“Understanding Common Aspergers Problems and Behaviors”

An Easy-To-Search Solution Guide

By

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www.ParentingAspergers.com/blog
Disclaimer

The writer of the material present in “Understanding Common Aspergers Problems and Behaviors” believes that a multi-disciplinary approach to parenting Asperger’s children is of extreme importance. This means combining the approaches of a wide variety of disciplines involved with Asperger’s children and their parents such as social workers, nurses, teachers, doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, speech therapists. Also it involves using the knowledge and information of parents themselves.

The author recognizes that within scientific, educational, social and medical fields there are widely divergent viewpoints and opinions. This material is written for the express purpose of sharing educational information gathered from the experiences of the author and other people in the areas mentioned above.

None of the information contained in this e-Book is intended to diagnose, prevent, treat, or cure Asperger’s, nor is it intended to prescribe any of the techniques, materials or concepts presented as a form of treatment for Asperger’s.

Before beginning any practice relating to Asperger’s it is highly recommended that you first obtain the consent and advice of a qualified health, education or social care professional. Should you choose to make
use of the information contained herein without first consulting a health, education or social care professional, you are prescribing for yourself, which is your inalienable right.

However, the author assumes no responsibility for the choices you make after your review of the information contained herein and your consultation with a qualified health, education or social care professional.

None of the statements in this article or in the book have been evaluated by the Food & Drug Administration (FDA), or the American Medical Association (AMA). Every effort has been made to accurately represent this product and its potential. However your level of success in attaining the results claimed in this program depends on the time and effort that you devote to the program, ideas and techniques mentioned. Results will vary for people on an individual basis. We cannot guarantee your success nor are we responsible for any of your actions.
Quick Introduction

I have compiled this resource in response to requests by many parents of children with Aspergers.

In a recent survey a lot of parents said that they would really like a searchable database; where they can look for quick answers on particular topics.

So I’ve put this resource together which, whilst not claiming to be a 100% exhaustive guide, covers the most common questions asked by parents over the past 5 years on my Aspergers blog.

This resource also links out to articles, discussions and videos to further help parents in understanding a particular issue. It’s simple to use…

1. To search for a particular topic (e.g. anxiety) just go to the contents page and find the black link for that topic.

   Then all you need to do is hold down the Control button ("Ctrl") which is generally on the bottom left hand side of your keyboard and looks something like this -

   And left click your mouse at the same time.

   You will then be taken to that section of the resource.

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2. Each topic (e.g. anxiety) has a blue link at the end of the article (and some in the middle) for further reading, an online video or a helpful online discussion post on the subject.

To access these further resources just follow exactly the same instructions as above.

**Further helpful search tip** – If you are somewhere in this resource and want to find another topic quickly; without having to scroll right back up to the Contents Page…

There is another way you can research too

You can hold down the “Ctrl” and “f” key on your keyboard.

This will bring up a search box on the page, where you can put in the new word you now want to search for (e.g. anger).

Just type the new word into the box and press enter – and it will take you to the page you want.

I have put together a very quick online video that you can watch that will show you exactly how to search this guide, just click with the left button on your mouse on the link below –

http://www.parentingaspergerscommunity.com/public/How_to_use_the_new_resource_guide.cfm
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Alcohol use

Question

I am worried that my teenaged son with Aspergers is becoming more reliant on alcohol to cope with his low feelings. Is this common and what can I do to help him?

Answer

The teen years can be precarious when under the influence of alcohol. A teen's peer group often sees alcohol use as a rite of passage. Teens think to be accepted by the crowd, you have to be willing to take some risks. These risks are reckless: crazy driving, drinking, sex, and drug use, to name a few.

Teens with Asperger's Syndrome already struggle with acceptance. Lacking in social skills and prone to depression, anxiety, and self-isolation, teens with Asperger's are at a high risk for addiction problems. Drug and alcohol abuse are very common in these circumstances.

There are things you can do to help prevent addiction problems. Likewise, there are things you can do to help a teen who has already become mired in alcoholism. Nevertheless, as an older teen quickly approaching adulthood, your son will have to be a willing participant. It is time for him to make his own decisions.

Preventing alcoholism
* To help prevent alcohol abuse, begin educating your children about the dangers at a young age. A child with Asperger's should know he has increased risks of addiction.

* Set clearly defined rules in your home. Children with Asperger's like rules and structure. For some, bold rules against a behavior can be enough to help them abstain.

* Practice involved parenting. Know your child's friends, where he goes and what they do. Ask questions and expect answers.

* Set a good example. Practice sensible alcohol use in your home.

While these tips can help prevent unwanted problems, there are no guarantees, as you already realize. As parents we can do all of the right things and fail to achieve the desired result. This is not a parent's failure; your child has free will.

Ways you can help an alcohol dependent teen

* Family and individual therapy will help both parents and individual tackle the emotions behind the problem.

* Isolation and depression are the result of a lack of meaningful relationships. Social skills groups are great for all ages.

* Alcohol abuse can cause serious medical problems. A complete physical and mental health assessment is a good place to start.
* Alcohol abuse support is necessary for healing. These support groups meet the individual members exactly where they are and help them trudge through the turmoil of addiction. Remember, it is a process.

Your son needs a strong parent right now to guide him away from this crutch before it is too late. Your son has found a friend in alcohol. Encourage him to take control of his addiction. With a little help, he can regain control.

**Online discussion about Aspergers and alcohol -**

[http://www.wrongplanet.net/postt161869.html](http://www.wrongplanet.net/postt161869.html)
Anger

Question

My child with Aspergers has anger problems and also how do I help him understand what his real emotions are.

Answer

For children with Asperger’s, anger can be a major challenge. Many people do not realize the strong connection between Asperger’s Syndrome and behavioral issues like anger, anxiety, and depression. The very characteristics of Asperger’s lead to these behavioral issues. Some of these characteristics are:

* Inflexible thinking
* Sensory issues
* Gross and fine motor problems
* Narrow interests
* Social skills weaknesses
* Lack of language skills, especially social language, gestures and cues

Understanding Asperger’s anger is simple. Nearly all of your child’s anger stems from frustration. The characteristics of Asperger’s listed above (plus others) create a confusing and uncomfortable social environment. The natural reaction is frustration, and the natural escalation of frustration is anxiety, then anger.
Helping a child with Asperger’s understand his Asperger’s anger and other emotions, however, can be quite difficult. You must help him understand the cause of his emotions and then develop a plan to avoid the negative emotions that stem from frustration. There are several options available for the parent searching for anger management for their child with Asperger’s. Here are a couple of those options.

*Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy*

Many people with Asperger’s anger choose to try cognitive-behavioral therapy. This therapy is highly recommended for children and adults with Asperger’s Syndrome. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is individual therapy designed around the idea that a person’s emotions and thought processes are what control that person’s outward feelings and behaviors. Most people tend to blame the situation or other people. This therapy places the focus on a person’s internal thoughts. In other words, if we think a certain way, even though the situation makes us feel the opposite, we can begin to feel better about that situation.

*At-Home Solutions*

Not everyone with Asperger’s anger issues choose private therapy. For some people, these therapies are not covered by insurance or are simply not available. Others choose to handle therapy and learning situations at home, in their own way. This is perfectly acceptable, and in all honesty, quite helpful for the child even if you do choose private therapy. Support at home will increase progress. Some examples of home solutions are:
* Social stories can be written for specific behavioral problems and situations. These stories can put your child’s feelings into words and offer him simple solutions.

* Parenting discipline programs like 123-Magic teach parents how to use proper discipline techniques, which in turn, may diffuse some of the child’s anxiety and anger.

* Five point scale assessments teach a child how to recognize his anger or anxiety and prepare to control their emotional responses.

* Play therapy/activities make learning emotional control fun. “104 Activities That Build: Self-Esteem, Teamwork, Communication, Anger Management, Self-Discovery, and Coping Skills”, by Alanna Jones, is a book filled with activities that teach coping skills. For your child with Asperger’s, anger can get in the way of learning, playing, and life. Perhaps you can use some of the above suggestions to help him handle his anger and better understand his emotions.

Video by a 9 year old with Aspergers about anger -
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aaB2T64a48
Anxiety

Question

How you deal with anxiety in teenagers with Aspergers?

Answer

The life of a teenager can be filled with anxiety. Dating, academics, special interests, and home life all create a heavy workload. When you add Asperger’s Syndrome to that equation, you multiply the anxiety tenfold. Teens with Asperger’s Syndrome are prone to anxiety and depression due to the social awkwardness that comes with this condition. Additional symptoms, such as communication struggles, inflexibility, and obsessive behaviors may also play a part in your teen’s anxiety.

There are many different things you can do to help alleviate your teen’s anxiety. Anxiety develops from different situations and it could be that your teen has many sources for his anxiety. He could be stressed by the social situations in his life. Sensory issues may contribute by making him uncomfortable in many situations, especially noisy, crowded places.

On the other hand, your teen with Asperger’s Syndrome may have issues that are worsened by the anxiety. He may be isolating himself and listening to too much negative self-talk. He may be missing sound sleep, and that will feed

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anxiety. Here are some treatment suggestions that you can try that may help your son cope better with his anxiety.

- Relaxation techniques like deep breathing, guided imagery, and meditation can help relieve stress and anxiety.
- Sensory therapies like gross motor activities, deep pressure massages, and joint compressions can aid in relaxation, reducing stress and anxiety.
- Exercise or heavy work that takes a lot of energy to perform is a natural stress reliever. Exercise also improves mood and can lessen depression.
- Teens need a lot of sleep, and unfortunately, many teens with Asperger’s Syndrome struggle with sleep issues. Getting enough sleep can help with anxiety problems. If your teen has trouble sleeping, you may want to try the natural supplement melatonin. Ask his doctor about proper dosage.
- Counseling may be necessary if the anxiety is having a heavy impact on his life. Individual counseling and/or behavioral therapy will help him learn skills that will help him deal with the stress that precedes anxiety.
- Sometimes medications are the answer to anxiety issues. Your teen’s physician or neurologist can prescribe anti-anxiety medications.

This should give you an idea of what will work best to manage your teen’s anxiety. With the right treatment plan, your teen can begin to move past this anxiety and take on a more positive outlook with a healthy self-image.

Video on Aspergers and Anxiety -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBTDWJzgqM

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Arguments

Question

Our 13 year old son seems to want to argue with us over just about everything. If we say "yes," he says "no." If we say it's "white" he'll say it's "black."

Answer

Teens with Asperger’s Syndrome are, in many ways, just like their neurotypical counterparts. Your son is beginning to realize that he is totally separate from his parents and just as smart. Or so he thinks. He has his own thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about a wide range of topics. And usually, these thoughts, beliefs, and feelings will be the exact opposite of yours. As a teen with Asperger’s Syndrome, your son desires to put his stamp on his world. He is much more confident speaking out around his family, so home is where he will assert his independence. You will need to decide how far you are willing to let him take this assertion. Here are some suggestions:

* Social communication is important at your son’s age. Social skills classes can help him learn better ways to work around his lack of social ability, which will enhance your relationship.
* As his parents, demand his respect. Make sure he understands what it means to show respect to his parents. Give him instructions on what you expect so he understands how to respect you.

* Trust is essential to the parent/teen relationship. Define your ideas of trust so your son knows what you expect. Explain the concept of mutual trust and encourage him to be honest and open with any questions or problems he encounters.

* House rules are necessary when you have teens. Create a visual aid and give it a prominent place. A list of all of the house rules, along with the consequence for each infraction should be included. Explain each rule and consequence to confirm that he comprehends. You can also use pictures to illustrate your list for additional understanding.

* Counseling can help teens with Asperger’s Syndrome work through the complications of puberty, sexuality, social opportunities, school, and parental relationships. A caring professional with knowledge and experience in Autism can make a huge difference in the life of a teen with Asperger’s Syndrome.

Take heart! In about ten years, your son will once again realize that his parents are wise and intelligent individuals. He will lose his argumentative attitude and once again embrace your ideas. Until then, prepare to stand your ground when necessary while showing him the meaning of true flexibility.

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Video with Advice for Parents about Arguments

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVjYSYNsMZc
**Attention Seeking**

**Question**

My son continuously seeks attention, usually really bad attention, and fights with absolutely everyone; what can I do?

**Answer**

It sounds as though your son is experiencing a sense of desperation and a need for help, but does not know how to express it, so he fights to get attention. Unfortunately, the attention he receives is not the kind he needs.

Have you asked why he fights or what happens just before he fights? Does he start the fights or react to others in a negative way? If his fighting is due to bullying, you must take steps to get the bullying stopped. But, since he fights with everyone, this is probably not the situation. It sounds as though he needs professional help. (See below.)

Children with Asperger's Syndrome sometimes display challenging behaviors in order to receive attention or get a reaction. Often, the child does not care if the attention is negative or positive, as long as he gets it. Such behavior requires a two-pronged approach, often involving “tactical ignoring.” I realize your son's behavior may not be the kind of behavior that can be ignored, but bear with me briefly.

Tactical ignoring is part of a behavior management plan. It is a method of responding to behavior that includes positive reinforcement and skill
development in learning more appropriate methods of seeking attention.

What is tactical ignoring? Tactical ignoring is a strategy in which you give no outward sign of recognizing a behavior (e.g. no eye contact, no verbal response, no physical response). But, you do monitor the child to ensure his safety and the safety of others. For example, if your child is provoking you by saying, "I want a cookie. You're mean! Give me a cookie," ignore him. When he finally asks you politely for a cookie, praise him for asking politely and give him a cookie. For example, "Thank you for asking so politely for a cookie. Here it is." If he was provoking you because you said "no" to the cookie, then wait for a new request and, if it is phrased politely, honor it.

How is tactical ignoring used? An attention seeking child is trying to send a message. The message requires a response. Attention seeking behavior is ignored. The goal is to give the child positive attention for displaying appropriate behaviors and not displaying attention seeking behaviors. So, when the child verbally express difficulties and feelings appropriately, asks for help when needed, participates in activities and conversations appropriately, or, uses socially and situationally acceptable strategies for calming himself, he is rewarded with praise and/or small rewards or tokens that can be used to earn rewards and privileges.

Tactical ignoring may work with your son if his "fighting" consists of arguing and harassing others. However, when fighting and actual violence are part of attention seeking behavior, ignoring won't work. Someone could get hurt. Your first task is to determine if your son has a pervasive developmental
disorder, particularly any that might be described as being malicious. These three characteristics may indicate such a disorder:

• fighting with those who did not start the fight and don't deserve a violent response,
• lack of compunction and control, and
• lack of remorse or fear.

In many situations, the child who starts fights and shows the above characteristics is testing his own power, seeking control and power over others. Eliciting strong feelings such as fear in someone else may be more rewarding to the fighter than the fact that the feeling is hostile or distressing. If this sounds like your son, he may have serious emotional problems, a lack of coping skills, and be crying out for help. Immediate counselling may be needed. Medication may be required. A doctor or counselor may want to do more testing for other mental conditions (mood or personality disorders). You must take your son for help to determine why he is acting this way and what will help him.

If all else fails, consider investigating a placement into a supervised facility for his own safety and that of others.

An additional article about Managing Attention Seeking Behavior -


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Bereavement

Question

My 12 year old son has Asperger's and a friend at school died recently. He can seem O.K., but gets upset suddenly, while watching TV or doing some other favourite activity. I am really not sure how to discuss the idea of death and grief with him. Have you any ideas?

Answer

Children with Asperger's Syndrome have difficulties with social interaction and responses to social situations. With regard to the emotional aspects of death and grief, your son may react, as you have seen, by getting upset or angry. He may also appear insensitive or apathetic regarding the death of his friend. These responses occur because he doesn’t fully understand what has happened and, due to his Asperger's, doesn't know how to ask for assistance with factual information or in how to react to the death of his friend.

Many Asperger's children feel that a friend, being so young, should not die, and, therefore, the child feels betrayed because a “rule” has been broken, which can lead to anger and outbursts. In addition, any unexpected event is particularly difficult for people with Asperger’s. You son probably finds it hard to grieve, empathize, or feel sad over the death, but may also worry because he doesn’t have these feelings. He may try to force himself to cry even though he doesn’t feel sadness.
Even if your son doesn’t ask for help, it is definitely called for in this situation. Although he may show little emotion, he is affected by the loss of his friend. Patience, understanding, and support on your part are required. A helpful book (for you) might be Gray’s Guide to Loss, Learning, and Children with ASD

Be sensitive to his need to talk if he exhibits one and don’t put up barriers to it, such as telling him he’s too young to understand what happened. If he doesn’t show a need to discuss the death, you should open a discussion anyway.

Asperger’s children have average or higher levels of intelligence and will appreciate honest, simple explanations about death and grief. Explain that birth is the beginning of life and death is the end of life and that, when someone dies, we feel bad because we didn’t want the person to die and we will miss him. Don’t tell him his friend “went to sleep,” “went away,” “got sick,” that only old people die, or that the death was “God’s will.” All of these are open to misinterpretations, such as “If I go to sleep when I’m sick, will I die?” Or, “Will God make me die?” At his age, your son is able to understand that death is irreversible and that he will die eventually, but he needs reassurance that he will most likely live a long time.

Some questions your son asks may seem insensitive, for example, “When are you going to die, Mom?” He may show curiosity about dead animals or ask about what happens physically to dead things. These questions may seem
gruesome to us, but they are a way of learning about death. Children should not be made to feel guilty or embarrassed about their curiosity.

Your son may feel that the death of his friend, who was a good person, was unfair. This is the time to gently explain that many things that happen in life are not fair and that we should try to help each other cope when unfair things happen.

