

Asperger's Disorder:

Asperger's Disorder is a syndrome that typically appears first in childhood, and is primarily characterized by a person's difficulty in everyday social interactions with others. For instance, a person with Asperger's may engage in long-winded, one-sided conversations without noticing or caring about the listener's interest. They also often lack usual nonverbal communication skills, such as engaging in eye contact with others they're talking to, or failing to react and empathize with other people's stories and conversation. This may make them seem insensitive, although that is rarely the case. They may have a hard time "reading" other people or understanding humor.

Adults, too, may have Asperger's, as often the disorder is not properly diagnosed in childhood. Asperger's is considered the mildest, least severe form of autism. The following five criteria primarily characterize Asperger's Disorder.

1. A significant, ongoing impairment in social interactions with others, as demonstrated by at least two of the following symptoms:

- Significant difficulty in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as the lack of eye contact, few facial expressions, awkward or clumsy body postures and gestures
- Failure to develop friendships with other children of the same age
- Lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people (e.g., by a lack of showing, bringing, or pointing out objects of interest to other people)
- Failure to express appropriate and corresponding social or emotional reactions, such as when conversing or playing with others. For example, a child who shows little or no reaction, feelings or empathy to another child talking with them.

2. Restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, and activities, as shown by at least one of the following symptoms:

- A significant and encompassing preoccupation or obsession with one or two restricted topics, that is abnormal either in intensity, subject or focus (such as baseball statistics or the weather)
- Seemingly inflexible adherence to specific routines or rituals that serve little purpose
- Repetitive motor mannerisms. For example, hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements.
- A persistent preoccupation with parts of objects

3. The set of symptoms causes *significant impairment* in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

4. There is no significant general delay in language (e.g., single words used by age 2, communicative phrases used by age 3).

5. There is no significant delay in cognitive development (such as reading or math skills) or in the development of age-appropriate self-help skills, behavior, and curiosity about the environment in childhood.

Early Signs of Asperger's Disorder

It's important to note that a person with Asperger's disorder has no general delay in language acquisition, cognitive development and adaptive behavior (other than in social interaction). This contrasts with typical developmental accounts of autistic children who show marked deficits and deviance in these areas prior to age 3.

Other common descriptions of the early development of individuals with Asperger's include certain characteristics that may be helpful in identifying it earlier on. These characteristics include:

- A certain precociousness in learning to talk (e.g., "He talked before he could walk!")
- A fascination with letters and numbers. In fact, the young child may even be able to decode words, with little or no understanding of them ("hyperlexia")
- The establishment of close relationships to family members, but inappropriate relationships or interactions with friends and others (rather than withdrawal or aloofness as in autism). For example, in Asperger's the child may attempt to initiate contact with other children by hugging them or screaming at them and then puzzle at their responses.

These behaviors are sometimes described for higher-functioning autistic children as well, albeit much more infrequently than they are for children with Asperger's.

Recommended Readings:

[The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome](#) by Tony Attwood, Jessica Kingsley Publishers; c2007 ISBN: 1843106692

[School Success for Kids With Asperger's Syndrome](#) by Stephan M. Silverman, Rich Weinfeld, Prufrock Press; c2007 ISBN: 1593632150

Useful Websites: