

Working with Kids with Asperger Syndrome: Practical Strategies for the Classroom

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- I. Autism and Asperger Syndrome – General Information**
 - A. History**
 - 1. Early Descriptions of Characteristics and Social Mythology**
 - a. Autism – Dr. Leo Kanner**
 - b. Asperger Syndrome - Dr. Hans Asperger**
 - 2. Defining Characteristics – Autism Spectrum**
 - a. Deficits in Language/Communication**
 - b. Deficits in Social Interaction Skills**
 - c. Excesses in Self-Stimulatory/Stereotypic Behavior**
 - d. Onset Prior to 36 Mos. of Age**
 - 3. Incidence**
 - a. General Population**
 - b. Ratio Male to Female – Autism $\frac{_}{_}:\frac{_}{_}$, Asperger $\frac{_}{_}:\frac{_}{_}$**
M:F M:F
 - 4. Autism Spectrum Disorders**
 - a. Autism**
 - b. Asperger Syndrome**
 - c. Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified (PDD/NOS)**
 - i. Some characteristics of Autism or AS**
 - ii. Not otherwise specified as any other disorder**

Assessment

Assessment should include an Asperger Syndrome checklist, as well as intellectual, academic, language/communication, social, behavioral, and adaptive measures.

Autism

- ◆ **Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS)
(Modules 1 and 2 for younger/less verbal students)**
- ◆ **Autism Behavior Checklist (ABC)**
- ◆ **Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS)**
- ◆ **Gilliam Autism Rating Scale (GARS)**

Asperger Syndrome

- ◆ **Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS)
(Modules 3 and 4 for older/more verbal students)**
- ◆ **Gilliam Asperger Disorder Scale (GADS)**
- ◆ **Asperger Syndrome Diagnostic Scale**
- ◆ **Australian Scale for Asperger Syndrome**
- ◆ **Social Communication Questionnaire (formerly called the ADI Screener/based on the ADI-R)**

Features of Asperger Syndrome – Language/Communication

- ◆ **Good rote memory/reading may be accelerated; low comprehension**

- ◆ **“Literal” interpretation of language**

 - Rules; “letter of the law”**

 - Verbal directions**

 - Written directions**

- ◆ **Deficits in abstract language**

 - Humor**

 - Sarcasm**

 - Idioms**

 - Deductive reasoning/inference**

- ◆ **Deficits in social language**

 - Greetings/joining groups**

 - Conversation initiation**

 - Conversation reciprocity**

 - Topic maintenance**

 - Conversation turn-taking**

 - Attaining attention**

 - Affect paired with social language**

- ◆ **Speech/voice difficulties**

 - Volume**

 - Rhythm/speed**

 - Intonation/pitch**

 - Stress on words**

Features of Asperger Syndrome - Social Interaction

- ◆ **Difficulty seeing others' perspectives ('mind blindness')**

- ◆ **Attention issues**

 - On-task**

 - Lack of joint/shared attention (young children)**

 - Shifting* attention from one task to the next**

- ◆ **General lack of social interaction skills**

 - Coping skills**

 - Classroom social skills**

 - Relationship-building skills**

 - Conversation skills**

 - Problem-solving skills**

 - Assessment of environment skills**

 - Body language skills**

 - Employment social skills**

- ◆ **Isolation from others**

 - Preferred interaction with adults**

 - Physical withdrawal from groups/activities**

 - Limited interactive play**

 - Difficulty interpreting social and affective information**

- ◆ **Social difficulties in adolescence**

 - Problems with reciprocity (as societal expectations increase)**

 - Difficulty seeing others' perspectives ("mind blindness"; "theory of mind"); difficulty with experiencing empathy**

 - Problems with becoming targets of bullying/teasing**

 - Lack of understanding of subtle social cues (verbal, affective, etc.)**

 - Difficulty dealing with interest in opposite sex/sexual development**

 - May have problems with depression**

Features of Asperger Syndrome – Self-stimulatory and Stereotypic Behavior

- ◆ Intense need for routine
- ◆ Narrow range of interests/striking intensity of interests
- ◆ Topic perseveration
- ◆ Insistence on inclusion of “stim” topic in school work
- ◆ Aversion to physical proximity/physical self-stimulatory behaviors

Features of Asperger Syndrome -Motor Skills

- ◆ Awkward gait
- ◆ Gross motor difficulties
 - Balance
 - Agility
 - Response time
- ◆ Fine motor difficulties
 - Writing skills
 - Cleric speed
 - Keyboarding finger placement
- ◆ Motor imitation difficulties