Since Asperger’s children have trouble feeling emotions and their emotions are often more connected to objects and ideas than other people, their frustration in emotional situations, such as a death, may turn to anger. Your son will need a lot of time to accept this death and may react with anger at unexpected times. Be understanding. Take time to teach him about emotions – sadness, happiness, anger, etc. – and also explain that he may or may not experience them as he goes through life. Use books to help him understand emotions and provide models of acceptable behavior. Also, role playing can help him learn how to behave in this situation (expressing sympathy, for example), and in other emotional situations.

Video on understanding ASD and Bereavement -
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnMVFNv2Wa4
Bullying

Question

It is a well known fact that autistic and Asperger’s children are more susceptible to teasing, taunting, and bullying. I am a parent with an 8 year old child who has Asperger’s; he is being bullied on the school bus. After several complaints to the bus garage, the bullying on the bus still continues. I was wondering, as a parent, what are my son’s rights? We are supposed to have an anti-bullying policy, but if you call the school, they say they are not responsible for this. Since this has been a problem for many children, I am wondering if you know of some parents who have experienced the same problem or any organizations that may be able to help. Is there more that I should be doing in order to make sure that this stops?

Answer

A National Institute of Child Health and Human Development study found that 30% of students ages 10-16 reported being bullies or victims. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 60% of bullies have criminal records by the time they’re 20.

Your first step is to see if anti-bullying law exists in your country or state and get a copy of the law. Your child’s rights are contained in these laws. Many states have anti-bullying laws that should contain the following:

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1) The word “bullying” must be used in the bill/law/statutes. Some other words being used are, "hate crimes" harassment, discrimination, or intimidation.

2) The law must be an anti-bullying law, not a school safety law. Anti-bullying laws discuss individual student rights and personal safety; not building safety.

3) There must be definitions of bullying and harassment. Defining victims is not important; any child can be a bullying victim and all children should be protected.

4) There should be recommendations on content of the model policy and how it will be implemented. Log on to: www.bullypolice.org/wa_law.html for more information.

5) An effective law involves education specialists at all levels, i.e.; the State Superintendent of Education’s office, school district and school personnel, parents and students.

6) A good law mandates anti-bullying programs, using the word “shall.”

7) Laws should include a date when policies must be in effect.
8) There must be consequences for reprisal, retaliation, or false accusations and procedures for reporting bullying anonymously.

9) There must be school district protection against lawsuits. Parents of bullies should know that they can be sued for their child’s behaviour and school districts should know that they can be sued if they fail to comply with anti-bullying law.

10) A top rated law will provide counselling for bullying victims.

11) There must be accountability reports made to lawmakers. Someone needs to keep track of what's happening in each school and school district when complying with an anti bullying law.

Step two is to understand that if the school or school district pays the bus company to transport students, the bus company is considered part of the school and is, therefore, bound by the same laws. If the school won’t deal with the bus company, get a child advocate or attorney and take steps to see that they do.

The vast majority of schools have disciplinary policies to address this type of misconduct. Even if the policy does not include the word "bullying," the conduct is included in the policy, as well as in criminal law regarding assault, threats/menacing, intimidation, and disorderly conduct. Know the school policies that protect students from harassment, bullying, and physical
violence. Get copies and hold the school accountable, using legal means, if necessary. If the school principal will not address the problem, speak to the School Board, publicly stating what is happening. You will get a response. If you know of other bullying victims, get their parents to work with you.

Notify the police if your child is assaulted. Get a restraining order so that the bully is required by law to have no contact with your child. Take legal action.

Children who are bullied experience low self-esteem and depression and those doing the bullying may go on to more serious crimes. Bullying takes place in every school. The children most likely to experience bullying are aged 10-13. Boys are more likely to be involved than girls. If your child needs counselling, be sure to get it for him.

There are 6 types of bullying:

1. Physical - hitting, kicking, stealing or damaging things belonging to the victim;

2. Verbal - name-calling, taunting, insulting;

3. Emotional - shunning, spreading gossip, teasing;

4. Sexual - unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive or inappropriate remarks;

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5. Racist - racial slurs, offensive gestures, or making jokes about race, gender, etc.;

6. Cyber - spreading hurtful images and/or messages via email or in chat rooms.

The fear of bullies gets in the way of learning and makes going to school a nightmare. Being bullied makes children feel lonely, unhappy, and scared. Bullied children may develop stomach aches, nightmares, nervousness, and anxiety.

Signs that a child is being bullied:

- inventing illnesses to avoid school;

- “lost” belongings or money;

- sleeping problems;

- bedwetting;

- irritability or depression;

- poor concentration;
· problems with schoolwork.

Be sure that your child knows to tell you right away when he is bullied. Warn him against being aggressive or provoking the bully. Help him practice being assertive and not showing fear. Encourage your child to stick with friends at all times. Also warn him against trying to appease the bully, for example, if the bully says he should steal something and then they’ll be friends, your son should know to refuse. Your son should also know that if he gets involved in a fight, he may be suspended or expelled, even if he was defending himself. Be absolutely sure that your son understands that he must never bring a weapon to school, even for protection.

Video about Aspergers and Bullying -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwk7b36Fmzs
Cause of behaviors

Question

My seven year old son has Asperger’s. We have problems with him yelling, and hitting his head on the pavement among other things. What can we do to eliminate these behaviors?

Answer

Behavior serves a purpose and as long as it meets the needs of the child they will continue to display the behavior.

The challenge is in finding out what purpose the behavior is serving.

Generally, behavior occurs for one of four reasons:

1.) To gain something.

2.) To make something go away.

3.) Because of pain.

4.) To meet sensory needs.
In order to determine the purpose you need to construct an ABC format and monitor a variety of situations.

This is in order to determine the antecedent (what happens before the behavior - A), the behavior (B), and the consequence (C).

In your specific example, going into a supermarket, the supermarket is the antecedent, the behavior is banging their head on the pavement, and the consequence is not clear from the information given.

The consequence does not necessarily mean a punishment that you have designed for the behavior.

The consequence could be any of these:

Do you leave the store immediately?

Do you respond verbally and or physically?

Do you continue on your way and finish your shopping?

Entering the supermarket may cause anxiety for the child or overload due to the amount of stimulation that is present in the store.
If this is the case, then you should avoid prolonged trips into the store and simply take the child to buy one or two items, giving them time to adjust.

Keep in mind that your child does not want to display this behavior.

Banging their head does not bring them pleasure, but it may bring them relief if they are anticipating a great deal of anxiety.

Figuring out the reason for the behavior may be painstaking, but will be well worth it if you stop the problem.

Have you asked your son why he does this, when he is calm?

Try talking to him about it and ask him what you can do to help him stop the behavior.

If he is unable to describe his emotions, you will need to complete the ABC analysis and determine the cause of the behavior.

From there, you can develop a support plan that will create an environment where your son does not need to display the behavior in order to meet his needs.
A support plan will let your child know that the behavior is not necessary. This support plan may be that you only go in the supermarket when it is quiet, or only for 10 minutes.

Your son is acting impulsively and he may not really know why.

Talk to him about his behavior while it is not occurring and let him know that you want to help him through this.

Further article on Reasons for Aspergers Behaviors -

Challenging Behavior

Question

I transport children to school and home, some of who are diagnosed with Asperger’s. I sometimes encounter challenging behaviors during transportation. What is the best way to handle this?

Answer

Children with Asperger’s have a lack of social skills and are very impulsive. They will need to know what is expected of them during their transportation. Provide a structured environment that allows them to know the rules.

Do not take misbehavior personally.

The high-functioning person with autism is not a manipulative, scheming person who is trying to make life difficult.

They are seldom, if ever, capable of being manipulative.

Usually misbehavior is the result of efforts to survive experiences which may be confusing, disorienting or frightening.
People with autism or Asperger’s are very egocentric (which means that they can only see the world through their eyes and really struggle to see the views of others).

Most also have extreme difficulty reading the reactions of others.

Remember that facial expressions and other social cues may not work. Most individuals with autism have difficulty reading facial expressions and interpreting “body language”.

Transition is a difficult process for children with Asperger’s and transportation to or from school is transition. Try to make this as routine as possible so that they will know what to expect.

**An online discussion about Aspergers Challenging behaviour -**

Concentration problems

Question

Can you advise with Focus and concentration techniques. My son with Aspergers will be starting high school 2011, these are his weaknesses.

Answer

Focus and concentration are important attributes for any student approaching the high school years. These years can be stressful and positively grueling for a teen with Aspergers Syndrome and focus problems. These problems are common in children with Aspergers Syndrome, but there are treatments options and techniques you can implement to make the high school a little less stressful. Here are several interesting ideas you can use to help your teen with focus and concentration.

* Some people feel strong listening skills are the answer to concentration problems. By developing his listening skills, your son may be able to increase his concentration and focus issues. Listening skills training involves sessions of intense listening that begin at very short intervals, yet eventually increase as listening comprehension improves. While this makes sense, it can be difficult due to the very concentration problems it is used to improve. It cannot hurt anything to try this harmless technique.
* Neurofeedback, sometimes called biofeedback, enhances attention, focus and concentration. Using EEG equipment, psychotherapists help individuals record, recognize brainwave activity, and alter that activity via a computer program. Many sessions may be needed to see improvements. The drawbacks to this type of program are the expense, the time involved—many sessions over a long period of time, and the fact that it is not a do-it-yourself technique.

* Natural supplements and vitamins are commonly used to treat the symptoms of Aspergers Syndrome. You can find specialized formulas that enhance focus and concentration at your local health food store. In addition, a healthy diet of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy choices can help maintain focus and concentration. If your son's current diet contains an excessive amount of sugar, caffeine, and other artificial ingredients, you may consider making a few changes in his diet.

* Medications are probably the most popular treatment for focus and concentration problems in school-age children. Stimulant medications used to treat ADHD are often prescribed to treat similar problems in kids with Aspergers.

While these treatments and techniques all have their place in the treatment of children with Aspergers Syndrome and other conditions, no plan is complete without organizational skills training for better focus and concentration. Your child’s need for structure can be used to his advantage in the school setting. The ability to organize thoughts, actions, and physical work is necessary for success. Help your son create daily visual schedules, written checklists, a...
visual calendar, and color-matched notebooks. Practicing social communications skills will help him learn to organize his thought processes.

Forum Discussion about Aspergers and Concentration at

Criminal behaviours

Question

I am curious about Aspergers adults and criminal activities. I realize many people with AS are naive, and do get into trouble that way, but what about those that get into trouble because of mind blindness, or extreme lack of empathy? Does this make it ‘easier’ to commit a crime?

Answer

It has been very common to hear Asperger’s Syndrome connected to criminal activity in the news. This has created quite a bit of concern within the law enforcement community, justice system, and the public. Enough buzz has been generated to provoke several studies on the subject. The overall findings seem to suggest that there is no real evidence that people with Asperger’s Syndrome commit more crimes or are capable of committing more crimes.

The very characteristics of Asperger’s Syndrome that you mention are the cause for all of this speculation. Naivety, along with mind blindness, can cause a person with Asperger’s Syndrome to become accused of improper conduct due to behaviors that bother others. Since the person with Asperger’s Syndrome shows little concern for his actions, or empathy toward others, he or she may be accused of wrongdoing. The truth is, a person with
Asperger’s Syndrome may indeed be capable of causing harm to another person or his or her property and may show little remorse. However, some people are able to commit crimes and others are not. Asperger’s Syndrome may have nothing to do with it.

A person with Asperger’s Syndrome may have social awkwardness and social communication problems, rigid thinking, and obsessive qualities, but these characteristics do not make the person a criminal. With that said, it is possible to understand how the assumption can be made due to some offensive actions. Here are some examples.

- Bluntness of tone and speech when questioned
- Obsessive behaviors towards another person or object of property
- Immaturity in social situations
- Lack of apprehension about the outcome of his actions
- Defiance when asked to change certain behaviors

Is it possible for a person with Asperger’s Syndrome to commit a crime? Yes, of course. Do all people with Asperger’s Syndrome find it easy to commit crimes? Definitely not. Do some behaviors and characteristics of Asperger’s Syndrome make it easier for a person to commit crimes? This is up for debate. So far, the limited research says not exactly. Asperger’s Syndrome is a serious neurodevelopmental condition and must be treated as such. However, it is unjust to claim that Asperger’s Syndrome is the direct cause of criminal activity.
Also it is worth bearing in mind that someone with Aspergers is more likely to be the victim of a crime too when compared to people who don't have a diagnosis of Aspergers.

Insights from “Aspergers Answer Book” about Aspergers and Crime - http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=ojfE5FADBdJ0C&pg=PA261&dq=aspergers+and+criminal+behavior&hl=en&ei=Y_YSTrGMA5K38gPuuaHKDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CC8Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false
Dating

Question

My son is 17 he has Aspergers and dating is now becoming an issue - he likes girls but struggles with what to do next. Can you help?

Answer

Asperger's dating can be a bit more complicated than typical teen dating. The onset of dating is a big step for teens with Asperger's, just as it is for all teens. Like any other teen, your son wants to develop those special friendships and be a part of the crowd. The socialization struggles brought about by Asperger's Syndrome calls for some advanced planning. Here are some tips to get you started.

Social skills

Social skills are necessary to form friendships. Unfortunately, this skill area causes problems for people with Asperger's. Dating calls for the ability to notice social cues, body language, and gestures. You can help your son by identifying and practicing necessary skills. Many schools or community Autism support organizations have social skills group therapy classes. By attending these group activities, your son can learn socialization skills in a controlled and supported environment.
Personal Hygiene

Sometimes personal hygiene is all but forgotten by people with Asperger's. Dating definitely requires good personal hygiene. It is difficult to attract the attention of the opposite sex if you forget to bathe and brush your teeth. Help your son create a schedule for his personal hygiene. A visual checklist can keep him on a regular schedule.

Interest-led activities

One way to meet people is through a shared interest. For example, if your son's special interest is computers, he could join a computer club or take a class. Now is the chance to put to good use those obsessive interests that are so commonly held by people with Asperger's. Dating someone who loves the same things you do makes for a more natural relationship.

Therapy

It is not easy to make your way through the teen years with Asperger's. Dating is expected and desired. If your son is struggling, he may benefit from individual therapy. A private counselor can help him work through his issues, concerns, and fears. A counselor can give him strategies that will make life easier and more pleasant.

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With a little planning, your son can tackle his socialization struggles. With a bit of organization, some social skills practice, and possibly some therapy, your son can begin to overcome some of the weaknesses of Asperger's. Dating will then become his reality. With a little practice, he will become comfortable with himself in social situations.

Practical Hints for Aspergers Dating can be found at

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=qUiyPCMhO9AC&pg=PA43&dq=aspergers+dating&hl=en&ei=ovoSTru4HoeX8QPL3ZC8Dg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CEgQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q&f=false
Defiant Behaviors

Question

What can we do to curb defiant behavior in our son with Asperger's?

Answer

I will outline how to cope with defiant behavior in a number of steps:

Step 1 – Why

The first step in eliminating behavior is to determine why the behavior is occurring.

The behavior is meeting a need for your son and you will need to determine what that need is, and provide an alternative way for him to meet that need.

First, is the behavior occurring because he does not have alternative behaviors to express how he feels?

Step 2 – Teach social skills
If the behavior is occurring because he does not have alternative behaviors; teaching some social skills that will help him express himself could be beneficial.

Social skills and communication are difficult areas for a child with Asperger’s.

If the behavior is also resulting in aggression, then you will need to deal with that as well.

A direct approach would be to examine each area where your son is defiant, doing this with your son.

*Step 3 – Create alternative behaviours*

Create alternative behaviors for your son to use in each of those settings.

One challenge, particularly for parents, is that if you are going to teach him appropriate means to express himself, then initially this will mean that you are going to have to accept that also.

For example, if you ask your son to clean his room, and rather than being defiant, he appropriately expresses that he does not care to do that right now, you will have to accept it as it is an appropriate way to express himself.
That doesn’t mean that he will never have to clean his room, it just means that because he expressed himself appropriately, you will accept it for now.

Is the defiant behavior occurring because he is overwhelmed and needs to escape?

Anxiety is a common behavior in Asperger’s and can be expressed in a variety of ways.

If he is overwhelmed and anxious, you may need to consider environmental changes that you can make to reduce that anxiety (so think about factors like noise, crowding, lighting, visual stimulation like wallpaper color or pictures).

If he overwhelmed because of the size of a task, then it needs to be broken down into smaller steps.

Step 4 – Contingency Plan

Finally, if you have exhausted teaching him appropriate ways of interacting and you have made appropriate environmental changes but they have proven unsuccessful, you may need to seek the advice of an appropriate professional.

A psychiatrist may be able to help you assess if your son has the ability to be compliant.
That is, is his impulse behavior beyond his control?

If that is the case, then a psychiatrist may suggest some medication.

Medication is never to be taken lightly and may present other challenges for both yourself and your son.

A risk versus benefit assessment should be completed to determine if the risk of medication is worth the affect it may have on your son’s life.

If he can be helped by the medication and it would improve his quality of life, and therefore yours, then it may be worth the risk of side effects.

But that needs to be an informed decision that you need to make so make sure that you do your homework – in books, talking to professionals and information on the internet.

Also bear in mind that defiant behavior is not always a bad thing. If it means that it may make him a little less vulnerable to the demands of others in future, then don’t look to eradicate it completely.

A further article about Defiant Behavior –

Depression

Question

Can Asperger's cause depression in a child? If yes, why and what are the signs? We believe our son might be depressed. He spends a great deal of time in his room and doesn't want to interact with the rest of the family.

