

# **Asperger's Syndrome--An Eagle's Eye View**

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## **Introduction**

Narrator: This video will discuss Asperger's Syndrome. Asperger's Syndrome or AS is a form of autism. Some people with AS like the nickname Aspie. Neurotypical or people without any neurologic disorder or syndrome are sometimes nicknamed NT.

Asperger's Syndrome can cause difficulties in social behavior, language, interest and routines, motor clumsiness, cognition, and sensory sensitivity. We will try to show how the Aspie experiences these difficulties and how to handle them.

We have used Tony Attwood's book, "Asperger's Syndrome A Guide For Parents and Professionals" as a guide.

We will focus on the age groups for middle and high school.

## **Social Behavior**

Narrator: Social Behavior can be very unusual or eccentric in people with AS. They can have a problem with nonverbal behavior such as eye contact, facial expression, body posture, and gestures. Aspies don't develop peer relationships that are appropriate for their age. They generally lack in the ability to share ideas or interests with others.

An Aspie might be found off by himself in the cafeteria. He may not know how to start interaction with others or be anxious and avoid others.

(Scene 1)

(Aspie off alone in cafeteria)

(Scene 2)

(Aspie reading book and instead of playing basketball)

Narrator: He may stare or look away when talked to.

(Scene 3)

(Teacher talks to Aspie about an important test, but Aspie just looks around the room)

Narrator: He may only talk about topics he likes and not realize that other kids are not interested.

(Scene 4)

NT1: Did you see the game last night, it was unbelievable.

NT2: I know. Who could image that last play?

Aspie: My favorite episode of Star Trek is the one where Mr. Spock is captured by the Romulans...

NT1: Who cares about that game, we were talking about the game.

Narrator: He may want to interact with others but is inflexible and plays only by his own rules.

(Scene 5)

(Aspie and NT set up to play chess and Aspie wants to go first because he always goes first.)

(Scene 6)

(Aspie and NTs are working on a report and the Aspie wants to do an outline while no one else does.)

Narrator: Codes of conduct or unwritten social rules are unknown to the Aspie.

(Scene 7)

(A small Aspie goes and sit down at the football teams table)

(Scene 8)

(Guy flirting with a girl and an Aspie listen to them. Guy says 'Do you mind?')

Narrator: But there is hope, a person with AS can learn. A social skills class can specifically practice these skills. Posters and games can help an Aspie learn different facial expressions.

Families can model how to speak and act in different situations. Brothers and sisters can act out skits practicing different situations they have noticed that are difficult for their sibling with AS.

(Scene 9)

(Aspie and NT sister get back home from school)

NT: Hey Ben, I saw you at the bus stop and you did talk to Nick when he said 'hi'. I really think you need to practice that. Let's practice now. I'll pretend to be Nick. Hi Ben. How's it going?

Aspie: Fine.

NT: You could even say 'How's it going' back. Let's try again. Hi Ben. How's it going?

Aspie: Fine. How are you?

NT: That was great. I know you will do better next time.

Narrator: One technique is called social autopsy. Rick Lavoie.

(Title fills the screen)

City Morgue. After hours slip body through slot in door.

Narrator: no not that kind. But where a situation would be discussed and sort through what would be a better way to handle that. A parent or teacher can get together with the Aspie and jointly discuss what was the error and determine how to plan to be sure it doesn't happen again. Social autopsies can be used to go over good social episodes too.

A trusted friend or family member could discretely point out the errors and get the person with AS back on track.

(Scene 10)

NT1: Did you see the game last night? It was unbelievable.

NT2: I know, who could have imagined that last play!

Aspie: My favorite episode of ....

NT2: (throat clear) We are talking about the game now.

Aspie: Oh I didn't see it. What happened?

NT1: Well the whole thing was action packed and there were constant turn overs..

Narrator: Skills like how to start, end, and maintain or avoid contact can be practiced. The Aspie can have some key phrases to use to be flexible and cooperate.

(Scene 11 Aspie saying the following.)

“Hi, what have you been doing?” “Well that is cool but I have to go now.” “I like Star Trek but tell me more about what you were talking about” “I am doing something and I’ll talk to you later.”

Narrator: Sometimes clubs or groups can provide just enough structure to make socialization easier.

(Scene 12)

Aspie approaches a kid and starts talking about the Yu-Gi-Oh.

Narrator: But in organized groups, the topic and activity is defined and the Aspie knows what is going to occur. He is less likely to talk about something unrelated or have unstructured time.

