

Asperger's Syndrome

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Asperger's syndrome was first described by a German doctor, Hans Asperger, in 1944 (one year after Leo Kanner's first paper on autism). In his paper, Dr. Asperger discussed individuals who exhibited many idiosyncratic, odd-like behaviors (see description below).

Often individuals with Asperger's syndrome have many of the behaviors listed below:

Language:

- lucid speech before age 4 years; grammar and vocabulary are usually very good
- speech is sometimes stilted and repetitive
- voice tends to be flat and emotionless
- conversations revolve around self

Cognition

- obsessed with complex topics, such as patterns, weather, music, history, etc.
- often described as eccentric
- I.Q.'s fall along the full spectrum, but many are in the above normal range in verbal ability and in the below average range in performance abilities.
- many have dyslexia, writing problems, and difficulty with mathematics
- lack common sense
- concrete thinking (versus abstract)

Behavior

- movements tend to be clumsy and awkward
- odd forms of self-stimulatory behavior
- sensory problems appear not to be as dramatic as those with other forms of autism
- socially aware but displays inappropriate reciprocal interaction

Researchers feel that Asperger's syndrome is probably hereditary in nature because many families report having an "odd" relative or two. In addition, depression and bipolar disorder are often reported in those with Asperger's syndrome as well as in family members.

At this time, there is no prescribed treatment regimen for individuals with Asperger's syndrome. In adulthood, many lead productive lives, living independently, working effectively at a job (many are college professors, computer programmers, dentists), and raising a family.

Sometimes people assume everyone who has autism and is high-functioning has Asperger's syndrome. However, it appears that there are several forms of high-functioning autism, and Asperger's syndrome is one form.