Answer

With Asperger's, as well as many other developmental disabilities, there is an increased risk of depression.

During early childhood, your child was probably less concerned with their differences to other children.

His life revolved around your family and his teacher, with social contact with others having limited value or interest.

Adolescence brings a new venture with new challenges as your child becomes more interested in socializing with others and begins to become aware of their difficulties.

The cause of depression may simply be a reaction to having Asperger's, which is understandable, but may also have a biological basis.

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In addition a lot of the possible social causes of depression can be things like feeling isolated/rejected, limited life opportunities, struggling at school etc. which may well also feature for your child.

In most cases there are classic signs of depression with changes in mood, appetite, sleep, and suicidal thoughts and actions.

If you believe your child is depressed you should seek appropriate intervention with a psychiatrist who can assist you in determining clinical depression and provide you with direction.

However, your child may also have anxiety about interacting with others, or simply lack the social skills to do so.

Try to create small groups where your child can interact with others and create situations where he can converse on topics that are familiar to him.

Children with Asperger’s don’t want to appear stupid when in a group and yet often lack the social skills or awareness to communicate clearly with others.

You may want to talk to his school and see if he is participating in social skills groups. If not, perhaps his teacher would be willing to work on that with him.
These are two very different scenarios which could be causing the end result that he chooses not to interact with others.

Talk to him about it.

Don’t be surprised if he cannot describe his emotions to you.

Be patient and be willing to listen to his concerns.

And a final point to consider is that some of the behaviors may just be “typical teenager” stuff.

It really depends to the extent that he is staying in his room (is it always or just some times?) and not interacting with the family (is it always or just sometimes?).

You know your child best and probably have a “gut instinct” whether or not it is a potential mental health issue.

But to be sure do talk with your general medical practitioner and/or psychiatrist about the issues.

A short poignant video about Aspergers and Depression -
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2X5Hft9ce8

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Driving

Question

My daughter is 17 years old. She wants to drive but I worry that she will go into ‘Asperger's mode’ and zone out while driving. When we talk about driving I explain to her that she needs to be paying attention at all times. Her response is "I don't know if I can do that.” Any suggestions?

Answer

One of the first, most obvious life transitions for a teen is reaching the legal driving age. That driver's license screams adulthood and independence.

Every teen dreams of the day they can jump into a car and drive away, alone and unsupervised. Yikes!

Teens with Asperger's are no different from their peers when it comes to meeting these life transitions. With a little extra preparation, your teen can be or her way to taking the driving exam and claiming her independence. This plan of action will give your daughter the transition into freedom she so desperately seeks, while giving you the peace that she is well prepared for this step toward adulthood.

Before any major life transition, a consultation with your teen's physician and any counselors are in order. The medical professionals involved in your

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daughter's care should have training in the well-being of the Asperger's teen. They should be able to offer guidance in this area, and in other areas of transition your teen will soon reach.

Your teen's school or community will have driving education classes. There may also be private driving schools in your area. Find a program that offers driving simulation before actual street driving. The practice in a simulator can help prepare your teen for the actual experience and expectations of paying constant attention without risk or danger.

Once you and your teen are both comfortable with her attention span and skill level, insist on extra precautions before allowing her full freedom behind the wheel. A couple of suggestions would be limiting the number of passengers at all times and driving a certain number of hours accompanied by another licensed driver before driving alone. Some states have these types of requirements built into the learning process. Be sure to verify your state's laws. You may want to go above and beyond your state's requirements to ease your mind and allow for a little more maturity behind the wheel than necessary. It's better to be safe than lax in this area.

Teens with Asperger's meet this achievement with no problems and go on to function as any other teen driver. Remind her to be cautious and careful, as you remind yourself that she is capable. Remember that while your teen does have extra challenges, she will be able to meet the demands of life because of the efforts you have made to assist her in these transitions.
Online discussion forum about Aspergers and Driving -

http://www.wrongplanet.net/postt53942.html
Eating

Question

My son is very limited in what he eats. He has texture issues but the main thing is that if it does not LOOK good or SMELL good there is no way he will try it. His foods are very limited and as a result he has Terry's nail syndrome. I have to sneak in supplements. How do I get him to try some fruits and vegetables?

Answer

Food and eating issues are a major concern for many parents of children with Asperger's Syndrome. One of the most basic responsibilities of parents is the proper feeding and nutrition of their children. When your child refuses to eat the food you prepare, or insists on eating a very restrictive and unhealthy diet, a parent can quickly feel defeated. Common complaints are the very problems you are having with your son: texture issues, certain smells, and the visual appeal. Here is more information on common food and eating problems.

- Sensory issues can cause a child to have an enhanced sense of smell or an under-sensitive mouth. Children with sensory issues may pack their mouths and gag, even when eating their preferred foods. The sight and smell of some foods can be overwhelming, creating an over reaction.
• Oral aversion is when a child simply refuses to eat certain foods. The child can have an aversion to anything smooth, chunky, sweet, or any combination of attributes.

• The social aspect of eating can be a big cause of eating problems. Children with Asperger’s Syndrome can have social anxiety on top of sensory issues that cause them to limit what, where, and when they will eat.

• Rigidity can be another problem for children with Asperger’s Syndrome. Any change in the routine of eating, the brand of a favorite food, or a change in the method you choose to cook foods can cause eating problems.

Food and eating problems can lead to a failure to thrive, a medical condition that indicates an unhealthy, slow growth pattern, or even malnutrition. By choosing to sneak supplements into your son’s diet, you are taking initiative to improve his health. Here are some additional steps to try.

• You can puree fruits and vegetables and add them to your son’s favorite foods. Use mild additions so they go undetected. Be sure to start small by adding tiny amounts and working up to full servings. For example, add small amounts of pureed cooked carrots to his macaroni and cheese. There are cookbooks available now that give tips on sneaking extra nutrition into a child’s diet. Check your local public library.

• Your son’s doctor may ask you to try a supplemental nutritional drink. These drinks are usually milk-based, come in several flavors, and are
packed with vitamins, minerals, protein, and extra calories. You can also find supplemental drinks that taste like juice.

- Ask your son’s doctor for a referral to a nutritionist. This specialist can help you develop strategies that will improve your son’s health. If an appointment with a nutritionist is not possible, look for books on feeding problems and Autism. Search the Internet, your library, and your local Autism support group for titles.

Terry’s nail syndrome can be the sign of serious illness such as diabetes or liver disease. It is very important that your doctor is aware of your son’s condition and that your son is checked for serious illnesses that are indicated by Terry’s nails.

An easy approach to improve your Aspergers child’s eating -

http://www.slideshare.net/nancym1/living-on-thin-air-how-to-get-your-asperger-kid-to-eat-a-healthy-diet-presentation
**Emotional Outbursts**

**Question**

How should I deal with my son’s emotional outbursts?

**Answer**

Emotional outbursts are very common in children with Asperger’s Syndrome. Also referred to as rages or meltdowns, these events can be frightening for the child and everyone present. Children of all ages (and even adults) with Asperger’s must take precautions to help prevent reaching the stage of losing complete control. There are several Asperger’s characteristics that can cause these emotional outbursts.

To help your son control these emotional outbursts you’ll have to discover the reasons behind the outbursts. The answer will depend upon the cause or causes.

**Possible Causes**

* Social issues. Children with Asperger’s have problems with social communication and situations. Being in a social situation can be extremely uncomfortable and can lead to an emotional breakdown.

* Sensory issues. Hyposensitivity and hypersensitivity to light, sound, touch, smell, and visual activities can quickly become overwhelming, sending the child with Asperger’s spiraling out of control.
* Emotional awareness. Children with Asperger’s do not always understand their own emotions or feelings about people, things, and situations.

There are a few things you can try that may help with your son’s emotional outbursts. You will want to contact your son’s physician to discuss the use of medication therapy or counseling and to check his general health.

Management Options

* Behavior modification. Help your son pinpoint any stressors that cause outbursts.
  1. Adapt the use of redirection to avoid an outburst.
  2. Create a safe zone that is a calming place to relax and regain control.
  3. Use rewards to encourage self-control.

* Family and individual counseling. Counseling can help you understand the feelings your son is struggling with and can give you the knowledge you need to develop a plan for him. Counseling can help your son understand why he loses control which can lead to better control and prevention.

* Medication. Your son may need help with anxiety and depression or other emotional issues that can be improved with the appropriate medicines.

There are books available that will increase your understanding on the issues your son experiences on a daily basis. “Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments: Practical Solutions for Tantrums, Rage, and Meltdowns – Revised and Expanded Edition” by Brenda Smith Myles & Jack  

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Southwick is a great resource for you to utilize. This book offers solutions and practical advice for home and for school and helps the child with Asperger's, as well as those around him.

Educating yourself on the causes and treatments for these extreme emotions will benefit both you and your son.

A short explanation of Aspergers Emotional Outbursts -
http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=RTrLq1YicwQC&pg=PT96&dq=aspergers+emotional+outbursts&hl=en&ei=K_8STtuZMYSo8QO1lenNDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CDkQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false
Emotions

Question

Information about how to teach AS children (ours is age 10) to control their emotions and speech volume.

Answer

Children with Asperger’s Syndrome have great trouble understanding emotions. They struggle to understand how feelings and emotions work together in other people. They struggle to understand how feelings and emotions affect their own lives. They struggle to understand how these feelings and emotions, the emotions of others and their own emotions, work together and affect everyone within his circle of family and peers. It is a quite complicated concept, if you think about. Fortunately, most of us are equipped to recognize the complexities of emotions.

These social intricacies are woven into our very being and when they are non-functioning, or off in any way, all areas of development are affected. Believe it or not, there are emotional and social connections to things like voice fluency and volume. Many children with Asperger’s Syndrome are unaware of their inconsistent and often inappropriate voice volume. They just do not have the theory of mind development to make these connections.
There are other factors that play into the emotional upheaval and speech volume problems. Sensory issues wreak havoc in many aspects of life. Hypo and/or hypersensitivities to sound, light, smell, and touch are very common in children with Asperger’s Syndrome. Anxiety can cause voice fluency, volume, and inflection issues, as well as major emotional setbacks. Here are some things you can investigate that may help your child.

- Sensory therapy for sensory integration dysfunction can help with emotions and overall well-being. There are books available that give parents activities to try at home. *The Out-of-Sync-Child* by Carol Kranowitz is one option.
- Speech therapy works on articulation, inflection, and volume, as well as social communication and many other issues. Contact your son’s school for an evaluation and therapy or talk to your son’s physician about possible private therapy. Using a speech curriculum at home is also a viable option.
- Counseling may be needed to give your child an opportunity to talk about emotions and learn how to manage them.
- Cognitive-behavior therapy is another option that teaches the child about feelings and emotions. This therapy will help your child learn that our inner thoughts are what control our feelings and emotions, and that we can control these emotions regardless of what outside situations occur.

Finally, visual aids are very useful for children with Asperger’s Syndrome. An emotion board can help your child communicate his emotions. You can make

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a simple emotion board by laminated pictures of faces showing sadness, anger, happiness, etc. With Velcro, your child can attach the appropriate face to the board. (A poster board or a laminated sheet of paper work well).

For the voice volume problems, try using an if/then chart. This chart will have a picture of certain behaviors with a corresponding picture that shows a consequence for that behavior.

Additional information on Aspergers and Emotions -

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=ojfE5FABdJ0C&pg=PA125&dq=aspergers+emotions&hl=en&ei=sQATTpPdD80o8QO996GAAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CDcQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false
Emotions Part 2

Question

How can we help our child understand and deal with his emotions?

Answer

Children with Asperger’s have a difficult time understanding emotions. The best option to teach them about emotions is to explore one emotion at a time and make that a theme for a project. You can choose the emotion “happy” and then find as many illustrations as you can that demonstrate an individual who is happy (e.g. pictures of smiling people). You can create collages with the illustrations.

Then you can further this project by describing different levels of happiness or by talking about what makes people happy. Similarly you can use facial recognition software to help teach your child the different emotions on a human face.

You can also model different levels of emotion for your child by body language, tone of voice, face, and then ask the child to describe how you feel. So you could adapt a sad look on your face and sit down all slumped over and depressed looking and ask the child about how they think you feel.
Once a particular emotion and the varying levels of expression are understood, the next stage would be to include a contrasting emotion such as happy.

You can then create a game using pictures, stories, or role play and have the child describe which emotion is portrayed. These pictures can be used to create scrapbooks that the child can refer to often. A game of “feeling hats” can be used as a group activity. An emotion is written on a card and then pinned to a hat. Each child chooses and puts on a hat with its associated emotions and shares times when they have had those feelings.

A social skills group can include a game using cards. Written on one pile of cards are emotions and written on a second set of cards is an action. The game involves taking a card from each pile and role playing the action according to the emotion, while other participants try to guess the activity, feeling, and the degree of expression. So for example you may pick up “sad” (feeling) and “going shopping” (action) and then have to act this out.

Natural circumstances can also be used to learn the specific cues to identify feelings. So for example looking at people in the street and asking your child to tell you what emotion they may be feeling (as long as they don’t say it too loud!)

**Free Trial Facial Recognition Software at**

Empathy

Question

How can I teach empathy to my son with Aspergers?

Answer

One of the most common areas of weakness mentioned to me by parents is empathy. Asperger's Syndrome causes an individual to lack empathy. Showing emotions and acknowledging another person's feelings are very important skills. Without empathy, a person is seen as cold and unfeeling, therefore making it difficult to develop personal relationships with others.

If you were to complete an Internet search on empathy and Asperger's Syndrome, you would find a topic that is very well covered. This weakness is quite well-known. The problem lies within the inability to determine another individual's feelings, more so than an actual inability to feel. Once your son becomes aware of another person's feelings, he is likely quite capable in showing empathy of a variety of emotions. The key to teaching empathy is helping him learn to understand and recognize other people's true feelings and emotions.

As a parent, you should definitely teach empathy. Asperger's Syndrome doesn't eliminate the desire to learn, even though it can make it a bit difficult.

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Here are some ideas you can use to help your son develop a healthier emotional outlook.

* Social stories can be used to teach a variety of skills. You can purchase books of social stories or create your own personal versions. Feel free to make some of them silly and fun, while others are more sad and serious.

* Social skills groups/classes can be found through your son's school, doctor's office, or your local Autism support group. Good social skills will automatically enhance your son's empathy. If you cannot find a social skills group for your son, speak with the special education department at his school for tips you can use at home. Better yet, convince them of the need to start a social skills group at school, complete with peer buddies. (Peer buddies are neurotypical classmates who have a desire to help with the challenges some of the special needs students face at school.)

* Occupational and Speech/language therapy practice at home is important to your son's development. Make sure you are meeting with his therapists regularly and working on the goals that help with empathy: sensory issues, social cues and language, and pretend-play, to name a few.

* Video, peer, and self-modeling are all good ways to teach empathy. Using videos, your son can learn to connect feelings by watching facial expressions while listening to the conversations that take place. Once a video has been implemented, bringing in a peer to help re-create the video will bring about a
new dimension. Likewise, have your son use a mirror to see different facial expressions while talking about their meanings. Seeing, hearing, and doing will help your son make important connections that will stick with him.

While planning to assist a child by teaching empathy, Asperger's Syndrome specialists and parents must also balance the need for good communication skills. Social cues and gestures are an important part of emotional connection. A good speech/language therapist can help your son learn better social skills and empathy by improving his verbal and nonverbal language skills.

An online article about Aspergers and empathy -

http://www.scn.org/autistics/empathy.html
**Eye contact**

**Question**

We have one main concern with our child with Aspergers. Eye contact is very important to me and the people around me. And as I have read before, eye contact is something that is hard for a child with Aspergers to do. We cannot get my son to look anyone in the eyes. If he does then it is only for a split second before he looks away again. sometimes he will say he is looking at us but his eyes are diverted elsewhere. Is there an exercise we can do with him to help get his attention on our eyes better?

**Answer**

It can be very difficult for children with Asperger's to engage in eye contact with people they are speaking to. Many people are uncomfortable talking with someone who can't look them in the eye. There are several things you can work on with your son concerning eye contact.

The first thing to do is to explain to him the importance of eye contact to other people. It might take him some time to understand this, but if you make the conversation age appropriate, he should be able to understand why other people need this from him.

Once he is aware of the issue, there are a few techniques you can do to help him learn how to make eye contact. The first thing to try is to teach your son to not to stare directly at someone (which can make people uncomfortable as
well), but have him focus first one eye of the person he is speaking to. He can then switch to the other eye. This way, it seems as though he's making eye contact, but he can still shift his gaze in a way that is helpful to him.

Another suggestion would be for your son to find a place on a person's face where he feels comfortable looking. This could be a nose or a mouth or even an eyebrow. Have him practice shifting his gaze from eyebrow to eyebrow, or from nose to eyebrow. Since most children with Asperger's find it uncomfortable to look directly into someone's eyes, this can be a good compromise.

The other thing you might give some thought to is readjusting your expectations of your child. You say eye contact is important to you and those around you, and that is a very valid expectation. It's not an expectation your child with Asperger's can easily meet. Be patient with him. Try to get the people around you to adjust their expectations for you son as well. Talk to the rest of your family members and come up with a set of expectations that you can all live with.

Understand that your son truly find making eye contact uncomfortable. Try to see this as a process where he might be able to work his way up from a few seconds of eye contact to a minute. Celebrate his progress and help him to understand how learning this skill can help make his social interactions easier and more meaningful.
Short video on Aspergers and Eye Contact -
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wEPxhNha3g

Fantasy

Question

Aspergers Teenagers - What do I do to equip my 15 year old son to cope with real life issues and set aside his fantasy world?