Language/Communication – Interventions

- 1. Practice *joint attention* and imitation skills**
- 2. Practice the “wh” questions (who, what, when. . .)**
- 3. Teach idioms**
 - ❑ **Saying One Thing, Meaning Another (Spector, Thinking Publications)**
 - ❑ **There’s A Frog In My Throat (Leedy & Street, Scholastic)**
 - ❑ **Hold Your Horses (Shulman Auslin, Dormac, Inc.)**
 - ❑ **Communicating with Common Expressions (Mattes & Matthews, Academic Communication Associates)**
- 4. Teach conversation skills (e.g., body lang., eye contact, topic maintenance, reciprocity, question-asking, opening/closing skills, etc.)**
 - ❑ **A Work in Progress (Leaf & McEachin, 1999)**
 - ❑ **Asperger Syndrome and Your Child (Powers)**
 - ❑ **Skillstreaming (Goldstein)**
 - ❑ **Work with your SLP on curriculum scope and sequence**
- 5. Teach humor**
 - ❑ **As Far As Words Go (Spector, Thinking Publications)**
- 6. Teach additional social language skills (e.g., greetings, slang, requesting help, getting attention, interrupting, introductions, etc.)**
 - ❑ **Skillstreaming (Goldstein) and ACCEPTS (Walker)**
 - ❑ **Peer Information (slang; greetings, etc.)**

Social Interaction Skills – Interventions

1. Teach social skills with a social skills curriculum (listed are common skill deficits across several types of social interaction)

a. Conversation skills

- Reciprocity
- Topic Maintenance
- Opening/Closing a Conversation
- Giving Compliments

b. Coping skills

- Taking “No” for an Answer
- Handling Teasing
- Handling Changes in Routine

c. Relationship-building skills

- Joining a Group
- Making Invitations
- Turn-taking

d. Classroom skills

- Attending Skills
- Hand-raising
- Teacher Pleasers
- Requesting Help

e. Resistance skills

- Saying “No”
- Leaving a Situation
- Giving a Reason

f. Problem-solving skills

- Identifying the Problem
- Listing Solutions
- Weighing Consequences
- Making a Decision
- Acting on It

g. Body language skills

- Physical Proximity
- Eye Contact
- Touching
- Posture

h. Employment social skills

- Asking Questions
- Taking Feedback
- Interview Skills
- Disagreeing Politely

- Skillstreaming – 3 Levels (Goldstein)
- ACCEPTS (Walker)
- Social Stories (Gray)

- 2. Teach class/home rules and *exceptions* to rules**
- 3. Designate a contact person in every setting and provide a means for requesting assistance**
- 4. Teach a “Coping with change”/“It’s not what I thought would happen” skill (Source: Powers, 2002)**

Younger Students:

- Self-calming sequence
 - Stop/deep breath
 - Count to 5 to self
- Say “OK”
- Go on to next task/Follow the direction

Older Students:

- Self-calming sequence
 - Stop/deep breath
 - Count to 5 to self
- Look around (look at peers)
- Ask peers
- Ask adult
- Say “OK”
- Go on to next task/Follow the direction

Motor Issues – Interventions (OT eval when needed)

Fine Motor

- 1. Teach keyboarding**
- 2. Allow peers to take notes**
- 3. Consider work reduction**

Gross Motor

- 1. Teach ball-handling skills in isolation**
- 2. Steer students into non-competitive/non-team sports (e.g., track, golf, gymnastics, skiing, etc.)**
- 3. Consider alternatives to general ed PE**

Environmental/Organizational Issues - Interventions

- 1. Provide written/visual schedules**
- 2. Provide maps of various school/community settings**
- 3. Prepare for changes in routine**
- 4. Consider impact of sensory issues**
- 5. Provide organizational tools (e.g., planners, notebooks, color-coded folders/files, etc.)**
- 6. Consider seating changes**
- 7. Provide visual start/stop cues**
- 8. Teach study skills**
- 9. Provide a “help” sign for requesting assistance**

Learning Characteristics/Methods of Instruction - Interventions

- 1. Use inductive (instead of deductive) teaching strategies when possible**
- 2. Use direct instruction methods**
- 3. Provide visual cues/prompts**
- 4. Provide cues for changing activities**
- 5. Provide examples of completed work**
- 6. Develop a peer tutor/peer partner system**
- 7. Develop a reinforcement system for on-task/work completion (must include a visual feedback component)**

Behavior Escalation

(*or* How We Make Kids Worse Over Time)

**Withdraws or
Changes Request/
“Negotiates”**

**Tantrum/Agg
Stops**

Large Threats

Tantrum/Agg

Small Threats/Warnings

Argue

Verbal Prompts

Delay

Request in Question Form

Ignore

**↑
Adult**

**↑
Student**

PRECISION DIRECTIONS

1. “Name, direction please.”

WAIT 3-5 seconds

(students *with no*
language delays)

7-10 seconds

(students *with*
language delays)

Compliance
REINFORCE!

Non
Compliance
↓

2. “Name, *you need to* direction.”

WAIT: same as above

Compliance
REINFORCE!

Non
Compliance
↓

3. **Pre-planned Consequence**

Label the behavior – “That’s not following dir.”

Label the consequence – “That’s _____.”

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

1. _____

2. _____

Small

3. _____

Inconvenient

4. _____

Hierarchy

5. _____

When consequences are arranged in a *hierarchy* consisting of *small* steps, and are designed to be *inconvenient* for the student by affecting his/her agenda, they are much more likely to be effective in reducing the rate of inappropriate behavior. After students learn the consequence system, most will not continue with non compliant behavior past the second step.

POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES (reinforcement menu)

Rotate*

*** Items should be rotated on and off of the reinforcement list/menu periodically, in order to maintain motivational intensity.**

A class-wide reinforcement system may be developed along with individualized systems for selected students' target behaviors.

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