also seems to be linked to structural abnormalities in several regions of the brain.**



WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL HELP



- **All kids have their quirks, and many toddlers show a sign or symptom of Asperger's syndrome at some point. It's natural for small children to be egocentric, and many little ones show a strong interest in a particular topic, such as dinosaurs or a favorite fictional character. These aren't reasons to be alarmed.**
- **However, if your elementary school child has frequent problems in school or seems unable to make friends, it's time to consult your pediatrician. These difficulties have many possible causes, but developmental disorders such as Asperger's syndrome shouldn't be ruled out. Children whose eccentricities interfere with learning and social development should have a comprehensive evaluation.**

TESTS AND DIAGNOSIS



- **Because Asperger's syndrome varies widely in severity and signs, making a diagnosis may be difficult. If your child shows some signs of Asperger's syndrome, your doctor may suggest a comprehensive assessment by a team of professionals.**
- **This evaluation will likely include observing your child and talking to you about your child's development. You may be asked about your child's social interaction, communication skills and friendships. Your child may also undergo a number of tests to determine his or her level of intellect and academic abilities. Tests may assess your child's abilities in the areas of speech, language and visual-motor problem solving. Tests can also identify other emotional, behavioral and psychological issues.**
- **Unfortunately, some kids with Asperger's syndrome are first misdiagnosed with another problem, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or an emotional-behavior disorder. Even worse, some children with undiagnosed Asperger's syndrome are labeled as willful or malicious troublemakers. That's why it's important to talk to your doctor if your child is having difficulties at school.**

TREATMENT

- **The core signs of Asperger's syndrome can't be cured. But most children benefit from early specialized interventions that focus on behavior management and social skills training. Options may include:**
 - *Communication and social skills training.* Many children with Asperger's syndrome can learn the unwritten rules of socialization and communication when taught in an explicit and rote fashion, much like the way students learn foreign languages. Children with Asperger's syndrome may also learn how to speak in a more natural rhythm, as well as how to interpret communication techniques, such as gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, humor and sarcasm.

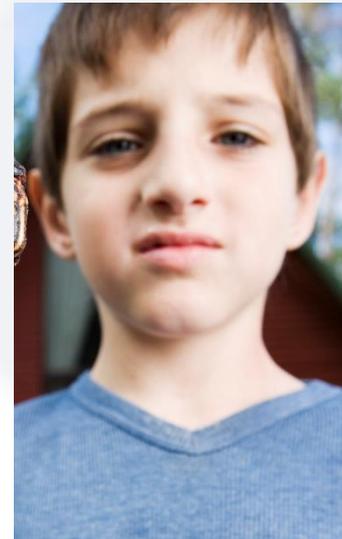
TREATMENT



- ***Cognitive behavior therapy.*** This general term encompasses many techniques aimed at curbing problem behaviors, such as interrupting, obsessions, meltdowns or angry outbursts, as well as developing skills like recognizing feelings and coping with anxiety. Cognitive behavior therapy usually focuses on training a child to recognize a troublesome situation — such as a new place or an event with lots of social demands — and then select a specific learned strategy to cope with the situation.

TREATMENT

- **Counseling Techniques**
 - **Cartooning**
 - **Situation-Options-Consequences-Choices-Strategies—Simulation strategy**
 - **social autopsies**
 - **Behavior Therapy**



TREATMENT



- **Cartooning**
 - Provides visual support
 - Helps enhance student understanding of verbal and nonverbal language
 - Uses figures and symbols in a comic book format to teach and practice conversation and nonverbal communication

Counseling Techniques: SOCCSS



- **Situation, Options, Consequences, Choices, Strategies, Simulation strategy**
 - **Situation** – understand the situation by first identifying who was involved, what happened, the date, day, and time of occurrence, and reasons for the present situation
 - **Options.** brainstorm several options for behavior. This step encourages the student to see more than one perspective and to realize that any one situation presents several behavioral options.