(Scene 13).

Scouts and Aspie working on a badge and talking about the topic of the badge, chess club, and robotics club

Narrator: Social stories by Carol Gray help the person with AS know what to do in specific situations. They follow a specific lay out with different types of statements such as descriptive, perspective, directive, and control. They are often used with younger kids but with humor and a relaxed mood, a teen Aspie could make their own with a parent, trusted friend, or therapist.

(Scene 14 show kid and hear self talk and music)

Narrator: Often when kids get together, they talk. I might have something I want to talk about. (Mission Impossible music) My assignment if I wish to accept it is to listen to what others have to say and not interrupt. I will switch into agent mode and observe the situation to see what the kids are talking about.

Also a teen Aspie can turn into a super spy and observe others, what do they do? Pick a particular person and watch how he talks and listens to others.

Consider drama classes. Explore how to act out different emotions.

Watch certain comedies that show social interaction in obscure ways such as Third Rock From the Sun (Opening of show). Turn on a soap opera and have the sound turned down and try to identify the emotions of the actors.

Play The Sims, (Show game) a computer game that you control and make decisions for people in all areas such as health, work, and social contact.

### Language

Narrator: Language can be an area of misunderstandings for an Aspie. You saw how language problems affect social misunderstandings in some of the previous examples. For the NT world, social and language go together easily. For the Aspie, it is a puzzling blend. Fortunately, a speech pathologist can help.

(Show shot of Aspie with a speech pathologist)

Narrator: Many Aspies can have very superficial language and often use phrases they have heard.

(Scene 15 self talk)

“Well actually.....

“Not to my recollection.....

he usually says "If you'll notice" or "As you look at the dinosaur's skull you will notice his..."

Narrator: Corey constantly says things are "more better" and that somebody did something "by purpose" " on him". He never says somebody did something "to" him, but its always "on" him...The weather is also "on" him...the cold is "on" him...."its cold on me in here"

. If you say to Dillon, "Don't you want to go get ice cream?" If he says, "yes" he is saying "Yes, I don't want to go get ice cream". If you say, "Wouldn't it be great if we all went to the park today?" and he says yes, he is saying, Yes, it wouldn't be great. Would not you like to... Yes, I would not like to...

They also can have a formal pedantic language or odd prosody voice characteristics. They also have comprehension problems and are very literal.

(Scene 16)

Dad: “Did you go upstairs and get the photo album out of the guest room?”

Aspie: “No.”

Dad: sigh and go to get album

Aspie: “It wasn’t upstairs in the guest room, it was in the hall.”

(Scene 17)

Dr. Brookman: Mark, ask Ben why she came to this school.

Mark: I came to this school because I had trouble at my middle school.

Dr. Brookman: No, no, Mark, say, "Ben why did you come to this school?"

Mark: I came to this school because I had trouble at Warner School.

Dr. Brookman: Repeat after me. "Ben, Why did you come to this school?"

Mark: [in a monotone] Ben, why did you come to this school.

Narrator: Social problems are mixed with Language problems. The person with AS may make comments that are irrelevant or break social codes. Once a conversation starts it might go on and on with no end in sight. Whole scripts of the Aspie's favorite program can come pouring out.

(Scene 18)

Aspie picking up a chair and wondering where to put it when a NT said, "You can take a seat now."

Or the Aspie going pale and scared looking when my friend mentioned they were going to die of hunger.

Or the Aspie greeting his Auntie who was visiting from out of town with a hug like I had but then later asking, "Why did we cuddle Auntie Janet?"

Narrator: Snide remarks are not understood because part of the meaning is conveyed by facial expression and tone of voice. My mom says that Asperger's Syndrome is kind of like color blindness. A person who is color blind sees every object but doesn't see the true color of them. People talk words but they also send messages with their tone of voice, body language, or facial expression. Those things are like a color going back and forth along with the words, giving more of the message than the words do alone. Aspies don't get those unspoken things and go by the words alone. The analogy of color blindness helped me to understand AS and to know I was missing part of the message and needed to learn those things that neurotypicals automatically understand.

(Scene 19)

Same person saying these phrases with different emphasis.

"I want you to come to MY house."

"I want you to come to my house."

"I want YOU to come to my house."

Narrator: He may use phrases inappropriately.

Scene 20 ( At church with pastor and older church members)

An Aspie at a funeral sitting in rows of chairs and as people walk by saying, “Are you having a good day?”

