

An Overview of the Learner with Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism: A Snapshot of Learner Characteristics

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AS: The Invisible Disability

"You could teach a child with AS the theory of relativity once and he'd get it. But you'd have to tell him the rules for lining up for recess 500 times.



1 in 88 has autism; 1 in 54 boys has autism

Imitation

- One of the most basic modes of learning
- Imitation is used across the lifespan and across environments
- Mirror neurons impact imitation
 - When attempting to engage in an activity by modeling
 - When observing someone engaging in an activity



“Mindreading”: Theory of Mind

- Difficulty in ...
 - Predicting
 - Reading intentions
 - Understanding emotions
 - Explaining own behavior
 - Perspective or reference
 - Reading and reacting to others' interests
 - Understanding social interactions

“You Can’t See the Forest for the Trees”: Central Coherence

- Idiosyncratic focus
- Preference for the known
- Difficulty in choosing and prioritizing
- Difficulty seeing connections
- Lack of compliance

A Great Example of Central Coherence

Reason No. 4 Why Guys Don't Write Advice Columns

Submitted by E.T. Thompson
Reader's Digest, 3/08, p. 182

Get the facts and draw the wrong conclusions

Problem Solving

- “One way of viewing a problem”
- Sees facts instead of a whole
- Problems with cause and effect
- Does not see problems as having more than one option
- Stuck thinking
- Problem solving is often literal
- IQ and problem solving are not related

Executive Function

- Difficulty in ...
 - Perceiving emotions
 - Imitating others
 - Planning
 - Starting and stopping
 - Organizing (time, self, space)

Language and Social Challenges

- Nonverbal communication
- Verbal communication
- Initiating and maintaining social interactions
- Literalness
- Perspective taking
- Hidden curriculum
- Cause/effect relationships
- Difficulty conveying own thoughts
- May not use social “niceties”
- FIRST LANGUAGE IS USUALLY VISUAL

Group Work

- Challenges with participating in group work
 - Teaming
 - Negotiating
 - Compromising
 - Fact vs fiction
- Related to the social area
- Imitate behaviors that get large reaction
 - Often the behaviors they should not imitate

Academic Challenges

- Reading comprehension
- Written expression
- Mathematic reasoning and calculation
- Need to assess whether tasks are “rote” or “meaning-based”



Auditory and Visual Systems

- Has rote memory for auditory information
- Has challenges in meaningful memory
- Can repeat a phrase, paragraph, request, command, or rule ... but cannot do it



Filtering

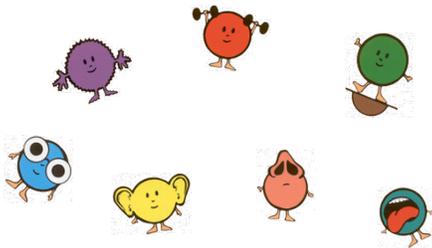


What is in the head -- sometimes with disastrous effects

Special Interests and Obsessions

- Narrow interests
- Not permanent
- Often appear “uncontrollable”
- Role of the interest: interest; fun; security, comfort; relaxation; stress reduction

The Sensory Systems ... (it all starts here)



Motor Skills

- Fine motor
- Gross motor
- Visual motor
- Motor planning

Behavior

- Anxiety and stress
- Depression
- Distractibility and inattention
- Tantrums, rage, meltdowns, and shutdowns
 - Internalized
 - Externalized
- Rigidity and lack of flexibility

Self-Regulation

- Individuals with AS may have challenges in recognizing and changing their own emotional states
- Tantrums, rage, and meltdowns are not on purpose – often the only way they know to express their emotions
- Cannot discern minor from major concerns

Flexibility

- Problems dealing with unanticipated events or changes or delays in schedules
- Why?
 - Fear of the unknown
 - Does have the cognitive resources to cope with change
 - Inflexibility of thought
 - Does not know what to do instead of ...

Ketty Gonzalez, 2005

Sense of Social Justice

- The good guys always win.
- Rules are meant to be followed.

You can't bring food into the theater!

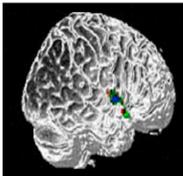
Some Biological Factors

- Seizures
- Ear infections
- Gastrointestinal
 - Diarrhea
 - Constipation
 - Abdominal pain

Potential

- Individuals with AS have limitless potential
- Their potential is limited by *our ability to teach*

All Areas of Functioning are Impacted



- According to Nancy Minshew, a specialist in psychiatry and neurology at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine: "... you cannot compartmentalize ASD. They are [sic] much more complex."