Counseling Techniques: SOCCSS



- **Consequences** - student and counselor work together to evaluate each of the options generated
- **Choices** - student selects the option or options that will have the most desirable consequences

Counseling Techniques: SOCCSS

- **Strategy** - student and counselor develop an action plan to implement the selected option
- **Simulation** - role-play the selected alternative



Counseling Techniques: Behavior Therapy

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- **Very effective when working with students with Asperger's Syndrome**
- **Three types of behavior therapy most often used:**
 - **Behavior modification**
 - **Guided discovery**
 - **Systematic positive reinforcement**

Counseling Techniques: Behavior Therapy



- **Behavior modification can be used to work with students in a variety of settings:**
 - behavior changes
 - following specific classroom rules
 - attending to assigned classroom tasks such as school work, tests, and homework

Counseling Techniques: Behavior Therapy



- **One specific behavior technique that counselors have found to be useful with many students is cognitive behavior modification.**
- **This is a technique that teaches individuals to monitor their own behavior or performance and to deliver self-reinforcement at established intervals (Meichenbaum, 1977). By doing this, the locus of control for the behavior is changed from a source such as a teacher or parent and given to the student. This also helps a student take responsibility for his or her actions, thoughts, and feelings.**

Counseling Techniques: Behavior Therapy



- **Systematic positive reinforcement**
- **Desired behavior is motivated and rewarded by positive reinforcement.**
- **This can be helpful in:**
 - **teaching and encouraging students to use positive social skills**
 - **completing homework**
 - **completing work at school**

MEDICATION



- ***Medication.*** There are no medications to treat Asperger's syndrome. But some medications may improve specific behaviors — such as anxiety, depression or hyperactivity — that can occur in many children with Asperger's syndrome.



COPING & SUPPORT



- **Asperger's syndrome can be a difficult, lonely disorder — for children and their parents. By nature, the disorder brings difficulties socializing and communicating with your child. It may also mean fewer play dates and birthday invitations and more stares at the grocery store from people who don't understand that a child's meltdown is part of a disability, not the result of "bad parenting."**
- **Luckily, as this disorder gains widespread recognition and attention, there are more and more sources of help. Here are a few suggestions:**
 - *Learn about the disorder.* Just 20 years ago, many pediatricians hadn't heard of Asperger's syndrome. Now, there are numerous books and Web sites dedicated to the disorder. Do some research so that you better understand your child's challenges and the range of services in your school district and state that may help.

COPING & SUPPORT



- *Learn about your child.* The signs and symptoms of Asperger's syndrome are different in every child, and young children have a hard time explaining their behaviors and challenges. But, with time and patience, you'll learn which situations and environments may cause problems for your child and which coping strategies work. Keeping a diary and looking for patterns may help.
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- *Find a team of trusted professionals.* You'll need to make important decisions about your child's education and treatment. Find a team of teachers and therapists who can help evaluate the options in your area and explain the federal regulations regarding children with disabilities.

COPING & SUPPORT

- ***Help others help your child.*** Most children with Asperger's syndrome have no visible sign of disability, so you may need to alert coaches, relatives and other adults to your child's special needs. Otherwise, a well-meaning coach may spend time lecturing your child on "looking at him while he's talking" — something that can be very difficult for a child with Asperger's syndrome.
- ***Help your child turn his or her obsession into a passion.*** The tendency to fixate on a particular narrow topic is one of the hallmarks of Asperger's syndrome, and it can be annoying to those who must listen to incessant talk about the topic every day. But a consuming interest can also connect a child with Asperger's syndrome to schoolwork and social activities. In some cases, kids with Asperger's syndrome can even turn their childhood fascination into a career or profession.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR ROLE



- **School personnel must be in a position to provide appropriate and effective support and accommodations to students with Asperger's Syndrome.**
- **School counselors in collaboration with other school personnel must be prepared to present practices in the following areas:**
 - *social and behavioral supports*
 - *academic planning and programming*
 - *sensory accommodations*