Scene 21 (At church with pastor and other church members)

I've got a phrase heard elsewhere and used inappropriately. Gil heard Karl ask a close guy friend "how's it hanging" once. That became his greeting for each and every person around. We had several talks about just what that means and when it can be used, and he still couldn't quite get it right (like greeting his 90 yr old great grandmother or our female church pastor this way). We finally just said that this is a greeting used by adults only.

Narrator: A person with AS need to work on repairing a conversation, coping with the unknown, screening out irrelevant comments and not interrupting. Practicing with family can help these skills develop

(Scene 22)

Family in kitchen getting meal ready. NT brothers and sister talking to Aspie about a Yu-Gi-Oh. Aspie completely changes the topic.

Mom: Wait a minute, they was talking about Yu-Gi-Oh. What did you talk about?

Aspie: Well I said that monks made pretzels.

Mom: What do you think they wanted to talk about or how could you make that smoother?

Aspie: (pause) Well,...um.....I guess I could have said something about Yu-Gi-Oh and talk about pretzels later.

Mom: That is great.

(Scene 23)

Nick: Grandma, I am really hungry, what do you have to eat?

Grandma: Well I have these chips and salsa,.....pretzels.....and some cookies.

Nick: I want chips and salsa! (Crunches on ) You can go now.

Grandma: Nick, is there another way you could say that or something different you could say?

Nick: (still eating chips) Well you can go now.

Grandma: Yeah I know that but it isn't the slickest thing to say to someone who gave you a snack.

Nick: Oh, um.....okay. (pause) Thanks for the chips grandma.

Grandma: That is much better. Glad you like them.

(Scene 24)

Bunch of people standing around a parking lot. Scouts getting ready to go to an event. Scouts have backpacks.

Scoutmaster (SM): Nick put your gear in Mr. Ball's car.

Nick looks confused but gets his bag and walks around the different cars slowly looking in them.

(SM): Nick get your stuff in Mr. Ball's car, I have other stuff I need you to load.

Nick just stands there shutting down.

(SM): (gently) Nick do you know which car is Mr. Ball's?

Nick: (Pause) no um I not sure.

(SM): Okay well if I ask you and you don't know, what could you do?

Nick: Well I was trying to figure it out but you wanted me to do more stuff!

(SM): But what could be a better way to find out what you are to do?

Nick: I could ask.....( Pause) Which car is Mr. Ball's?

(SM): That green car over there. Okay put your stuff in that green car and then come back.

Narrator: Often what an Aspie thinks is what an Aspie says. That can cause trouble.

(Scene 25)

Group of teens standing around.

Aspie says, "Wow your shirt is really ugly!"

Narrator: The Aspie needs to learn to think it and not say it. To run his comment through his mind to determine if it should be said.

Is it true?

Is it kind?

Does it have to be said?

(Scene 26)

Aspie eating at another family's house. He takes a bite and the mom asks, "So how do you like it?"

Hear Aspie saying to himself, "Is it true? Yeah this is lousy? Is it kind? Probably not

Does it have to be said? Well it isn't poison so I guess I don't have to say it and I like the other food so I can eat that." He says aloud. "It is okay."

Narrator: Auditory discrimination can be a problem for a person with AS. They might have trouble in noisy background. Getting instructions would work better in a quieter situation.



(Scene 27)

Home with TV on, dishwasher going, and siblings talking. Dad tells Aspie to go upstairs and reboot the computer and also bring down a book. The Aspie looks confused. Redo with Dad starting but realizing that it is too noisy. So he turns off the TV and asks the siblings to pause and then gives the instructions. Even better is when instructions are given with visual clues. Dad gives the instructions but also jots it on a piece of scrap paper.

### **Special Interests**

Narrator: Special interests are vital to a person with AS. They are like air! Most Aspies know they are different and want others to realize how intelligent they are. They may talk on and on about their interest to show off how much they know. Or it may be they don't know how to start a conversation other than talking about their interest.

(Scene 28)

Group of kids sitting around. Aspie starts talking about Star Trek out of the blue. Others react oddly to him.

Narrator: Or an interest could be a way to provide order, comfort, or relaxation for an Aspie.

(Scene 29)

Aspie looking over his Star Trek books while watching Star Trek.

Narrator: But this can be handled. An Aspie could learn to enjoy his interest at certain times.

(Scene 30)

Show an Aspie walking in the door from school, taking off a backpack and has Star Trek time.

Narrator: Or his interest could be used for motivation,

Interests and routines are a vital part of an Aspies life. They can be the focus of their whole world. It is good to have a passion for a topic but it can cross the line and be a hindrance to social interaction in some areas.