Answer

There are different types of children with Aspergers and some enjoy living in fantasy worlds that they create. In your son's fantasy world, everything goes exactly as he wants it to, all the time. Children with Aspergers who enjoy Fantasy retreat into their own worlds. They play games for hours, read books, listen to music, or just daydream. Presumably, this is what your son is doing.

Children who like fantasy often fantasize while using electronic equipment, but the fantasy can also be replayed or re-created in your son's head as he is eating dinner, going to school, or talking to you. He creates or recreates word-for-word dialogue and scenes in his head. These fantasies serve many functions. They are enjoyable, remove him from the difficulties of the real world, make no demands on him, and always go the way he wants. Thus, reality is avoided, interactions with others don't occur, and life goes on without him. This is how he copes with stress and reality. His fantasy world is where

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he considers his real friends to be. If you interfere, he may become angry and resistant.

Nonetheless, it falls to you to teach him the difference between reality and fantasy: how to recognize which is which and how to function in reality. You must limit fantasy time and help him develop the ability to enjoy non-fantasy activities. He won't want to be a part of the real world until there is something in the real world that he enjoys.

Perhaps your son's teachers can help get him involved in school activities and make a friend or two with whom he can socialize outside of school. A doctor specializing in Asperger's Syndrome may need to evaluate him for other disorders, such as borderline personality disorder. If he needs treatment for this kind of condition, be sure that he gets it.

Since your son fantasizes about the things he wants, which may include having friends, owning a car, and finding a girlfriend, consider using his fantasy goals to help him develop real life goals. If he can establish goals for his future and ways to achieve those goals, he may be more willing to function in the real world. Also, he may outgrow some of his fantasy life as he matures and gets busier in school or at a job.

One thing that may help is for your son to join groups, including e-groups. He should find groups that share his interests - online or off. He may still prefer solitude much of the time and need his own space, a sanctuary to retreat to when he needs quiet, but that is fine.
Help him take small steps, be patient, and remember, this is the most difficult time of life for him. Socially and emotionally he is functioning similar to an 11 or 12 year old. Give him time to mature. Keep trying even if you are not successful at first.

An online discussion about Aspergers and Fantasy -

Friendships

Question

My son is 13 with Aspergers and friends are a big problem. He never has anyone call or come over. Should I push on this issue or let it play out as he is happy and content so far?

Answer

What do most parents want the most for their children with Asperger's?

Friends.

We are social beings and because of that, we desire friendships. Some people are more social, needing to be surrounded by other people constantly, while some of us are much less social, preferring to spend some of our time alone.

Socialization is difficult for kids with Asperger’s. Friends are hard to come by. Other kids do not understand the characteristics of Asperger’s Syndrome and may think your son is awkward, aloof, or conceited. There are things your son can do to improve his chances for friendships, if he so desires. Here are a few suggestions.
• Social skills classes help kids with Asperger’s Syndrome learn ways to interact with their peers. Some schools offer these classes to their special needs students through the speech and language therapy department.

• Peer mentoring picks up where social skills classes leave off. Typically developing peers are matched with students with Asperger’s. Friends are made while these peers act as social guides. This can be quite effective at opening dialogue between peers while a protective peer mentor is in control.

• Special interest groups or clubs, both at school and in the community, will give your son opportunities to practice his newly acquired social skills with kids that share his special interest or topic. For example, your son could join a computer club or band at school while enjoying bird watching or local history meetings on the weekends.
Personal hygiene is sometimes a forgotten concept in kids with Asperger’s. Friends may not be so accepting if your son has poor hygiene habits. Create a visual schedule to help him remember the basics to cleanliness.

There is another thought to keep in mind regarding Asperger’s. Friends are not the most important thing to some people with Asperger’s Syndrome. Some people truly are more comfortable with very few friends and spending most of their time alone. If your son is obviously happy and content, as you say, there may not be an issue here at all. If you notice your son struggling with who he is, or with depression or anxiety, you may want to intervene. For now, make sure he is learning proper social skills and interacting with people appropriately. As long as he is happy and productive, take your cues from him.

Therapeutic insights into Aspergers and Friendships -
http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=fme8oEQgHOgC&pg=PT122&dq=aspergers+friendships&hl=en&ei=qMTTr-oMMebQO2oMygDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false
Hygiene

Question

We have trouble getting our 11 year old son with Asperger's to understand how important hygiene is. Any ideas?

Answer

For many children with Asperger's, hygiene is a low-ranking responsibility. In addition, typical children at this age often go through a phase of low hygiene. Your child's hygiene may naturally improve once puberty strikes, but more than likely, he will need extra support to learn appropriate habits. Investigate the causes of your child's hesitation. You can then form a plan of action to help him understand the importance of good hygiene.

Due to the characteristics of Asperger's, hygiene can be overwhelming for a couple of reasons. The need for daily bathing may sometimes defy logic. Your child many not feel he has done anything to get dirty. Since he is not dirty, his clothes are not dirty. It will be difficult for him to understand the need to bathe, change clothes, and wash his laundry every day when he feels such action is not merited.

Another reason for poor Asperger's hygiene is related to sensory integration issues. Some children have great difficulty with the feel and splashing of water during a bath or shower. Some cannot tolerate water on their faces. Washing hair and brushing teeth is pure torture. Some children can tolerate
the feel of a bath, while others must have a high-pressure showerhead. Here are a few ideas for you.

* Address your child's sensory issues. If splashing water is a problem, create a soothing bath experience. Use a shampoo visor to reduce anxiety. Try to make personal hygiene as pleasant as possible.

* Talk to your child about the basics of personal hygiene. Appeal to his sense of scientific thought by adding information on body odor, bacterial growth, and specific diseases that are caused by poor hygiene. Since your child is probably a visual learner, try incorporating videos and photos.

* Create a daily hygiene checklist for your child. Visual aids are very helpful for children with Asperger's Syndrome. A checklist can be posted in the bathroom where he can check off each item as it is completed.

It may help to know that poor Asperger's hygiene is a very common problem that does not always improve with age. During childhood, you can push your child to perform these daily tasks. However, as an adult it will be up to him to follow through with basic hygiene. Give him the tools and information regarding hygiene now, and hope for the best.

**Online discussion about Aspergers and Hygiene -**


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Inappropriate comments

Question

Sometimes my son (aged 6) with Aspergers has words slip out of his mouth like he can say “gee that man is smoking a lot” or “Look at that lady she’s FAT!” I feel like going underneath a rock. He may also say things to me and his father or brother too. We reprimand him and I know he is saying it like he sees it. Am I doing this right?

Answer

The old adage, “children say the darndest things” is never truer than when referring to a child with Asperger’s Syndrome. Just as you have found, your son calls it as he sees it. And it does not matter how the words may affect those around him.

Children with Asperger’s Syndrome have great difficulty with social communication. Relating to other people, picking up on their sensitivities, social cues, and gestures, and speaking with tact are all part of the problem. Some people say people with Asperger’s Syndrome have no filter. That is, in fact, an accurate observation.

Punishment and reprimands will fail in this case. Your son will only wonder why he is being punished for stating the truth! However, it is important that he

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learn to use some control, if possible. Here are some things you can do to help your son in this area:

_Social Interaction_

Social interaction is very important for children with Asperger’s Syndrome. Your son may attempt to avoid social interaction because it causes him discomfort. You will notice that he does not make eye contact or initiate conversation. You have to draw him out every chance you get to avoid social isolation, which is his more comfortable position in life.

_Social communication_

Your son also needs to develop social communication skills. How to hold a two-way conversation, where to stand, where to look, and what to say are foreign to him. The pragmatics of language is just as important as the actual speech, or articulation, when it comes to communication.

To encourage social interaction and communication, you can do the following:

- Group activities like scouts or academic clubs offer supervised meetings that are geared towards a certain interest. Find a group or club of peers that your son will enjoy providing him more one-on-one contact with others.
• Therapies are necessary to enhance social ability. Speech/language therapy, social skills classes, and cognitive-behavioral therapy are all commonly suggested for children with Asperger’s.

• Pretend play with peers is a great way to encourage appropriate communication. These play dates should be fully supervised. You can use these play dates as opportunities to correct some of your son’s inappropriate comments while offering reasoning and alternate comments.

• Practice at home, always. As the parent of a child with Asperger’s, you must expand on all therapy topics while guiding your child through life.

Your son is young. You will learn to do the things he needs to make him the best he can be. You are doing things right!

Helpful insights into Aspergers thinking patterns that can cause Inappropriate Comments -

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=ojfE5FABdJ0C&pg=PA105&dq=what+is+truth-bound+thinking+aspergers&hl=en&ei=OwYTTtSLLMSx8gPi64HPDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false
Lying

Question

My son is 14 and has Asperger's. His main means of survival is lying. I can't tell when he is telling the truth or not. Did he eat breakfast? Does he have lunch? Did he use soap in the shower? Did he do his homework? What do you recommend?

Answer

It is often said that kids with Asperger's cannot tell lies. The truth is, they can learn, as you well know. Asperger's Syndrome is a spectrum, and while children with Asperger's will have the same basic characteristics, they are unique individuals with their own strengths and weaknesses. Children with Asperger's Syndrome struggle with social communication, causing them to be very rigid thinkers. For instance, rules are rules, no exceptions. The thought of stating a falsehood does not come naturally.

However, as the child grows older, he will more than likely develop the ability to tell little white lies, and in some cases, real whoppers. The concept is not easy to grasp, so they usually learn about lying much later than their peers and they may never be very good at it.

The issue here could be that your son is lying to gain control. It's possible that he has discovered that his eating habits, cleanliness, and schoolwork are
much more important to you than to him. He rarely gives these things a second thought. Therefore, he has realized that he can tell you what you want to hear and carry on. When you ask about these things, he can choose not to answer, (lie of omission) or to tell you he did these things when he really didn't. It's possible that he isn't completely aware of the importance of these skills.

Your son is old enough and has demonstrated that he knows the difference between telling the truth and a lie. He needs to learn the importance of being honest when it comes to his well-being. After a targeted conversation on the repercussions of lying, explain to your son that you will be implementing new strategies.

Parent Tools

Create an activity schedule for home use. This is a written checklist of his daily schedule, broken down into steps. Although he may protest, this will appeal to his need for order. Walk him through the schedule for several days, checking off each step and verifying that it was completed. Being a creature of habit, it won't take long for him to settle into this new routine.

Supplement his new activity schedule with social stories about lying, eating, bathing properly, and other areas he needs help with. Social stories are simply written short stories that are used to teach social and living skills to children with Asperger's. You can find social stories written specifically for teens, many in comic book form. They tackle subjects like lying, dating, and bullies.

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Professional Tools

Contact your local Asperger's support group for information on living skills or independent living classes. These classes are designed to help teens with Asperger's take care of themselves properly, and to ensure the possibility of independent living as an adult. Hygiene, self-care, housekeeping, and handling money are just a few of the skills covered in these group therapy sessions.

Finally, do not hesitate to consult with your son's psychologist or counselor. The root of his lies may have an underlying cause that is unrelated to the actual subject matter. It is a good idea to look for the reason for his lies before you attempt to correct the situation.

Online discussion about Aspergers and Lying -

http://www.wrongplanet.net/postt15464.html
Manners

Question

I need strategies that help a boy understand why it is important to respond back to a “Hi” or “Good morning” from a teacher or adult. I also need strategies to help him understand why being respectful and polite to other Asperger's peers is important, regardless of whether they are driving him crazy.

Answer

As you know, children with Asperger’s Syndrome have difficulty understanding and interpreting social cues and situations that require responses to cues from others. Asperger's is characterized by social awkwardness, as opposed to social phobia. Many of these communication difficulties can be improved with help. Aspie children can learn strategies and compensate for their problems with responding.

Social skills, such as saying “Hi” or “Good morning” or responding politely to others, are often taught by communication specialists or in social training groups. Imitating and practicing new skills in situations which are as true to life as possible is most effective. Skills' training includes:
a. Learning nonverbal behaviours, such as the use of gaze for social interaction, using appropriate hand gestures, and smiling;

b. Interpretation of nonverbal behaviours of others;

c. Processing of visual information simultaneously with auditory information;

d. Social awareness.

e. Learning verbal behaviours.

This training should occur in both home and school to maximise the help for a child.

There are video lessons that might help, too. Consider using *Model Me Conversation Cues* and *Model Me Friendship* videos, part of a set of videos that focus on social skills activities. Here is a sample of how the lessons proceed:

Lesson goal – To say hello when someone says hello to us.

Sequence of Social Skills Activities

1. Watch the video chapter "Say Hello".

2. Say hello to each student one by one, turn your body, look, say hello.

3. Once a student is able to greet in response to an adult, pair students for practice. Start with students seated close to each other. Prompt non-responding student to initiate greeting.
4. Over time and as students are successful, move students further apart or have one approach the other.

5. Introduce new situations such as greeting at the door and at locations outside the classroom.

You can find the Model Me Kids Videos at: http://www.modelmekids-store.com/?Click=8209

Videos and scripts work best when used in real life situations, which are fun, and appropriate to the Aspie’s age and developmental level. Many Aspies find it hard to deviate from a learned script, so they must be taught to vary it. Encourage imitation of peers in new situations, however, problems can occur, such as when wished Happy Birthday, the Aspie may wish the other person the same!

You must explain why it’s important to be respectful and polite, regardless of anyone else’s behaviour, including Asperger’s children’s behavior. Explain why they do the things they do and why your child shouldn’t. Explain that we have a social rule that says we should be polite and respectful to everyone.

Another idea for social skills development is to establish a weekly or monthly skill target. The goal is to learn a specific skill and be able to apply it in a variety of situations. Here are some steps to follow.
- Decide which skill you would like the child to be able to use, for example responding to the questions “How are you?” or “What's new?”

- Teach the child the question/skill and several appropriate responses. Make sure you explain that there are many ways to respond. Model lots of options.

- Work with family, friends, and school staff to set up situations that require practicing the skill in different situations.

- Develop a plan for how the questioner should prompt or respond, if the child doesn’t respond correctly.

- Keep track of the child’s responses to see if the child uses the skill consistently.

Online discussion about teaching Manner to Children with Aspergers -

http://www.wrongplanet.net/postt160517.html
Meltdowns

Question

How do you handle a child with Aspergers when they meltdown?

Answer

Sometimes when life feels unbalanced, you will witness your child with Asperger’s meltdown. These occurrences are uncomfortable for everyone involved, but none more so than for the child. Many things can cause a meltdown. Here are a few causes.

* Changes in routine or schedule cause stress, anxiety, and frustration. Children with Asperger’s tend to be inflexible, needing a routine that remains constant.

* Simply transitioning from one activity to another can also cause a meltdown. Children with Asperger’s Syndrome have difficulty with transition and should be prepared in advance for transition.

* Sensory overload can lead to meltdowns. Hypersensitivity to sounds, lights, and smells, for example, can be a problem when the child is in this type of environment.

* Lack of social communication skills can cause a child with Asperger’s to become frustrated in a social situation, leading to a meltdown.

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Meltdowns are to be expected in children with Asperger’s. Meltdowns are a source of release for the child with Asperger’s. Finding alternative ways to release this stress and frustration will automatically cut down on meltdowns. The goal should be to find ways to prevent these anger problems before they appear. Here are some tips to help you handle and prevent Asperger’s meltdowns.

* Discover the cause of your child’s meltdowns. Each child with Asperger’s will have different triggers. Know your child’s triggers.

* Develop a plan to prevent these meltdowns. Avoid your child’s triggers when possible. When avoidance is not possible, prepare your child (and yourself) for possible frustration. Talk to your child about the situation and explain how you would like him to handle himself.

* Determine what to do when a meltdown occurs. Make a written plan for dealing with your child’s meltdowns. The plan can start with a verbal discussion as soon as you see the warning signs and escalate to removing your child from the situation.

* Decide to accept that meltdowns are bound to happen. It does not matter what strangers see or think. They have no idea what is happening. Diffuse the situation to the best of your ability, redirect your child, or leave the situation.

It is possible to find good resources that can help you learn the best ways to deal with Asperger’s meltdowns. “No More Meltdowns: Positive Strategies for Managing and Preventing Out-Of-Control Behavior”, by

Read Brand New Weekly Articles For Parents of Children with Aspergers at www.ParentingAspergers.com/blog
Jed Baker, Ph.D. is a great book for parents who need help controlling behavioral problems in their children with Asperger’s.

Great short video on understanding Aspergers Meltdowns -
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWgApN3GZwA
Memory

Question

How can I help a child retain their memory of numbers etc?

Answer

Children with Asperger’s can find reading, spelling, and numbers very easy or very difficult. Some may have dyslexic tendencies and therefore have more difficulties. Try to use a number of teaching methods when teaching numbers. Allow the child to see the number, feel the number, and hear the number. Using more than one sense will allow them to use all of their ability to learn.

Children with Asperger’s may also be highly sensitive to criticism and may shut down if they are afraid that they will disappoint the teacher. Build a relationship with the child and try to determine how he is learning best, (sight, touch, sound, or a combination) then incorporate those methods into every opportunity.

Children with Asperger’s often benefit from short learning blocks, combined with physical activity to keep them focused. Remaining on task can be difficult for children with Asperger’s. They can be very disorganized and can be distracted by their own interests. When they have difficulty staying on task

--------------------------------------------------------------------
in classroom activities often it is not that the attention is poor but, rather, that 
the focus is odd.

The individual with Asperger’s cannot figure out what is relevant, so attention 
is focused on an irrelevant area. Then they can withdraw into their own world 
so can appear as though they are daydreaming. This often causes difficulties 
learning in group situations. For an Asperger’s child to learn effectively in the 
classroom an amount of structure must be provided.

