TIPS FOR WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH ASPERGER SYNDROME*

Asperger Syndrome is a developmental disorder that is characterized by deficits in social skills, communication, and unusual repetitive behaviors. It is sometimes referred to as "high-functioning autism."

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS
Due to the diversity and complexity of this disability, you may not see all of these characteristics in a given student. Often behaviors that seem odd or unusual or even rude are in fact unintentional symptoms of AS.

- Frequent errors in interpreting others’ body language, intentions or facial expressions
- Difficulty understanding the motives and perceptions of others
- Problems asking for help; Wants things just so
- Motor clumsiness, unusual body movements and/or repetitive behavior
- Difficulty with the big picture, perseverates on the details (can’t see the forest for the trees)
- Difficulties with transitions and changes in schedule
- Problems with organization (including initiating, planning, carrying out, and finishing tasks)

FUNCTIONAL IMPACT

- Poor or unusual eye contact
- Problems understanding social rules (such as personal spaces)
- Difficulty in initiating or sustaining connected relationships
- Conversation and questions may be tangential or repetitive
- Restricted interests that may be unusual and sometimes become a rigid topic for social conversation
- Unusual speech intonation, volume, rhythm, and/or rate
- Literal understanding of language (difficulty interpreting words with double meaning, confused by metaphors and sarcasm)

SOME TIPS

- Don’t use absolute words such as “always” or “never” unless that is exactly what you mean
- Supplement oral with written instructions
- Keep directions simple and declarative
- Use clear directives and establish rules if …
  - A student invades your space or imposes on your time
  - The student’s classroom comments or conversational volume become inappropriate
- Go for the gist of the information. Don’t get bogged down in details. Teach to generalize
- Don’t require students to “read between the lines”. All expectations should be direct and explicit
- Avoid idioms, double meanings and sarcasm unless you plan to explain your usage
- Clearly define course requirements, dates of exams and when assignments are due
- Provide ADVANCE notice of any changes in due dates or exam dates


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