Some interests could become careers or social contacts.

(Scene 31) Show an Aspie working with animals.

(Scene 32) Show an Aspie working on a computer

Narrator: So interests could be used to reduce an Aspie's level of anxiety while also teaching the concept of compromise, time, and schedules.

(Scene 33) Show an Aspie enjoying his interest and mom walks by and says, "Did you finish your school work?"

"Yeah I got it all done before I ...."

### **Motor Clumsiness**

Narrator: Aspies usually have motor clumsiness. But there are things they can do to improve their skills or accommodate their weak areas.

(Scene 34) Show blue ball, mini trampoline, Alpha smart, Swimming

### **Cognition**

Narrator: Theory of Mind is part of Asperger's and a person with AS needs to understand it to see when it is a factor hindering his communication.

Theory of Mind is when a person has trouble understanding and appreciating what other people think or feel. They often assume that other people think and feel as they do. Everybody is interested in their interest, everyone knows how they feel or think, it is obvious. Theory of mind is the inability to mind read and sometimes a person with AS impose their own thoughts onto the blank mind they can not read.

(Scene 35)

Boy comes in the house from school.

"Mom, we are doing a team project for science. We have to write a report and make a poster. We should do it on Mars."

"Well, what does the rest of the team think?"

"Well it is in the news. They will want to do Mars."

"But did you discuss it with them?"

"No but I know they will want to do this."

Narrator: People with AS tend to be visual thinkers.

People with AS tend to have one track minds and inflexibility in their thinking.

(Scene 36)

pulling drawer out behind someone and not tell the person. They knew the draw was open so they assumed you did too.

(Scene 37)

Looking at a book and asking someone across the room what a word is. They can see the word so you can too.

(Scene 38)

Do you want a waffle?

Do you want a waffle? I said yes!

No you thought you said yes, but you didn't say anything. Confusing thoughts and words.

(Scene 39)

Bringing a radio to someone watching TV. They thought you wanted to hear it but didn't ask you, just assumed.

(Scene 40)

Mom is cranky and slamming things down but Aspie doesn't see it isn't a good time to ask for a treat.

(Scene 41)

AS announces another boy will trade a yugioh card. Mom asks, are you sure? Oh yes, he will give me llll card for gggg card. But did you ask him? Well no

(Scene 42)

Aspies can think they know what you are going to say so they don't stop to listen to what you actually say

Mom calls Aspie and starts to tell him to get something in the garage but he quickly goes to the garage before she finishes.

### **Sensory Sensitivity**

Narrator: Many people on the autism spectrum have sensory integration disorder (SID). SID is hyper (too much) or hypo (too little) information from the senses. Hyper sensitivity to tactile sensation would be the person who is bothered by the seam in their

socks or tags in their clothing. Hypo sensitivity to tactile sensation would be not noticing a blister forming from shoes that didn't fit well. Examples include

Hyper sensitive to sound

Music is too loud and kid has hands over ears complaining

Hypersensitive to light

Kid doesn't like going outside on a bright day, squinting.

Hypersensitive to vestibular

Kid gets car sick or doesn't like park rides. Who wants to go to Six Flags? Not me

Hypersensitive to smell

Walking down the detergent aisle at the store is difficult, kid covers his nose.

These problems can be overcome. Occupational therapy helps a person overcome SID and many of the activities are fun. Accommodations can get around SID.

Use ear plugs, have a cap and sunglasses, cut out tags of clothing.

### **Positive Aspects**

A person with AS has areas to work on. But everyone does. Every human being has things they are great at and things that are difficult. People with Asperger's have many wonderful traits as well. They are extremely loyal and passionate about things that concern them. When a problem catches their eye, they will focus on solving it like no one else can. Aspies can excel at visual skills. They have great memory skills and are creative. People with Asperger's think outside the box of the neurotypical world. There are a few people you know who have Asperger's. Many suspect Bill Gates to have Asperger's. Temple Grandin has joked that NASA is a sheltered workshop for Aspies. Tony Atwood says that computers were developed by Aspies for Aspies. Two areas in our country with a high number of AS in Silicon Valley and Washington state, around Microsoft. Many families with a child diagnosed with AS are realizing that a parent or relative also fit the diagnoses. Many engineers and college professors are Aspies.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, Asperger's Syndrome can present some difficulties but with knowledge, understanding, and a sense of humor, life with an Aspie can be great.