

Diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder

Asperger's syndrome, which is categorized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), under the Pervasive Developmental Disorders differs from Autism in the following ways.

- 1.) there are no significant delays in language
- 2.) there are no delays in their cognitive development
- 3.) No clinically significant delays in development in self-help skills
- 4.) No clinically significant delays in adaptive behaviors
- 5.) No delays in curiosity about the environment in childhood

The diagnostic criteria for Asperger's syndrome are that the child must demonstrate impairment in social interaction as shown by at least two of the following:

- Impairment in the use of nonverbal behaviors (such as eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures) during social interaction
- Lack of development of relationships with their peers
- Failure to seek enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people (ie.. a lack of showing, bringing, or pointing out objects of interest to other people)
- Failure to reciprocate emotions or social gestures

The child must also demonstrate restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, or activities, as manifested by at least one of the following:

- Encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal in intensity or focus
- Apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals
- Stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (ie.. hand flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)
- Persistent preoccupation with parts of objects

A common problem also seen in children with Asperger's as well as seen with children with Autism are sensitivity to sensory experiences. A child with Asperger's is often very sensitive to loud noises such as an airplane or an ambulance going by and they will often cover their ears. Some very common sensitivities seen in children are in smell, taste, sound, visual, and in touch.

A child with Asperger's will often cry when they hear very loud sounds, certain smells will make them sick to their stomach, and they often become overwhelmed when they are trying to process too much visual information such as seen when they go on a shopping trip. Children with Asperger's often are very sensitive to a lot of light and they often do not want to be touched and a hug or being patted on the head or on the back is often aversive to them.

A child with Asperger's may also have difficulty making friends as they often miss social cues that are often inherent in children who do not have ADHD. They do not seem to understand nonverbal communications such as another child's facial expression or the body language of the children around them. Social skills are often lacking and other children will often perceive them as abrupt and insensitive to others feeling. In addition, they are often very passionate about one or more particular areas, however can not relate when children talk about something that does not interest them. They do not accept change well and often seem inflexible to those around them.

Kara T. Tamanini, M.S., LMHC
Author and Therapist
Founder of Kids Awareness Series
www.KidsAwarenessSeries.com

Kara T. Tamanini is a licensed therapist that works with children/adolescents on a variety of childhood mental disorders.

References:

American Psychiatric Association (2000). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM IV (4th ed., text, revision), Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.