

Asperger's syndrome

What is Asperger's syndrome?

This condition was first identified in 1944 by Hans Asperger. He described a group of children with autistic behaviour and thinking, who, generally, had good intellectual and linguistic abilities. They are defined as a discrete group in the classification systems of the World Health Association and the American Psychiatric Association, but there is controversy about whether the distinction can be made reliably. Typically, children with Asperger's syndrome acquire speech and linguistic structures, but have difficulty with the social use of language.

Tantam (1988) suggests that the term Asperger's syndrome is best reserved as a term to describe those who...

- use language freely, but fail to make adjustments to fit different social contexts or the needs of their listeners
- wish to be sociable even though their peer group tend to avoid them because of their apparently eccentric behaviour
- are conspicuously clumsy
- develop unusual interests in which they become deeply engrossed
- have problems in expressing themselves in ways such as their facial expression, gestures or posture.

These children often have semantic and pragmatic disorders, but not all children with semantic and pragmatic disorders can be classified as having Asperger's syndrome (Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 1999). The difficulties persist into adult life and can present particular problems during adolescence because of social isolation and awareness of being different from their peer group.

References

Attwood, T (1998), *Asperger's syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley

Botting, N, & Conti-Ramsden, G (1999), *Pragmatic language impairment without autism*. *Autism*, 3(4), 371–396

Cumine, V, Leach, J, & Stevenson, G (1998), *Asperger syndrome: A practical guide for teachers*. London: David Fulton.

Frith, U (1991), *Autism and Asperger syndrome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Sainsbury, C (2000), *Martian in the playground*. Bristol: Lucky Duck

Tantam, D (1988), *Annotation: Asperger's syndrome*. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 29(3), 245–255

Please note: Afasic does not hold copies of any referenced material. However, it may be obtained via academic libraries.

Other relevant Glossary Sheets

- Semantic-pragmatic disorders (5)
- Autism (7)

Other organisations which can help

National Autistic Society

393 City Road
London
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