Assignments should be broken down into small units, and frequent teacher 
feedback and redirection should be offered. Children with severe 
concentration problems benefit from timed work sessions. This helps them 
organize themselves.

A great blog post about Aspergers and Memory - http://life-with-
aspergers.blogspot.com/2007/10/aspie-memory.html
Mood Swings

Question

My 11-year-old girl with Aspergers has mood swings, what can I do about them?

Answer

A common complaint from parents of children with Asperger's is dealing with the mood swings and meltdowns that are a component of Asperger's Syndrome. Emotional interaction and social communication are difficult for these children. These difficulties cause frustration that has to be relieved in some manner. Hence, the reckless mood swings.

In addition, puberty wreaks havoc on the preteen girl. Truthfully, it wreaks havoc on the preteen boy, but you don't hear about it as much. Girls struggle through the hormone changes, growth spurts, and onset of menstruation, fighting to keep their sanity and identity. Can you imagine the confusion and frustration puberty causes within the young lady with Asperger's?

We know that puberty and Asperger's Syndrome are not friends. So, what can we do about it? Here are a few things you can try that may ease your daughter's mood swings.
* Medical advice-A trip to the doctor is in order to rule out any medical conditions that could be causing problems. For example, something as simple as unmentioned headaches could be causing your daughter misery, attributing to mood swings.

* Medication options-Consult the physician about using medication to relieve anxiety and/or depression. If you have considered using natural, or biomedical supplements, now is a good time to get a doctor's opinion on using any of these options to treat your daughter's mood swings.

* Counseling-Your daughter may benefit from counseling. A psychologist can help her manage the issues of Asperger's that cause her trouble. Social skills therapy and behavioral therapy will allow your daughter to cope better with life in general. Group therapy will permit a chance to practice these therapy techniques on her peers, teaching her ways to carry what she has learned into her daily schedule.

* Educational planning-Enlist the assistance of your daughter's school support team. It is important that all of your daughter's support: medical, emotional/behavioral, educational, and family work together to make her life mission go as smoothly as possible.

* Information-Provide your daughter with the facts about Asperger's Syndrome and puberty. Appeal to her need for information, but keep it on a level she can comprehend. Children with Asperger's are intelligent and have a natural hunger for knowledge. Many resources available are written directly to the child, or are in video form.
Mood swings are an unfortunate part of Asperger's Syndrome, but there are ways to make life better. Your concern for your daughter will lead you to discover the best course of action for your family.

**Online discussion about Aspergers and Mood Swings -**

Motivation

Question

I can't get my 22 year old daughter with ASD to be motivated unless we are on vacation. To get her to help with the house or even just keep up her own things is a real trial. She likes to sit after getting up at 11a.m. on the TV all day and eat. I want to know if anyone knows anything about putting some kind of lock on the TV so it won't come on until evening. What can you advise?

Answer

One thing to remember about those who have Asperger’s syndrome is that they are not “wired” in the same way as others. They respond best when their motivation is high. When you are trying to get your daughter to help with the house or even just picking up after herself she is thinking, “what's in it for me”. While we see a clean house or uncluttered room as reward enough, your daughter doesn’t see it that way.

When you are on vacation it's all about new adventures for her. It’s about the new places she is going, the new things she is seeing, and the souvenirs she will be taking home. She views the vacation as it’s all about her and the amount of fun she is having which is why her motivation level is so high. What you need to do is learn some tricks to use at home to help motivate her and
make things she has no interest in doing, such as helping to clean, as being fun and rewarding – rewarding being the word to focus on.

While you can put a lock on your TV, so it does not come on until the specified time, having no TV is not going to suddenly motivate your daughter into helping with the house and cleaning up after herself. You need to find something to get your daughter motivated and help her stay that way.

What some parents with children with Asperger’s do to help motivate and have found works well is to implement a token reward system. Your daughter will earn tokens as a reward for certain actions or behaviors. For example, picking her clothes up off the floor could earn her 2 tokens. Make up a cataloge of items with a required token amount at the bottom and when she has earned enough tokens she can exchange them for an item or activity that is outlined in the booklet. This will help keep your daughter motivated since she will be receiving an award.

The answer to the question, “what’s in it for me,” is answered with the tokens and booklet of items she can receive by earning tokens. Just make sure whatever rewards to decide on they are things your daughter has an interest in and don’t make the required token amount too high. If it takes her too long to receive something she will get discouraged and the token system will fail. So at the end of the day, turning in a token for something as small as a sticker will keep the motivation active and want her to continue the next day.
An interesting blog story about Aspergers and motivation -

OCD

Question

How should we react to the "demands" of Aspergers and OCD especially in public? We try to anticipate situations but sometimes there are surprises.

Answer

Living with the demands of Asperger’s Syndrome can be a true test some days. Other days go by smoothly. Adding multiple diagnoses, like OCD or ADHD, can create even more havoc. Within a family’s home, the comfort and routine will produce the best scenario for children with Asperger’s Syndrome.

Taking your child into public situations will sometimes cause a sort of disruption. Usually, children with Asperger’s Syndrome will feel out of balance due to the changes of environment and normal routine. Children with OCD struggle to control their thoughts, actions, and worries. They live with great anxiety. Most families are aware of these issues and do anticipate some problem behaviors. It is best to plan for these changes; however, we are talking about children. Children, with or without Asperger’s Syndrome and OCD, can be quite unpredictable in new situations.

Preparation is your best bet for reducing the possibility of extra demands in public. A well-prepared child with Asperger’s Syndrome and OCD will feel
secure and will be able to function better during the public situation. Here are some ideas that you can use to help with preparation, as well as ideas to help with those surprises.

- Social stories are an excellent tool for parents of children with Asperger’s Syndrome. You can use these stories to teach proper behavior and so many other concepts. Find relevant social stories by searching the Internet and public library, talking to your child’s therapists or teachers, or try writing your own. Short, precise, and applicable details are important. Unfortunately, social stories are not as useful for OCD symptoms. If your child has both Asperger’s Syndrome and OCD, you may not see as much improvement.

- Some teachers and parents successfully use behavior cards in public situations. Laminate picture cards with appropriate commands: stop, wait, quiet, please, and sit, are examples of behavior cards. Make them large enough to be seen, but small enough to fit in your hand. Bind them with a ring clip for easy access. Behavior cards may work well for your child, but be aware that the OCD symptoms are not actual behavioral issues.

- In some situations that are not particularly child-friendly, like long waits with no distractions, you should be prepared to offer a distracter. This can be any portable activity that your child enjoys. An MP3 player with his favorite music, a hand-held video game, an e-book reader, or drawing paper and pencils, are all examples of distracters you can use in many situations. Distracters work well with children of all ages with a variety of diagnoses.
• Programs have been developed to help parents of special needs children with discipline solutions. One such program, 123 Magic, may be beneficial to you. You can find more information at 
http://www.parentmagic.com/parentingsolutions-view.cfm

• Basic discipline is necessary regardless of your child’s diagnosis. Programs such as these are designed for special situations and conditions.

• In many ways Asperger’s Syndrome and OCD have overlapping symptoms. The anxiety and obsessive behaviors are prevalent in both conditions. Because of this, your child’s doctor may suggest treatments like cognitive-behavior therapy or medications, like antidepressants or anti-anxiety drugs, for your child’s symptoms.

People who are unfamiliar with the characteristics and behaviors of children with Asperger’s Syndrome and OCD will not understand your child’s actions or your reactions. They will certainly not understand your lack of reaction when they see what they perceive to be a misbehaving child. Sometimes the truth must be revealed to prevent criticism directed toward you and your child.

Further information on Aspergers and OCD at 
http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=NBAv9piwGGEC&pg=PA124&dq=aspergers+ocd&hl=en&ei=FxMTTu3ROdK98gO_45mwDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CDUQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=false
Organisation

Question

Is it possible to help my son with Aspergers improve his organizational skills?

Answer

Thanks to the treatment and management advances made in the area of Asperger's Syndrome, children with Asperger's Syndrome can expect to live successful, productive lives. Medications, therapies, and school support are proving to add confidence and skills in the lives of these children.

It is common for a child with Asperger's to have problems with organization. These skills normally begin to develop at a very young age. The simple act of sorting beads by color is a beginning organizational skill. As the child grows, these skills begin to advance. Children with Asperger's Syndrome do not make these advances. However, this doesn't mean they cannot learn. This just means that you'll have to make extra efforts to teach these types of skills.

There are several things you can do to improve your son's organizational skills.

Start at home
It seems that organizing your things is a bit different from organizing your brain, but there is a connection. Teaching your child to organize his room, for instance, can lead to more organized thinking. It's important to emphasize organization and not just ‘picking up’. A child can clean his room by shoving all of his stuff in the closet! Yes, it's clean, but can he find both of his shoes?

Maintain a chore schedule. Teach your son to use written ‘to do’ lists and checklists for everything. Use visual schedules if he needs the extra input. Keep your son on a routine. This will help him conquer his weaknesses in the organization department.

If your son doesn't wear a watch, you might consider finding one he likes. Learning to tell time and having a watch convenient will give him a chance to learn to control his schedule. This will assist his efforts to learn to organize himself.

You should also consider medical advice. Occupational therapists are trained to find ways to assist people with organizational skills. The therapist will work with your son and your family to develop a plan especially devised to strengthen your son's skills.

Follow up at school

It is very important to have a good relationship with your son’s school personnel. A strong team makes all the difference. Your son’s occupational therapist at school can use your private therapist's plan as a base, expanding on issues related to educational performance.

Read Brand New Weekly Articles For Parents of Children with Aspergers at www.ParentingAspergers.com/blog
Your son's teachers and therapist can come up with schedules, calendars, and checklists that will give your son increasing control over his daily routine. They can encourage the use of these tools to keep up with assignments, therapy times, and other activities that occur during his school day.

Breaking down jobs or assignments into smaller increments will also help your son handle his daily duties. Shorter work times with lots of small breaks are confidence builders. Visual timers are another useful tool that will show your son how to manage his time. (These timers are good for home, too.)

Further developing your son's organizational skills will help him as a student and in his daily life. The efforts you both make now will enhance his chances for a successful future.

**Online discussion about Aspergers and Organisation** -

Perseverations

Question

How can I ease perseverations?

Answer

Obsessive-compulsive issues, also known as rituals, rigidity, perseverations, rules, or black-and-white thinking, start in the Asperger’s person's difficulty understanding the world around him. This creates anxiety, the underlying cause for the obsessive-compulsive behaviors. You will see anxiety in many different ways, depending on how your child displays it. Some children will show it in obvious ways, such as crying, hiding under furniture, or clinging to you. Others show it by trying to control the situation and bossing people around. Some may hit or throw a tantrum. Some may act silly.

No matter how your child displays his anxiety, you need to recognize that it is there and not assume it is due to some other cause such as attention seeking or just plain misbehavior. Anxiety can occur for the smallest reason. Don’t judge anxiety-producing situations by your own reaction to an event. Your child will be much more sensitive to situations than you will be, and often there will be no logical reason for his anxiety.
Something that you would be anxious about causes no anxiety in your child, while a small event causes him to be quite anxious. When events change, he never knows what is going to come next and he becomes confused and upset, which can lead to some form of inappropriate behavior. Your child's first reaction is to try to reduce or eliminate his anxiety. He must do something, and one of the most effective means is to take all changes, uncertainty, and variability out of the equation. This can be accomplished by obsessions.

If everything is done a certain way, if there is a definite and unbreakable rule for every event, and if everyone does as he wishes, everything will be fine. Anxiety is then diminished or reduced, and no upset, tantrums, or meltdowns occur. Obsession or perseveration has a cognitive part (in the brain) and a behavioral part, and both must be considered. Each child must learn to get "unstuck" or let go of an issue and move on. They also need to learn how to change their thinking so that it doesn't become a problem to begin with.

Realizing that this behavior can serve as a coping mechanism for the child is the first step toward dealing with it. Environmental adjustments can help to alleviate perseverations. Reduce anxiety by providing an environment that is consistent, something they can depend on. For example routines such as set meal times in the home. Change and transitions are difficult for the child with Asperger's. Keep the routine constant and provide visual and auditory reminders for when changes will need to take place.

For some children this may involve using a picture chart of the day's events so that they are aware of the routine.

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These are used in special schools in the UK and known as PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System). The child can then take a symbol off the chart (e.g. a picture of a reading book to symbolize reading time at school) when that activity is completed. Other children just need to be told what the schedule for the day is. For others it can be a combination of both seeing the chart and verbally telling them.

An interesting blog article on Perseverations -

http://www.journeyswithautism.com/2009/03/22/the-fine-art-of-perseveration/
Phobias

Question

How to deal with Aspergers and phobias?

Answer

Phobias are very common occurrences for children with Asperger’s Syndrome. A phobia is a form of extreme anxiety, an irrational fear of something that should not evoke such intense emotion. Common phobias are fear of bugs, small spaces, and crowds. The sight of a bug can cause fear and just the thought of being trapped in a crowded elevator, sheer and utter panic.

Due to the increased risk of anxiety and phobias, children with Asperger’s Syndrome will benefit from learning techniques they can use to push back these fears. You can also help your child with diet changes and other natural options. Sometimes phobias are too intense and call for outside help. Therapies and medications may be needed. Here are several suggestions on possible anxiety management options.

Coping skills

• Self-talk can sometimes be effective. Teach your child that his fear is
irrational by explaining the reasons (i.e., this feeling will pass, the walls are not moving in, etc.) why his fears are not as powerful as they seem.

- Redirection can be used to diffuse the anxiety. Redirect your child by talking or focusing on another activity.
- Teach your child to deep belly breathe during moments of anxiety.

Therapies

- Hypnosis can sometimes be used to remove irrational fears.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy is a commonly used therapy for children with Asperger’s Syndrome. This therapy involves feelings, thoughts, and emotions.

Natural options

- Diet changes may improve the situation. A healthy diet with no caffeine and low in sugar will benefit your child in many ways.
- Vitamins like B vitamins, fish oil, calcium, magnesium, and vitamin C are often used to treat the symptoms of Asperger’s Syndrome, including anxiety.
- Exercise, another healthy option, can improve your child’s outlook, mood, and demeanor.

- Medications
• Anti-psychotics can be used to treat serious phobias and anxiety due to Asperger’s Syndrome.

• Anti-anxiety drugs are used to treat the symptoms of anxiety in children with Asperger’s Syndrome.

• Anti-depressants are also used to treat children with Asperger’s Syndrome. Your child’s doctor can create a medication combination plan that is just right for your child.

Phobias, especially social phobias, can make a seriously negative impact on the life of a child with Asperger’s Syndrome. Children with Asperger's Syndrome can quickly progress from simple depression and stress to anxiety and isolation. By using some of the above treatment options, your child can learn to cope and live his life without the phobias taking complete control.

**Online discussion about Aspergers and phobias -**

http://www.wrongplanet.net/postt22531.html
Aspergers and Puberty

Question

How to deal with Asperger's and puberty?

Answer

Puberty can be a very difficult time for children with Asperger's Syndrome and their families. Since adolescents with Asperger's Syndrome already deal with social awkwardness and resistance to change, a time of life that normally causes struggle will bring on a plethora of fearful and stressful events. It is very important that the parents be prepared to help ease this transition while creating a positive environment.

The physical changes that take place can be scary and exciting for the preteen with Asperger's Syndrome. Prepare your child for these physical changes by talking about them before they happen.

The emotional effects of puberty are often overlooked. Preteens with Asperger's Syndrome are often lagging behind their peers in maturity. Your child may seem too young to be dealing with all these changes. Unfortunately, the changes come and we cannot stop them. Let your child know that it is okay to be sad or angry about these changes that mean he is...
growing up. Eventually, the transition will be complete and he will adjust to the new person he is.

Sometimes these emotions can become quite unstable. If you feel your child is struggling much more than you had anticipated, do not hesitate to consult his physician for suggestions. The physician may suggest therapy techniques or medications to help keep your child’s emotions in check.

Dating and relationships become more important than ever. Unfortunately, these areas call for strong social and communication skills. Both of which are usually lacking in the preteen with Asperger’s Syndrome. Make sure your child gets the social skills training he needs before he crosses over from childhood. Most therapies contain a social skills/communication component. Other options are social situations in your community of which you can take advantage.

Talk to your preteen about the changes that are coming in the near future. Be straightforward, open, and honest, giving your child the information in small pieces and on a level he can understand. Encourage him to ask questions. Be sure to display kindness, hiding any embarrassment you may feel. It is important that your preteen receive a clear message that puberty, dating, and sexuality are all natural and expected subjects for the two of you to be discussing.
Here is one last thought. Children with Asperger’s Syndrome often learn best with a multi-sensory approach. Visual aids, books, videos, and hands-on learning can be used to cement the information. For example, you can watch a video on the physical body changes your preteen can expect. Then you can make visual aids showing those changes and read about any concerns. Finally, you can demonstrate how to cope with some of these changes, like shaving unwanted hair or using deodorant. With an open mind and a plan, you can help your preteen make it through puberty.

thinking really does not match reality!

More on Aspergers and Puberty –

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=--ZN-Tw8z8C&pq=PA19&dq=aspergers+puberty&hl=en&ei=DD0UTr67NMyr8AOSlqD8Bw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CEAQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=aspergers%20puberty&f=false
Rage

Question

My son was just recently diagnosed with Asperger’s at nine years old. We have struggled with his behavior for years, not truly understanding his choices or lack of control over some of them. Now that we have a better understanding of him we can begin to work our way through these struggles. He "rages" a lot at home when he is overwhelmed, which results in him calling us and his brothers names. He is the oldest and his brothers are watching and learning from him. How do we help him without teaching his younger siblings that this behavior is appropriate for them?

