

Getting Your Needs Met As A Student With Asperger's Disorder

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What is Asperger's Disorder?

In 1944, Han Asperger, an Austrian doctor, recognized and described children who had impaired social interaction and communication. However, Asperger's Disorder did not appear in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-TR) until 1994. Due to the formal definition being relatively new, there is still potential for misdiagnosis or for high functioning individuals to go undiagnosed. Asperger's Disorder is a lifelong developmental disability that currently has no known cure; however, cognitive, behavioral and medical treatments are available.

According to the DSM-IV TR, Asperger's Disorder is one of the five disorders that fall into the category of Pervasive Developmental Disorders. It is characterized by severe and sustained impairment in social interactions and a restrictive and repetitive pattern of behavior and interests, which significantly impacts adaptive functioning. There is no significant delay in language development (DSM-IV, 2000).



Associated Features

Social Impairment

- Poor nonverbal communication
- Active but socially awkward
- Difficulty developing friendships

Communication Deficits

- Poor prosody and pragmatics (intonations and inflections)
- Does not adapt language to listener (one-sided conversation style)
- Speech is tangential and circumstantial

All Absorbing Interest

- Consumed with factual information about area of interest

Poor Sensory-Motor Integration

- Results in sensory overload and behavioral dyscontrol
- Highly sensitive to one or more senses (over or under sensitive to touch, sound, light or pain)

Emotional Difficulties

- Vulnerable to emotional outbursts
- Very difficult adjustment to unexpected change
- Anxious in new and unpredictable situations
- Often struggle with depression
- Frequently exhibit obsessive/compulsive behaviors

Executive Functioning Deficits

- Poor organization, planning, self-monitoring and difficulty remaining goal directed
- Limited flexibility—often rigid and rule-based
- Do not appreciate ambiguity or exceptions to rules

Poor Adaptive Skills

- Are surprisingly poor at basic skills, despite often having average to well above average intelligence

“The term eccentric is not used in a derogatory sense. In this author's opinion, they are the bright thread in the rich tapestry of life. Our civilization would be extremely dull and sterile if we did not have and treasure people with Asperger Syndrome.”
—Tony Attwood (1999)

Classroom Strategies for Success

- Follow consistent routines and explicit rules.
- Follow a posted schedule.
- Ask for clarification of expectations or if information is vague.
- Get written instructions for assignments.
- Arrive to class early to ensure you have the same seat if you like sameness. If you don't like close physical proximity, you may request to sit apart for exams.
- Allow yourself to get individual assistance, such as academic accommodations and tutoring.
- If you “tune out” in class, then ask if you can tape record class sessions.
- Utilize repetitive memorization for studying for exams (individuals with Asperger's typically have excellent memories).
- Talk out your chapters or notes step-by-step with an individual.
- Stay away from graphs when studying.
- Outlines may be useful for your written assignments, such as essays and research papers.
- Find out what works for you. Some individuals with Asperger's find that absorbing long strings of auditory information may be impossible, while visual materials are easier to learn. See what works for you and adapt your study methods.

Importance of Assessment

Many individuals in college are high-functioning so you may have “slipped through the cracks.” It is essential to find a clinician who has experience diagnosing adults with Asperger’s syndrome and high-functioning autistic spectrum disorders.

Resources

- CAPS— (321) 674-8050
(psychotherapy, behavioral techniques, learning disability evaluations)
- Academic Support Center—(321) 674-7110
(tutoring, academic accommodations)
- Social Support Groups
(improve communication and social interaction)

Adults with Aspergers Group

CARD University of Central Florida

(407) 823-2176 | Tedaly@mail.ucf.edu

Disability Support Group

Melbourne, FL | (321) 784-9008

Social support groups for students with Asperger’s have been conducted at CAPS in the past. If we generate enough interest from students, we may be able to accommodate your request. Contact us at (321) 674- 8050.

Specialized software is now designed to adapt computers for people with disabilities. It can be useful if you have visual problems or trouble with coordination.

Books with information on college students with Asperger’s Disorder:

Managing Asperger Syndrome at College and University by Juliet Jamieson and Clare Jamieson, David Fulton Publishers, 2004.

Pretending to be normal: Living with Asperger’s syndrome by Liane Holliday Willey, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, July 1999—includes not only an account of her university experience but also has a wonderful appendix titled “Survival Skills for AS College Students.”

Succeeding In College With Asperger Syndrome by John Harpur, Maria Lawlor and Michael Fitzgerald, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (4th ed.). Washington, D.C.

Ozonoff, S., Dawson, G., McPartland, J.(2002). *A Parent’s Guide to Asperger Syndrome & High-Functioning Autism*. Guilford Press.

Volkmar, F & Klin, A. (2000). *Diagnostic Issues in Asperger Syndrome*. In Klin, A. Volkmar, F., Sparrow, S., *Asperger Syndrome*. Guilford Press.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

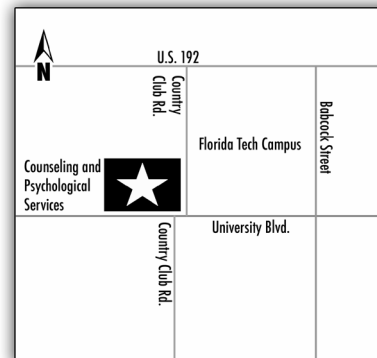
CAPS is a counseling facility operated by Florida Institute of Technology’s School of Psychology. Its goals are to promote the best possible academic, vocational and emotional health. Our services are available to students and their immediate families. Call CAPS at (321) 674-8050.

Center Hours

Monday–Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. • Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Location

Intersection of Country Club Road and University Boulevard, west of Babcock Street



For additional counseling, academic success resources and helpful articles, visit www.fit.edu/caps or call 674-8050.

PY-444-707

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