

THE PARENT LETTER



About Our Kids:
A Letter for Parents by the
NYU Child Study Center

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ASPERGER'S SYNDROME: DIFFERENT BUT INTELLIGENT

More than five decades ago, Dr. Hans Asperger, an Austrian pediatrician described 4 children who had some of the characteristics of children with autism, such as social communication impairments, but they had normal intelligence. His observations were largely ignored until 1981 when Dr. Lorna Wing also reported several children with normal intelligence but similar social problems and coined the term Asperger's Syndrome (AS) to distinguish these children from those with Classic Autism described by Dr. Leo Kanner in 1943. Nevertheless, it wasn't until 1994 that the American Psychiatric Association formally recognized Asperger's Syndrome (AS) as a distinct subcategory of Pervasive Developmental Disorders and published clinical criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV).

What are some characteristics of Asperger's Syndrome?

Children with Asperger's Syndrome have normal intelligence, but poor social and emotional interaction. Their speech patterns are odd and words are spoken in a monotone. They have difficulty reading facial cues and in developing peer relationships that are age-appropriate. They have unusual obsessive interests and repetitive behaviors. Due to their pedantic speech, children with AS are sometimes referred to as "Little Professor" or "Mr. Spock". They have difficulty negotiating the social demands of school or work and are frequently the brunt of practical jokes.

How common is Asperger's Syndrome?

As a disorder, AS affects approximately 2 in 10,000 and is less prevalent than Autism, which affects approximately 10 per 10,000. Unfortunately because of relatively normal intelligence and seemingly age-appropriate language, children with AS are usually identified later than those with Autism. Although there is no known cause or cure for AS, it is NOT due to bad parenting.

What are some useful treatment strategies?

Early identification and treatment of Asperger's Syndrome are the keys to an optimal outcome. The components of intervention should include:

- Enhancing social communication.
- Promoting autonomy.
- Providing supportive services for families.
- Providing a secure learning and work environment that fosters a climate of acceptance.

For those with AS having co-existing conditions (i.e., anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity), medication can sometimes be helpful as an adjunct to treatment.

What can I do as a parent?

Parents concerned about their child's social, emotional, language, or motor development, should follow their instincts and seek help, the earlier the better. They should NOT wait in the hope that their youngster will "grow out of it." Rather, parents should begin with their child's pediatrician or family practice physician but be prepared to seek further evaluation by a developmental pediatrician, child psychiatrist, and psychologist. The results of these assessments will facilitate the development and implementation of an individualized treatment plan for their child.

Useful Resources

Parents, teachers, and professionals can obtain more information about Asperger's Syndrome through the following resources:

- [Asperger's Syndrome](#) by Tony Atwood - a guide for parents and professionals on the nuts and bolts of the disorder.
- [Thinking in Pictures](#) by Temple Grandin - an autobiography about what it's like to have autism.
- [Addressing the Challenging Behavior of Children with High Functioning Autism/Asperger's Syndrome in the Classroom](#) by Rebecca Moyes - a guide for teachers and parents.
- [The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time](#) by Mark Haddon - a best selling novel about a 15-year-old boy with Asperger's Syndrome and the challenges he faces.
- www.futurehorizons-autism.com - a useful website to obtain information about other books, videos, and conferences on AS.

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ABOUT THE NYU CHILD STUDY CENTER

The NYU Child Study Center is dedicated to the research, prevention and treatment of child and adolescent mental health problems. The Center offers evaluation and treatment for children and teenagers with anxiety, depression, learning or attention difficulties, neuropsychiatric problems, and trauma and stress related symptoms.

We offer a limited number of clinical studies at no cost for specific disorders and age groups. To see if your child would be appropriate for one of these studies, please call (212) 263-8916.

The NYU Child Study Center also offers workshops and lectures for parents, educators and mental health professionals on a variety of mental health and parenting topics. The Family Education Series consists of 13 informative workshops focused on child behavioral and attentional difficulties. To learn more or to request a speaker, please call (212) 263-8861.

For further information, guidelines and practical suggestions on child mental health and parenting issues, please visit the NYU Child Study Center's website, AboutOurKids.org.

AboutOurKids.org

THE NYU CHILD STUDY CENTER ONLINE

Changing the Face of Child Mental Health
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