Answer

Begin by asking your son about the rages, try to find out what makes him feel angry and identify all the potential triggers. For instance does he find crowds a problem, certain noises or colors?

Create an open atmosphere in which your child can discuss the rages but also point out how they make you and his siblings feel, be specific and explain as thoroughly as you can.

So don’t just say “we hate it when you scream and call us names” but explain more to him. So perhaps you can tell him that “when you call me a horrible
person it makes me feel sad. Do you remember when X called you a name and how you felt. Well that’s how I feel when you call me a horrible person”.

One method that has proved successful for people with Asperger's dealing with rage is the use of a visual cue. This could be a card with a stop sign (like you see on the street) on it. Or it could simply be the action of holding up one of your or his hands (depending on who needs to use this method at the time) palm outwards and saying the word ‘stop.’

For this method to be effective you will need to discuss it with your son and see if he thinks it is a good idea, then you can work out a strategy together for putting it in place. When the card or sign is used, it signals that the situation is about to get out of control and diverts the problem before it gets out of hand. Your son could use it if he recognizes he is starting to feel angry or you could use it if you have recognized the signs. When the sign/symbol is used your son could remove himself to a designated, quiet, safe space of his own until the angry feeling passes.

There are 4 actions that you can take to help your other children in this situation:

1.) Explain - Explain to your other children that the rages are a part of your son's Asperger's and that at times he can't help himself from behaving in that way.
Also explain that they are able to understand these things more easily than their brother and that he needs a bit of extra help from you all in learning how to deal with certain situations.

2.) Explain Some More - When you feel your son is doing his part to control the rages tell his siblings that he is working very hard to control and improve his behavior and they must work hard to not provoke him or react to him in an inflammatory way.

3.) Correct - It is important that your other children see you correcting inappropriate behaviour from your son with Asperger's so they don’t copy the behavior. Then if they ever say to you “well X behaves this way” you can reply “yes and he gets told not to behave that way as well”.

4.) Continuity - Continuity is also important; treat all the children in your household with the same rules no matter what. It should help to stop sibling rivalry and the feelings of unfairness that create animosity between children.

Your son with Asperger’s is likely to do the ‘wrong thing’ on more occasions than the others because of his condition. But if every time an incident occurs the children are told the same thing, everyone will come to understand that the behavior is not acceptable.

Read Brand New Weekly Articles For Parents of Children with Aspergers at www.ParentingAspergers.com/blog
Online Discussion about coping with Rage and Aspergers -

http://www.dailystrength.org/c/Asperger_Syndrome/forum/3390510-rage-and-aspergers
Reasoning Skills

Question

How do you get your newly diagnosed Aspergers teen to use reasoning skills?

Answer

Basic reasoning skills are essential for all of us. We all have basic reasoning skills, to some extent. People on the Autism spectrum may or may not be limited in this area. These skills, cognitive in nature, show us what we know, how we know it, how we store that knowledge internally, and how we find the knowledge when we need it. Poor use of reasoning skills will affect all areas of life for your teen with Asperger's Syndrome.

Reasoning skills also help us form and hold fast to our own opinions and beliefs. Without reasoning skills, we are unable to share the reasons why we believe what we believe, since we cannot be sure what and why we believe in the first place. Encourage your teen to use reasoning skills. Your teen should know that these skills will improve his outlook and his chances of living a successful, independent life.

Many people believe that a person’s reasoning skills are developed during the late elementary or preteen years. However, others believe that there are
things we can do at any age to improve our reasoning skills. Unfortunately, most treatments and therapies that are geared toward kids with Autism are for very young children. While these therapies are effective for older kids with some adjustments, your teen may not be willing to cooperate. Without your teen’s cooperation, you will be wasting your time.

With that said, cognitive-behavioral therapy is another option. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is not exactly used for reasoning skills. It is a therapy that is more focused on feelings and emotions. However, reasoning skills affect all areas and this could be an option that benefits your teen in more than one way. If you are interested in this type of therapy, consult with your teen’s school counselor or his physician to find a therapist. You can also try contacting your local Autism support group for information on this type of therapy and any other possibilities that may help with reasoning skills. Here are a couple of additional options you may consider.

- Your local school special educational consultant is an excellent resource. Set up a meeting with this person to discuss your concerns and find out what the school can do to help meet your teen’s needs.
- You can find logic puzzles, critical thinking workbooks, puzzles, and reading problems that are commonly used to enhance the reasoning skills. There are many choices for all ages, so be sure to locate items that are on your teen’s current level to avoid frustration. Help him understand that it does not matter if the content is younger than he is. The idea is to grow and improve.
With your son’s full participation, you can help him improve his reasoning skills. However, if he is not fully on board, the progress will be slow. Be patient and encouraging throughout this process.

More information on Cognition and Reasoning -

Responsibility (Taking)

Question

My child will not take personal responsibility for her actions; she's now 18 so what can I do?

Answer

Even though your daughter is 18, emotionally she may be anywhere from 12 to 15 years old. She acts irresponsibly because she is functioning at 13 or 14! She will continue to mature as time passes and may catch up by the time she is 25 or so. If your daughter still lives with you, she is not an adult and you still have the responsibility of teaching her how to take responsibility for her actions. Failure to do so could lead to very serious consequences.

Your daughter may assume that because she is 18, she should have all the privileges of adulthood, but she refuses to take on the responsibilities. You must not allow this behavior. You must make it clear to her that she has to earn privileges by taking responsibility for her actions. You must establish limits and expectations that when met will help her move in the direction of independence from her parents.

"Consequential management" is a positive response to challenging or irresponsible behaviour. It gives the young person with Aspergers the opportunity to make informed choices and learn from the consequences.
Consequences exist within our society, and we live with the consequences of our actions on a daily basis. For each of your daughter's irresponsible behaviours, you must set clear expectations (a goal) with consequences and rewards related to each expectation. List them on a chart.

Don't start with a huge list of behaviors, consequences, and rewards. Start with one simple goal so that she learns the process and gradually add more expectations as she becomes more responsible. The first goal might be one that she almost has mastered; this will give her immediate success and get her thinking about the possibilities of compliance. Add each new goal to the chart as she progresses so she can see her progress.

**Six rules provide the basis for successful consequential management:**

• Define your expectations of appropriate behavior, very specifically, for example,

1. "You will return home each evening by 11 p.m." or

2. "You will clean your room each week. Change the sheets and pillowcases on the bed to clean ones. Dust the tops of your bureau, end table, and bookshelves with a cloth and Endust. Pick up all clothes on the floor and put them away or put them in your wash basket. Vacuum the carpet."

• Link consequences to behavior, for example, for #1 above, if she misses her curfew, she will not be allowed to go out in the evening for a week. For #2 above, if she doesn't clean her room completely, you will strip the bed and
leave clean sheets for her to put on it; you will confiscate clothes or other items on the floor for one week; she will not be allowed TV for 3 days.

• Use appropriate language; keep it simple and specific as above examples indicate.

• Allow informed choice: what will happen if she meets the expectation and what will happen when she doesn't? See the statement below and the ones above.

• Be aware of timing. Start with rules she can easily follow to build her confidence. As she masters one expectation, add another.

• Use positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior and negative reinforcement for inappropriate behaviour.

1. For example, if your daughter gets up on time, she might earn money (not too much, but a bit) or a choice of what she wants for breakfast. If she fails to get up on time, she gets no reward. (In that case, breakfast would be your choice and you should choose something she may not be thrilled about eating.)

2. For many young people with Aspergers, earning money is a great motivator and teaches them about the real world. It takes some careful observation and bookkeeping on your part, but it teaches an important lesson: "When we perform up to standards and handle our responsibilities, we earn money." This works best if the young person with Aspergers has no other income. If money is scarce, use play money (scrip) or carnival tickets that can
be saved and used to buy privileges and rewards. You can "fine" your daughter for inappropriate behavior, taking away some of the scrip or tickets if she acts irresponsibly does not meet expectations.

Key Points for Success

• Behavior does not change overnight and it is important to be persistent.

• Family, therapists - everyone needs to apply the consequences uniformly.

• The person should see that the consequences and rewards for his/her behavior are fair. Keep cash or other rewards on hand; don't run out. Once she masters the first expectation, keep the rewards coming for that one, but add another expectation or two.

• Plain language, clear communications, and a non-judgmental attitude are important. State the goals simply: "You must get out of bed by 7 a.m." She makes the choices - good or bad. No reminding her or yelling or scolding when she doesn't meet expectations; just apply the consequences, making a simple statement, such as "Oh, too bad. You didn't get up on time. Well, we're having X for breakfast. Let's eat." When she does meet expectations, say "Great job! You got up on time. You earned 10 cents. Here you go." When she does meet expectations, praise her and make sure she gets the reward immediately.
An interesting blog post on Taking Responsibility and Aspergers -
Routine (Sticking to...)

Question

My granddaughter is 6 years old and has been diagnosed with Asperger's. She was diagnosed just before she was three. With therapy she is doing quite well. Three days a week I get her ready for school and it is a challenge. She knows her routine but frequently refuses to follow it. What can I do to help her to follow her routine?

Answer

Routine is a critical part of success in a child with Asperger's. Providing visual cues (i.e. a list of tasks with pictures that need to be completed) and avoiding a power struggle will help both of you complete the morning routine.

It is important that you sit down with her, talk about this and show her the visual chart/card. For more about using visual schedules visit www.cesa7.k12.wi.us/SPED/autism/structure/str11.htm This shows you schedules used at school and you can just adapt them to the home environment very easily.

Ask her what you can do to keep her on task and also ask her why it is easier on the days when she is with her mom. This may be her reaction to her mom not being there. Once you establish a plan with her, make her aware of the boundaries. Keep a list of tasks with pictures posted where she has easy access to it and when she strays off task, direct her to her schedule.

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I don’t want to suggest this is magic and will eliminate all problems. But you may be reinforcing her off-task behavior by needing to prompt her all the time. By this I mean that she may enjoy being verbally prompted by you, as this is attention of sorts. But by re-directing her to the schedule you can take this attention element away from the situation. It depends on what purpose the behavior is serving.

Is she trying to get your attention or does she simply have difficulty focusing? If difficulty focusing is the problem, then you will need to eliminate any environmental distractions and create a situation where she can succeed. For example the room may be too bright, noisy, too many pictures which are all distractions and high stimulation.

It is likely that your granddaughter would much rather be in control of her behavior and push through her morning routine successfully. In developing your plan, spend a week or two observing her to see when and where things go awry and what the cause may be.

Does something occur that distracts her?

Is she responding to down time in the routine?
Plan for those occasions and eliminate the problem. Finally, reward her and yourself for those mornings that are successful! Choose time that is spent positively with her for a reward versus something that is material in nature. Make sure that your praise is enthusiastic and specific as to what she has actually done well and why.

More on Aspergers and Routine -
http://www.positivearticles.com/Article/Establishing-routine-for-your-Aspergers-child/17568
School Refusal

Question

I have an 11 year old girl who is terrified to go to school with teenagers. She is scared of the yelling, cussing, fist fights, and all the talk that goes along with being a teenager. She still plays with dolls and likes cartoon web sites. (She never goes to talk sites.) She is intelligent, but cannot cope with the social side of life, including making friends – help!

Answer

Here is a good website for those who are scared of school:

http://www.scared-of-school.tk/  Help your daughter log on to this site. Eleven year olds who still enjoy toys and cartoons are perfectly normal, whether they have Asperger’s Syndrome or not! She’s not ready to be a teenager yet and that’s good!

In the United Kingdom, it is the Local Educational Authority (LEA) that must meet your child’s Special Educational Needs. They are covered by a Code of Practice and you as a parent have considerable rights as to what you can expect from schools and the LEA. Copies of the code of practice are available from the DfEE. Your child may need a Statement of Educational Needs. This will determine your child’s needs, level of support your child will need in school, and list what the school must do to accommodate her.
Request an assessment and Statement now, under the Education Act of 1996, if you haven’t already. If you have one, ask for a meeting to modify it to address the school phobia your child is experiencing.

The LEA will have various specialists compile reports about your child. Specialists include: her doctor, Health Visitor, Speech and Language Therapists, nursery staff, Educational Psychologists and counsellors, teachers, and any others who have knowledge of your child’s difficulties. You will be asked if you wish to write a report yourself. Do write one and include as much information as possible. You can agree or disagree with the reports and suggestions. You can appeal to a Special Needs’ Tribunal, if the help for your child does not seem appropriate or effective.

School phobia is an anxiety disorder of childhood and adolescence, characterised by an intense fear of going to school. Problems caused by school phobia include: shyness, depression, over-sensitivity, panic/anxiety attacks, nausea, lack of self-confidence, and agoraphobia (fear of going outside the home).

Children who are school phobic may be afraid of many things or of nothing in particular. In some cases the reason is that they are being bullied, or can’t handle the workload, have no friends, or can’t handle the unexpectedness of the school routine. In some cases, the phobia of school comes out of nowhere, making it more difficult to explain. School phobia is an anxiety disorder.
School phobia often occurs after a long absence from school. School phobics feel they may be behind in work and panic about going back. Many schools assume there is a problem at home and that the cause of the phobia lies there. School phobia may be a manifestation of Separation Anxiety, the fear of leaving parents. But the anxiety is usually wrongly attributed to the home. However, the school may not understand its role in the problem. So what do you do?

You will have to communicate with the school. Ask for a meeting with the headmaster, teachers, and the people listed above. Think about what you want to achieve from the meeting; what can they do to make it easier for your child? Plan what you're going to say and do not just say what they want to hear. If you've got an idea of what is causing the school phobia whether it's bullying, the workload, or students swearing, cussing, and fighting, then address the problems at the meeting. Changes can be made.

Suggestions

- Students can be educated about their behaviour and how it affects others. Stricter discipline can be implemented to eliminate fighting and cussing.
- The school can ask another student to function as a mentor to help your child understand and deal with frightening situations.
• Your child can be assigned a “safe” room in which to take refuge when she is scared. A teacher or counsellor should be available to reassure her.

• Consider a placement into special education or even a change in schools if the problem doesn’t get solved at her current school.

• She can join school clubs or participate in sports to meet friends.

• She should avoid negative self talk such as, "I’m so scared. They’re going to hurt me."

• Invite one of your daughter’s acquaintances over to your home to help her make friends. Perhaps a girl who is a year or so younger will be more “in tune” with your daughter’s interests.

• Perhaps you can help with a school activity to make it less traumatic for your daughter to attend, or even become one of the sponsors (leaders) of a girls’ group, such as Girl Guides (Girl Scouts).

• See if you can get your daughter interested in High School Musical or Hannah Montana (or the latest “thing”), so that she has something to discuss with other girls.

• Get counselling for your daughter.

• Get her schedule modified to avoid exposure to large groups of students.

• Help your daughter role-play difficult situations to practice how she will respond. As she gets older, it will become easier for her.

The school must legally provide an appropriate educational environment for your daughter. You must be her advocate in insisting that they do so.
More on Aspergers and School Refusal -

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=RTrLg1YicwQC&pg=PT84&dq=aspergers+school+refusal&hl=en&ei=GkYUTpqSCoOp8AOmrYz8Bw&sa=X&oie=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CDsQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q&f=false
Self harm

Question

My son self-mutilates and carries out other destructive behaviors and I just don't know where to turn.

Answer

Children with autism, and sometimes those with Asperger's Syndrome, may engage in self-injury, also known as self-harm. These actions result in physical injury to the child's own body. Self-injury behavior includes:

• hitting oneself with hands or other body parts or toys
• head-banging
• biting oneself
• picking at the skin
• scratching or rubbing oneself repeatedly.

The cause of self-injury is unknown, but it may be caused by a chemical imbalance, sinus problems, headaches, attention-seeking, ear infections, frustration, seeking sensory stimulation/input, sound sensitivity, or to avoid a task. There are many different ways to treat this kind of behavior.
Your son needs an individual assessment to try to determine the cause and motivations for his self-injury. Call it to the attention of the child's doctor, psychologist, and any other professional who works with your child. If a medical problem is the cause, it can be treated. If the child is seeking sensory stimulation, you may be able to find a replacement behavior that will meet this need in a more appropriate way. For example, a child who is upset by loud noise, may feel comfortable using ear plugs.

If the self-injury is caused by a wish to get attention, tactical ignoring may stop the behavior. In this case, the parent has to ignore the self-injury and not give the child any attention until the child asks for it appropriately. The child must be taught to do this. Of course, this is not a good tactic if the child is injuring himself badly.

Another way to stop self-injury is to give the child an acceptable way to behave, such as diverting him by giving him something constructive to do.

Some children who self-injure will need medication. If the problem is a chemical imbalance, then treating the child with appropriate medication may solve the problem. Naltrexone is a medication that is often used as it stops the release of serotonin-like chemicals in the brain. When serotonin chemicals are no longer released as a result of self-injury, the child does not get the "good" feelings he was experiencing by hurting himself and he stops. There are other medications that may help also. Recent research indicates that SSRIs (serotonin reuptake inhibitors) help treat many repetitive behaviors.
including self-injury, impulsivity, and aggression. So you could to your child's doctor about this possibility.

Sensory issues

Question

A lot of AS children have sensory issues. They vary from mild to severe. In everything that we read or are told, sensory issues are mentioned, but how to deal with them is 'left out'. What are ways to handle the clothing, food, textures, and light/sound problems? I'm sure part of it is perception and part is programming, but it is difficult to decipher which. For instance, if I were to give my child a freshly washed BRAND NEW shirt and I neglected to remove the tag, once he has felt that tag on his neck, there is nothing I can do to get him to wear it, even after removing and rewashing the shirt. It seems his perception of the article of clothing relates to discomfort, even if he is aware the tag is gone. How should we handle this?

Answer

People with Asperger's Syndrome usually have difficulties with sensory issues. All of the senses, sight, taste, touch, smell and hearing, can be affected. Bright lights, loud noises, smells, food and clothing textures can set off behaviours in children that are hard to understand. In a way, the child has an overly developed sensory system and what seems normal to others is magnified for the child to degrees that we cannot even imagine. The degree of magnification varies from one child to another. Some children are under-reactive to sensory input. The question that is most common is, "Is the child's..."
response to a sensation a sensory reaction or is it a learned behavior, driven by rigidity, anxiety, and past experience?” Either way, you have the options of avoiding sensory input that causes problems and helping the child become less sensitive to sensory input.

To an Asperger’s sufferer, colors can have texture and sound. To an Asperger’s child, patterns and clothing can have a taste. Sound can fill their consciousness to the point where they feel about to be crushed. Lights or touches can drive them to distraction. Certain common foods may feel or taste repulsive. When they feel overwhelmed, they engage in compulsive, chaotic, or oppositional behaviour and are often diagnosed as Obsessive Compulsive or suffering from Attention Deficit or Oppositional Defiance Disorder.

Here are some suggestions on how to handle sensory problems:

1. Never rush to your Asperger’s child and give him a hug or kiss.
Sometimes touches feel painful or threatening to him. If you want to hug or kiss him, tell him exactly what you are going to do. If he says “No,” don’t do it!

2. Take the tags out of his clothes and wash them several times before he wears them. Buy clothes a bit large so that your child won’t have to try them on before wearing. Then you can remove the tags without worrying about having to return them. If certain clothes are acceptable to him, buy duplicates. Buy soft fabrics, such as sweatshirt and T-shirt fabric and flannel.

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Avoid wool. Hand-me-downs are often ideal because they are soft and, if the item is refused, you haven’t wasted any money on it!

3. Warn his teacher that, at school, he may try to avoid the hardness of the chair or the rush of air from the heater or air conditioner. He may hit a child who bumps into him. Provide a chair cushion and have the teacher move him away from air vents. Role play being bumped with the child so that he can learn an acceptable response.

4. Let him wear sunglasses and hats to block out light. Play in the shade outside.

5. Teach him to close his eyes when lights bother him.

6. For sound sensitivity, let him wear ear plugs or headphones to block out sounds.

7. Natural light (sunlight) is best, but soft indoor light is often tolerated.

8. Prepare a variety of healthy foods and let him choose what he wants to eat.

   Obviously, you won’t prepare junk food or lots of sweets.

9. Make sure the child has a place in the home that is dim, quiet, clean, and comfortable, where he can retreat when his senses overwhelm him.

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10. Don’t demand that the child open a gift, dig in the sand, or do things that he obviously doesn’t want to do, for whatever reason. When you must insist on an activity, try to make it easier for the child using some of these tips.

11. Don’t take the child places he can’t handle – malls, etc.

12. Provide a good role model. Stay calm, kind, keep your voice low, and so forth. Model how to handle situations that are uncomfortable.

13. Use fragrance free soaps, detergents, cleaners, and cosmetics. Avoid wearing perfumes. Avoid using home deodorizing sprays or candles of any kind.

14. Change your home décor as little as possible.

15. Keep a log of sensory input that bothers him. Brainstorm ways of reducing his exposure to it or making it more acceptable to him. List ways of avoiding problems (such as washing new clothes).

Some children benefit from Sensory Integration Training. You can find a local program, see if it’s offered at school, or do it at home. During this training, the child is slowly exposed to various experiences that involve all the senses, in order to desensitize his responses. Vestibular-proprioceptive activities may include swinging, jumping on a trampoline, bike riding, and dancing. Tactile
activities might be body brushing, rolling on an exercise ball, or playing with clay. Sound training involves listening to music and other sounds. Irlen lenses can help with light sensitivity. Small tastes of new foods may help.

Informative short video on Aspergers and Sensory Issues (also worth reading the comments section below the video too) -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxERxbu2ZDI
Sexualised Behavior

Question

How does a family deal with Asperger’s in a 13 year old child when it results in masturbation and fighting with siblings?

Answer

While some parents get concerned that their children show no interest in sexual matters, others have to deal with behaviors like:

1.) Touching private parts of own in public.

2.) Stripping in public.

3.) Masturbating in public.

4.) Touching others inappropriately.

5.) Staring at others inappropriately

6.) Talking about inappropriate subjects.
Talking about sex, especially the sexuality of our children makes us feel uncomfortable. Even though we all wish that our children have safe and fulfilling sexual lives at the appropriate ages. We hope the issue just gets resolved by itself, or at least somebody else takes the responsibility of resolving it. This is just as true for non-Asperger's children as it is for children with Asperger's.

In particular you may find yourself lost trying to imagine your child, who has significant problems carrying a simple conversation, building relationships that may lead to healthy sexuality. At times we all may find it comforting to believe that our children don’t have sexual needs and feelings, and avoid bringing up the subject in any shape or form. We may feel uneasy about sex education, believing that ignorance will prevent sexual activity.

The key is making up your mind that you will address the issue, rather than avoid it. Set up a time with your child to talk about sexuality, rather than making a few comments about it when the issue is hot, right after an incident, when everybody feels quite emotional about what just has happened. Ask direct questions about what your child knows about sex. Ask about his desires and worries. Tell him what you think should be his first step.

After inquiring and talking about the normal behavior, set realistic but firm limits about inappropriate behavior. Seeing your level of comfort around the issue, your child will get the message that it is OK to have sexual feelings and it is OK to talk about them. Getting this message alone will bring the tension

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around sexuality a few notches down. If this approach fails, please do not be shy about asking for help. Other parents with adolescent children would be a good starting point. Your child’s school may also be able to help.

Finally, you may inquire about professional help from someone like a Clinical Psychologist. This should provide: an individualized sexuality assessment and also sex education based on your child’s individual needs. The plan should utilize behavioral modification techniques to advise against inappropriate sexual behavior and encourage appropriate sexual behavior.

You could also try books dealing specifically with this subject such as “Taking Care of Myself: A Hygiene, Puberty and Personal Curriculum for Young People with Autism” by Mary Wrobel.

An interesting article on Aspergers and Sexual Behavior -

http://www.livestrong.com/article/5861-should-sexual-behavior-aspergers-syndrome/
Sleeping

Question

I have a 17 year old son who has a lot of trouble going to sleep. Can you recommend ways for him to fall asleep? We have tried calm music, aromatherapy, talking, biofeedback, and nothing works. He gets himself into an obsessive state and says “I can't fall asleep.” Can you offer any suggestions? He already sees a therapist and the therapist says that it is more than just thinking about falling asleep. He is having a tough time growing up and transitioning to adulthood. He has been diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Asperger's Syndrome. He takes Seroquel to sleep and also some Klonopin. However, there are nights that he just gets up and down constantly. I have tried covers, blankets, making tents, etc. Eventually he does go to sleep. It is just agonizing to go through. Have you any ideas?

Answer

A new study from the University La Sapienza in Italy shows children with Asperger's Syndrome have more sleep problems than average children. Dr. Oliviero Bruni, the researcher, found that children with Asperger's have a high incidence of sleep disorders and other problems, such as getting to sleep and restlessness, as well as daytime sleepiness. The study, published in the journal SLEEP, November 1, 2007, states that 50% of the children with AS
didn’t want to go to bed, 75% needed a light or television in the bedroom, 87% had difficulty getting to sleep, and 75% fell asleep sweating. Also, 87% had difficulty waking up in the morning felt sleepy during the day.

There are medications other than Seroquel or Klonopin that may help your son. Melatonin has had some good results, as have selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors. Ask your son’s doctor to review the meds and consider others for your son’s ODD.

Children and teenagers who spend two or three hours a day engaging in exercise have an easier time going to sleep because they are more tired physically. The negative ions given off by fresh air and moving water are good for children and function as anti-depressants. Getting enough sunshine is important; people who don’t get enough sunshine may suffer from "seasonal affective disorder," a type of depression. People who get sun and exercise are less depressed and healthier and often sleep better.

It’s also important for your son to have time for mental relaxation during the day, to reflect, absorb new ideas, synthesize new information, resolve problems, and explore solutions, so that his mind is ready for sleep at bedtime. If his mind tries to compress all these mental activities into the minutes before he goes to sleep, it will struggle to stay awake until it finishes. So, “downtime” during the day is very important.
Create a restful bedroom, keep a regular schedule, and eliminate noise and sensory distractions. If your son cannot get to sleep, suggest that he read quietly in bed for a while. Resting quietly will help calm and refresh his body, even if he can't sleep.

Video on Aspergers and Sleeping (also look for more details in the comments section on the video page) -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNoI4qpkpq8
Social Gatherings

Question

How do we help a boy deal with family gatherings?

Answer

Asperger's children are very easily overwhelmed by the presence of people, overloaded by sensory input, and become over stimulated quickly. Remember, the crowds and noise of family gatherings create a lot of stress for Asperger's children, who can't articulate and handle these situations. Consequently, family gatherings can become nightmares for them and their parents!

Take, for example, the Christmas and Hanukkah holidays. The Asperger’s child may obsess over the Christmas tree lights or may retreat to a corner, trying to get away from the lights, smells of cooking, and loud chatter of relatives. Relatives who are strangers may frighten him by getting too close, “Give Auntie Jane a kiss, honey.” The textures of wrapping paper and ribbons may feel strange and uncomfortable. If pressured to join in by opening gifts, singing carols, or eating unusual foods, the child may have a meltdown. Even at a simpler family gathering, such as a Sunday dinner, the Asperger’s child faces many sights, sounds, smells, and expectations that make him uncomfortable and anxious. So, then, how can you help him?

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The first thing to remember is that, in many situations, the family must be flexible, as the Asperger’s child cannot be. One of the main traits of the Syndrome is inflexibility. By expecting the child to “deal with family gatherings,” you may be setting a very unrealistic expectation. However, that does not mean that there are no strategies that might help. Here are some:

1. Long before the family gathering, introduce your Asperger’s child to each relative one-on-one. Have the relative spend a short amount of time in your home, making no demands on the child, other than greeting the child and saying good-bye when leaving. Each relative should visit several times before the gathering.

2. In between visits, remind your child about the relative, saying things like, “Remember when Aunt Jane came to visit. She really liked the shirt you wore.” This gets the child used to hearing about each relative. Gradually, expand the scenarios, talking about where Aunt Jane lives, who she lives with, her hobbies, how nice she is, etc.

3. Have some small gatherings in which only two or three relatives visit and keep them very short. Make sure your child understands it is O.K. to play in his room or be alone if he wants to be. Put no pressure on him to eat with the family or participate in any activity unless he wants to.
4. Explain to family members what Asperger’s Syndrome is and how it affects your child. Make it clear to each one how they should approach (or not approach) your child. Prepare them for tantrums or other behavior your child might exhibit. Explain that it will be helpful if they speak softly, remain calm, and don’t wear perfume. Explain that you will handle any difficulties and they should not interfere or give advice. (Yes, you can tell them these things. If you don’t, they’ll create a more difficult situation for everyone.)

5. Use social stories to prepare your child for family gatherings, discussing who will attend, what activities will take place, what food will be served, and so forth.

6. Sing or whisper to your child to get his attention and keep him focused.

7. Structure activities carefully and limit choices strictly. You may want to provide favourite toys, books, or videos for your child to use during the gathering or during car rides.

8. Keep a large calendar with family gatherings marked on it, as well as other activities that are planned.

9. Be sure your child gets plenty of sleep and eats at least a small meal before the gathering.
10. Change your home as little as possible. It helps to put holiday decorations in one room only, one that can be closed off from view.

11. Remind your child that not everyone will bring him a gift for Christmas, Hanukkah, or his birthday, and that is O.K. Help your child role-play saying “Thank you.” Help your child role-play what to say if he gets a gift he doesn’t like! Do not let gift opening become a free-for-all. Have each person open a gift in turn.

12. Role-play gatherings with your child to help him prepare things to say (and not say!)

13. No matter what you do, visiting others’ homes for gatherings will be difficult. It may be best to avoid this. If you do visit, role-play ahead of time. Limit the amount of time you visit. Bring familiar toys and books for your child. Bring his own food if he is a picky eater. Take him into a bedroom alone with you if things get stressful for him. Consider getting a good babysitter, whom he’s used to, to stay with him while you go visiting.

Social Skills

Question

How do I help my son with Aspergers in his social skills? He needs to interact with other kids and deal with people in the near future once he starts working.

Answer

Even though there are several areas of weakness caused by Asperger's, social skills problems are probably the most important. Good social skills mean more than friendships and peer relationships. Social skills are necessary for interaction on the job, dating, and dealing with out people in all aspects of life. Your son can find help with social skills in many different places.

Help at school

When there is no Asperger's, social skills are taught naturally in the classroom. However, children with Asperger's Syndrome fail to grasp the concept in this manner. Social skills must be taught systematically with much practice. Speech therapists in the schools are able to teach social skills along with other types of communication skills. This therapy may or may not involve a group of kids and will mainly focus on education related issues.

Help at home
You are a vital player in your son with Asperger's social skills therapy. The skills that are taught at school or in private therapy must be practiced at home. In addition, you should practice all forms of therapy at home and encourage your son to complete therapy homework whenever it is given.

Help in private therapy

For children with Asperger's, social skills can be taught through private therapy. Private therapists are usually associated with a hospital or medical group in your area. These therapists focus on all of a person's weaknesses where school therapists can only work on education related weaknesses.

Help in autism support groups

Autism support groups can also help children with Asperger's. Social skills groups may be available within the support group's membership. Check with the support group owner or leader for information on social skills groups or classes for your son. Even if your group does not have social skills classes, the members can supply information on other resources in your community.

Help in focused interest with clubs and outings

Intense special interests are a part of life with Asperger's. Social skills can be learned through these special interests. Find clubs or community groups that share a common interest with your son. These clubs will supply opportunities for your son to practice his social skills in an environment that feels comfortable to him. Club outings will allow further practice and a bit of independence.

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With some planning on your part, and hard work on the part of your son with Asperger’s, social skills can be learned and practiced on a daily basis. It may not come natural, but it is possible for people with Asperger's Syndrome to discover the basic ability of socialization.

Video about a new I phone App to help develop Social Skills -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zRdu2avdHg
Socially Acceptable Behavior

Question

I have a ten-year-old boy with Asperger's Syndrome who is high functioning. We are consistent with making him aware of what is socially unacceptable and why. It seems to go in one ear and out the other though. For instance, at meal time we always tell him to eat with his mouth closed. He will do as we say for 20 seconds and then he’s right back to chewing with his mouth open. We have sent him to eat in the other room, or we take away dessert if he continues after the fourth prompt. We have had no success for the past 2 years! Do you have any ideas or do you think that it’s something he can’t help?

Answer

This can be a “Catch-22” situation because, even though you want your son’s behavior to change in a positive manner, it might become more resistant or rigid if he is confronted or forced to behave in a manner that he finds disagreeable. This can become a long-term power struggle that can lead to your frustration and his feelings of failure.

In this case, giving your son rewards might have better results than imposing punishment. One possible solution would be “fun money” for your son. You can make or purchase “fun” (fake) money for your son to use when he behaves in a socially acceptable manner. The money can be spent for privileges, such as time spent with a video game, or other activities he
enjoys. This money can be made from ordinary paper, or it can be purchased from the Lakeshore Company at www.lakeshorelearning.com Type in the words “Paper Money” when you are on this website. If your son behaves in an unacceptable manner, you can impose a financial penalty, and your son has to give a portion of the money back to you. However, if he has to give too much back, he might never earn the reward, so reserve the “fines” for very serious transgressions of the rules.

An effective economic-reward system is based on consistency in enforcing it and keeping the list of rewards/penalties attainable and short. Start this system with just one goal to earn reward and increase the goals as he gets a feel for how it works. Try using one standard-size piece of paper and list the rewards on the left-hand side and the penalties on the right-hand side. Your son will be able to comprehend this list without it overwhelming him. This way, when he is rewarded or punished, he will know that there are limits being set and he has a degree of control over how much he will receive or forfeit. Your son will feel a sense of empowerment with this system, and it will allow him to make choices; he will learn from both.

A structured reward system works well with Asperger’s children because they do extremely well with structure, consistency, and clarity. When there is no structure, the Asperger’s child feels that chaos is controlling his life. A reward system maintains structure for your son, and it eliminates chaos from his life.

Structure, consistency, and clarity will give your son a sense of mastery over his environment. Whether you incorporate the solution proposed above or one that you obtain elsewhere, you will be integrating predictability into your

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son’s life, and this leads to his being able to rely upon you as being supportive and fair in his upbringing. Children without Asperger’s Syndrome and within your son’s age range are coping with the beginning of adolescence. Children like your son are coping with the same thing, except they find that they have to deal with the Asperger’s diagnosis in addition to everything else.

You need to make sure that the consistency that we stress here is maintained for your son’s benefit. Do not let your feelings and emotions take precedence because of the stress that accompanies any child-discipline procedure. Stay calm and let him choose to earn reward or pay fines. Also, be willing and available to discuss discipline with your son; it’s important regardless of any diagnosis that your son has. Above all, be truthful and sincere; your son will know that you love him and care about his well being.

Video on Social Behavior and Aspergers -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycujHKSlrE
Split Personality

Question

Is it common for a child with Asperger’s to have a split personality? My son is a really good kid at school, but then a complete monster at home. Is this normal?

Answer

Asperger’s Syndrome is known to manifest itself differently with different children. Also, children with Asperger’s Syndrome may react differently to various situations depending on their individual personalities. Your child may feel more comfortable with the familiar surroundings at home, and feel freer to act out more at home than in public, where he is surrounded by strangers and in a less familiar environment. The stress of school may be relieved by a “meltdown” or other difficult behaviour at home. This is a common occurrence.

Dr. Tony Attwood, a clinical psychologist, is a world renowned expert on Asperger’s Syndrome. Here is what he says about split personality and Asperger’s. “Quite a few children with Asperger’s Syndrome are Dr. Jeckylls and Mr. Hydes. They are saints at school, but they soak up the anguish, then squeeze it out on their brothers and sisters when they get home. We do not know why this happens…” This quote may be found at: http://www.awares.org/pkgs_files/librarydoc_134.doc

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Asperger’s is treated in two ways, and both of them help manage the anxiety that accompanies this illness. The first is cognitive psychology, and the second is prescription medication. The first thing you need to do in order to help your son is to find a psychiatrist or psychologist who specializes in Asperger’s Syndrome. This specialist will be able to help your son. He or she will help you and your son discover the reasons behind his behavioral changes.

In addition, a specialist will help you do two things:

1. Modify the situation or the environment in which he lives to reduce difficult behaviour;
2. Create interventions for handling your son’s anxiety.

Please don’t be intimidated. Changes don’t have to be complex or unmanageable. The changes you need to make might just involve changing lighting to a lower level, adjusting sound levels in your home, or creating a new schedule.

If initial interventions do not help, a psychiatrist can prescribe medications which will provide your son with the help he needs. It’s important to note that psychotropic (mood-altering) drugs like Zoloft or Prozac can help children, but they can also cause serious problems for children. If the psychiatrist prescribes medication, ask about dosage levels and, more importantly, side effects. Just about all drugs have side effects, and it’s important for you to know about them so you know what to expect. You know your son better than anyone else; ask yourself if he can handle side effects like nausea,

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hypersensitivity, or prolonged sleepiness. These are all possible, depending on the medication prescribed.

You can obtain additional information about this subject in the book _A Parent's Guide to Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism: How to Meet the Challenges and Help Your Child Thrive_ by Sally Ozonoff, Geraldine Dawson, and James McPartla.

This book was written to help parents of children with Asperger's Syndrome or High-Functioning Autism (AS/HFA). The book contains common terms and strategies for by AS/HFA. You can use this book as a reference during your child's developmental years. The book advocates capitalizing on your son's strengths and the challenges he will face on a daily basis. One of the highlights of this book is that it will help you to distinguish between your son's adolescent issues and the effects of autism/Asperger's.

Stimming

Question

Why do children with Asperger’s display self-stimulation behaviors, such as humming, rubbing body and flapping arms, etc?

Answer

According to people with Asperger’s Syndrome their disability is directly linked to their senses and their sensory processing. Meaning how they see, hear, smell, feel and taste the world. This means that these behaviors are often used to block out their emotions or response to pain. Also these behaviors may occur in an environment which is ‘over stimulating’. This could mean possibly a place that is too loud and crowded (e.g. a busy shopping mall).

If you see this happening to your child it is a good idea to look for the ‘triggers’ and either remove the triggers or your child from the situation where possible. It would also help your child if you can prepare them for times when you know they may be affected by these events.

Without wanting to get all technical and scientific; there also physical things that happen in your child’s brain when he displays such behaviors.

Repetitious activity (i.e. behavior that is repeated over and over again) such as rocking, flapping or pacing, results in the release of Endorphins through the
system. Endorphins are chemicals that are released by the brain – you have probably heard about them as they are what are released into your body to give you that “feel good” factor when you take physical exercise (such as running). Endorphins also reduce the sensation of pain and have the ability to block pain. In other words, when endorphins are present, the amount of sensory reaction is reduced or stopped completely.

Children with Asperger’s Syndrome have the ability to on purpose, but without knowing, overload their sensory system in order to shut it down completely i.e. by rocking, flapping or pacing etc. These behaviors are used to block out direct over stimulation from their environment, their emotions (happy, fearful, or excited) and their response to pain. So for example if a child finds the TV too loud, the light too bright, is feeling excited or is hurt then they may start rocking to block out the powerful sensory overload that is going on. These repetitive behaviors can also serve to calm an Asperger’s child, if their use is monitored rather than unlimited.

A video from an 8 year old on his experiences of stimming -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxJCBN7NTDQ
Street Wise

Question

My 21 year old is staying out all night and not telling us where he has been. I am worried as he is not really “street wise” and probably at big risk.

Answer

Those with Asperger’s have a lot of difficulty recognizing when someone is lying to them, using them for their own purposes, or befriending them in order to get them involved in inappropriate activities. Many Asperger’s teens and adults are surprised that someone would even try to take advantage of them. While they understand if something is true or false, they cannot understand why someone would use the truth to create lies, say one thing but mean something else, or believe something that is not true.

The slow or confused processing of emotions many Aspies experience can impede awareness of dangerous situations and stop rational thought. The emotional warning signs that are meant to protect them from difficult or harmful situations may malfunction, or work so slowly that they lose effectiveness. This means that Aspies are less prepared to defend themselves verbally or physically in an argument or conflict or say “No” to inappropriate activities. Consequently, your son, even though he is an adult, may fall victim to exploitation or worse through no fault of his own.

Even though he is an adult, you must still try to protect your socially naïve son as he is not ready for the same amount of freedom as other adults.
Does he have a trustworthy friend or relative (a cousin, perhaps) who could help him by going out with him and keeping him out of trouble?

This person can try to help him understand that many people act friendly, but may want to get him involved in foolish or dangerous activities. Also, this person could help him get involved in clubs or groups in which he will meet responsible friends.

Counselling is definitely called for in this situation. You and a counsellor may be able to convince your son to tell you what is going on when he is outside the home. Also, he needs to tell you when “friends” want him to do something wrong or dangerous. Convince him that by doing so he is doing the right thing, obeying the law, and keeping himself and others safe.

It is probably a good idea to put your name on all his bank accounts so that both of you must agree before he can access his money.

Sit down with your son and have a long talk about what he shouldn’t do when he is with friends, including inappropriate sexual activity, criminal activity, take drugs, drink, drive after drinking, and so forth. Make it very clear to him the negative consequences of doing each of these things, in very specific terms. Make it clear that he must not engage in these activities even to gain the friendship of others.

One of the good things for young people with Aspergers in this situation is that they can be very “black and white” in sticking to rules. So if you can emphasise some of the laws around certain behaviors e.g. petty crime, certain sexual behaviours, use of alcohol/drugs etc. you have a much better

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chance of compliance than with non-Aspie teens. In such situations quite rigid thinking can be a good thing if it helps to keep your son on the “straight and narrow”.

You should also consider the possibility of a group home or assisted living situation for your son to help him learn to become independent and act responsibly.

A blog post on emotional vulnerability at -

Stubbornness

Question

My son is so stubborn that we often end up in a battle of wills. How can I stop this happening?

Answer

The "stubbornness" that you observe as part of your son's personality is a common characteristic of Asperger's Syndrome. When you try to modify or change the behavior of someone with Asperger's, you must consider what is called the "Theory of Mind" impairment. This (sometimes called mindblindness) is when a person with Asperger's lacks the ability to read and understand other people's thoughts and feelings and react to them. As you know, when someone cannot do this well, it impacts their interactions with others in numerous ways. In your situation, it results in your son fighting with you over all kinds of things; he wants his way and he cannot comprehend your emotions, intentions, and motivations. Since he does not understand how his impairment affects his behavior and reactions, he does not have any desire to please you and does not feel bad about not wanting to please you. A battle of wills is a "no win" situation for you. This is due to mindblindness, not just stubbornness.
Your first step should be to communicate with him at his emotional/social age 
(which is probably 3 to 5 years less than his actual age), rather than at his 
language level, which is probably appropriate for his age. So, think of him as 
being about 4 years younger than he really is. How would a child of that age 
act? How would a child of that age feel? How much could a child of that age 
understand about what you are saying? Look at the situation through his 
eyes, but take into consideration his social immaturity.

Then, decide what you want to achieve when you and your son disagree. In 
order to change his behavior, you will have to point out and emphasise the 
effects his behavior has on other people and himself. It won't be obvious to 
him. If he is to change, you must convince him that it is in his best interest to 
change. Warn him of negative consequences if he refuses to change. Let 
him experience the negative consequences of his actions, as long as he is not 
in any danger of harm. Even that however, may not change his behavior.

It may help to focus on the positive. For example, if your son refuses to do 
homework, instead of scolding him or punishing him, try offering him a reward 
or special privilege if he finishes it. Then, if he does the work, combine the 
reward with specific praise, "You should be very proud of yourself for getting 
your homework done today. Here is your reward."

Talk to a counsellor about the problems you are having with your son. An 
objective opinion may help.

Keep a record of his daily behavior. It might help you see what triggers his 
stubbornness. Then you can work out a plan for avoiding or handling the
situations that trigger the battles between the two of you. Try to pick your battles wisely. If something isn't very important, don't fight over it.

Establish a daily schedule of tasks that must be done and when. Make sure that each task has a small reward attached to it. Keep track of what he accomplishes and reward him appropriately. Couple the rewards with praise.

If possible, involve a male role model in his life. Many boys with Asperger's are more cooperative with men than with women. They want to be like their male role models, so if your son has a father, grandfather, uncle, or cousin, perhaps they can help to persuade your son to do or not do certain things, using arguments such as, "Let's go get our hair cut. Men go to the barber. I'll go with you."

An article on Stubborn Behavior at
http://douglasvillega.ourlittle.net/www.ourdouglasville.net/oppositionalc
hild
**Suicide**

**Question**

What do I say to my son when he says that he hates himself and wants to kill himself?

**Answer**

An increased risk of suicide is observed in children with Asperger's, with the risk rising in proportion to the number and severity of other diagnoses, such as OCD. Asperger's is probably undiagnosed in many suicide cases because a lack of awareness of the condition's existence and the unreliable tools used to identify it. So, people with Asperger's who commit suicide are probably reported as having other or undiagnosed psychiatric problems. In cases of unexpected suicide, Asperger's is a strong possibility.

Parents and teachers need to keep a watchful eye on teenagers who have Asperger's Syndrome. Know the warning signs and learn about the three D's: drugs, depression and dangerous activity as possible clues to suicidal thoughts.

Preliminary research studies suggest that low levels of the serotonin metabolite 5-HIAA may be associated with violent suicide attempts. Children
as young as seven with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) may threaten and even attempt suicide.

A big factor in attempted suicide is depression. Have your son checked immediately for depression. Medication may be indicated and will help him reduce thoughts of suicide.

Inform all family members and teachers about your son's depression and the depth of it, hire a therapist, and get counselling for your son to deal with his emotional and social problems. If you feel he is close to a suicide attempt, call his therapist immediately for help. Learn how to contact the therapist at all hours - at the office or at home.

Do not wait and do not ignore suicidal thoughts, feelings, or urges. Learn the fastest way to reach an emergency room or be admitted to a hospital. Get the phone numbers to Community Mental Health Centers and a local Suicide Prevention Service.

Talk with your son and try to determine why he wants to commit suicide. Then, deal with the issues he brings up. He should receive ongoing counseling. Meet with his teachers to discuss how he is doing in school and what can be done to help him. Request interventions to help him. If he has not been diagnosed with an academic diagnosis of Asperger's, request testing immediately. Then, he will be eligible for many interventions. Educate yourself on how to help him at home.

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Establish a "take a break" room both at school and at home for him to use when stress builds. He can go there for peace and quiet until he feels calm.

Your goal is to lower the risk of suicide by working to: increase his psychological sense that he has good choices he can make, help him understand he does not have to feel he has no alternatives to suicide, and increase his sense of being emotionally supported.

Strategies:
• Establish rapport (e.g. "I'm listening and I want to help you.")
• Explore his perception of the crisis
• Focus on the immediate past (e.g. a recent significant event or problem) and immediate future
• Develop options and a plan of action
• Increase the options available to him and the number of people available to help
• Arrange removal of potential means of suicide
• Monitor his emotional state and establish a follow-up plan
• Try to involve appropriate people in his support system.

Consider a hospital placement if you feel he is in immediate danger. Or contact the other out of hours services such as the police.

A further article on helping someone with Aspergers who is suicidal -
http://www.aspieweb.net/how-to-help-a-suicidal-friend/

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Temper (Losing)

Question

My son is 10 years old and awaiting diagnosis. He frequently misinterprets the actions of others and becomes quite angry. He loses his temper frequently. How can we help him?

Answer

Your son is experiencing a great deal of stress due to his likely Asperger’s.

Some people react by becoming depressed, some become anxious, and others become angry and experience rage against the frustrating events that occur in their day.

Some individuals externalize their feelings and blame others, while some internalize their feelings and have a difficult time controlling their anger.

Their may be no particular event to his anger – just an aggressive mood or reaction to a frustrating experience.

Encourage self-control and teach your child to consider alternative behaviors.
Self-control can be strengthened by teaching your child to stop and count to ten, taking a deep breath and reminding themselves to keep calm.

Or for some children it is helpful that they have an agreed room or particular space that they take themselves too when they feel that they are getting anxious/angry.

Specific relaxation techniques can be practiced and your child can be taught the cues when they must calm down and relax. Explain the alternative to your child and in specific terms.

There are three stages to help your child when he/she is losing his temper:

1.) Make a list of signals - Construct a list of the signals that indicate the person is becoming increasingly stressed (e.g. rocking, reddened face, pacing, shouting etc.).

2.) Draw attention to the signals - Once these sign are recognized, the person’s attention must be drawn to their actions and behavior. The angry individual is usually the last to recognize the change in their behavior.

3.) Find calming alternatives - Then construct a list of activities which will calm them and encourage them to participate in those behaviors.
Keep in mind that your son will most likely have difficulty expressing what is making him angry.

You will need to assess the situation to determine what may be provoking him.

Another alternative is to keep him engaged in activities that burn off energy and reduce his need to express the anger that he is feeling.

The books “Social Skills Training for Children and Adolescents with Asperger's Syndrome and Social-Communications Problems” by Jed E Baker and “Relationship Development Intervention with Children, Adolescents and Adults: Social and Emotional Development Activities for Asperger's Syndrome, Autism, PDD and NLD” by Steven E Gustein may also be of help.

Article on Aspergers Temper Tantrums -
http://ezinearticles.com/?Aspergers-Temper-Tantrums---3-Tips-on-Stopping-Aspergers-Tantrums&id=2090474
**Violence**

**Question**

We so desperately need help with our grandson. He was diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome a little over a year ago and he totally loses control of himself and can become violent, hitting his mother, me, his grandfather, and his sister. This can happen if he wants you to take him to a video store for a game and you tell him “No.” He has also been diagnosed with Tourette’s syndrome and is taking Abilify to help control his tics. For the last three days, he has refused to attend school and his mother and I have a meeting at the school this morning. Getting him to do homework is a nightmare. I think he needs a therapist who deals with kids with his particular problems. He was also diagnosed with ODD some years ago and we’re at the point where we don’t know where one behavior starts and another continues.

**Answer**

Some research has shown that children with Asperger’s Syndrome may exhibit violent and aggressive behaviour. They often suffer from other disorders as well, including ADHD (Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder), Tourette’s Syndrome, and other neuropsychiatric/personality disorders. The combinations of disorders can create a nightmare for parents and treatment personnel as they tend to overlap, as you have discovered. Much more research in this area is necessary.
Your grandson definitely needs the help of a therapist, perhaps a child psychiatrist, behavioural and developmental paediatrician, or paediatric neurologist. Whichever you choose, be sure the doctor has had specialized training in the treatment of Asperger’s Syndrome and the other disorders mentioned above.

As you have seen, your grandson reacts with aggression and violence when he is told “No,” doesn’t get his own way, or doesn’t want to do something. He may also become violent when he perceives that someone is talking about him or touches him accidentally. His ODD encompasses tendencies to bother and irritate others on purpose, refusal to follow commands and requests, loss of temper, and stubbornness. Needless to say, these behaviours cannot continue and may get worse if not addressed.

Some children, about half, will grow out of ODD by the age of eight. The ODD diagnosis may change to a different diagnosis at some point. Other children’s ODD will get worse and they will be diagnosed with Conduct Disorder. This usually happens within three to four years, or not at all. It is unusual for a child to have only ODD; usually other disorders develop.

Besides behavioural therapy of one or more types, your grandson may need medications. Some possibilities include: Ritalin, Decadron, Adderall, Zoloft, Prozac, Neurontin, Divalproex, or Clonidine. There has been some success using omega-3 oils and vitamin E.
Parent training is vital to help you in dealing with ODD. Unfortunately, it can be expensive and difficult to find.

Conditions like Tourette’s often coexist with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. At the school meeting acknowledge this and be totally honest as you have been here! I suggest you ask for an immediate referral to the school paediatrician or psychologist. He or she should give you a referral to the Clinical Children’s Services at your nearest hospital. Once in the 'system,' family support should be offered on a long term basis. Additionally you will be able to discuss other options like medication, parent training, and possible respite care. There are support systems out there and it is important that you access these now before life becomes even more impossible!

Further article on Aspergers Violence -