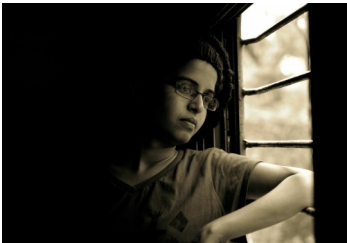




## Asperger's Syndrome: An Overview



Asperger's Syndrome is more about differences than it is about disability.

Asperger's Syndrome is popping up regularly in the media these days. From the lead character in Jodi Picoult's House Rules, to Dr. Spencer Reid and Sheldon Cooper on *Criminal Minds* and *Big Bang Theory* respectively, people with Asperger's seemed to be emerging from the shadows into the mainstream. Asperger's Syndrome (AS), named after the doctor who identified the condition, is a developmental disorder resembling autism. In general it is characterized by impaired social interaction, repetitive behaviors and activities and by normal language and cognitive development.

Lora Windsor, LCSW joked at a recent presentation, "If you've seen one person with Asperger's,

you've seen one person with Asperger's." Most have average or above intelligence; many would be described as "quirky" or "different" rather than disabled. But no two are alike. Asperger's is also a spectrum disorder that ranges from mild to severe.

Some AS characteristics include\*:

- Stilted or pedantic conversation style (The Professor)
  - Difficulty understanding the give and take of conversation
  - Literal interpretation of words
  - Low awareness of non-verbal cues
  - Difficulty perceiving and applying unwritten social rules
  - Rigid adherence to rules when flexibility is needed
  - In his/her own world
  - Strange or limited sense of humor
  - Highly sensitive to injustice
  - Naïve trust in others
  - Resistant to change
  - Difficulty distinguishing acquaintances from friends
- and understanding relational boundaries
- Anxiety, in some cases hypervigilance or paranoia
  - Shyness
  - Serious all the time
  - Immature manners
  - Tactless honesty or frankness
  - Limited range of highly developed interests
  - Exceptional long-term memory
  - Lack of "common sense"
  - Flat affect
  - Difficulty organizing and sequencing tasks
  - Black and white thinking
  - Messy and disorganized work space
  - Difficulty imagining the thoughts of others (putting oneself in another's shoes)

*\* No one person has all of the characteristics associated with AS. A professional evaluation is necessary to diagnose Asperger's Syndrome.*

### AS Strategies

1. Use visuals whenever possible to instruct or explain
2. Break down tasks into steps
3. Talk slowly. Pause between sentences
4. Don't force eye contact
5. Make the rules clear
6. Beware of overstimulation; keep environment simple
7. Rehearse and role play new or uncomfortable situations
8. Help them connect the dots between action and consequences
9. Use strengths and interests to find social niches
10. Help them organize and prioritize
11. Encourage social media as a way to communicate with peers
12. Help them see "gray" areas
13. Use straightforward language (no idioms, metaphors, sarcasm)

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## Caring Hearts/Helping Hands

News You Can Use to Change Your Community  
A Community Care Team Newsletter



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### RESOURCES

**Blazing Prairie Stars (Social Skills Groups) 630/365-5550**

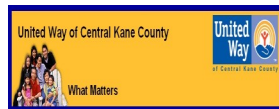
**Walburg & Associates (Therapy/Social Skills Groups) 630/845-9644**

**Heartland Counseling 630/443-9100**

**Family Counseling Service of Aurora 630/844-2662**

## Common Physical Manifestations of Asperger's

- Difficulty with balance; unusual gait stance and posture
- Gross or fine motor coordination problems
- Strong food preferences or aversions; limited food choices
- Self-injurious or disfiguring behaviors; nail biting
- Self-stimulatory behavior used to reduce anxiety
- Monotone vocal expression; limited use of inflection
- Difficulty maintaining eye contact
- Hypersensitivity to certain sounds, colors, lighting, odors and other stimuli
- Chronic sleep problems
- Low sensitivity to heat, cold and/or pain
- Poor personal hygiene and self-care
- Failure to observe the personal space of others
- 



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## Understanding the Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships

Authors Temple Grandin and Sean Barron know first hand the social land mines of living with Asperger's Syndrome. In their book, *Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships, Decoding Social Mysteries Through the Unique Perspectives of Autism*, they discuss 10 unwritten rules people with Asperger's need to know:

1. Rules are not Absolute. They are Situation-based and People-based.
2. Not Everything is Equally Important in the Grand Scheme of Things
3. Everyone in the World Makes Mistakes. It Doesn't Have to Ruin Your Day
4. Honesty is Different than Diplomacy

5. Being Polite is Appropriate in Any Situation
6. Not Everyone Who is Nice to Me is My Friend
7. People Act Differently in Public than They Do in Private
8. Know When You're Turning People Off
9. "Fitting In" is Often Tied to Looking and Sounding Like You Fit In
10. People are Responsible for Their Own Behaviors.

While these rules are intuitive to most people, they must be taught to persons with AS. Concrete examples and visuals (e.g. TV shows, videos) can help illustrate concepts that are difficult to grasp.

### Self-Affirmation Pledge of People with Asperger's Syndrome By Liane Holliday Willey\*

I am not defective. I am different.  
I will not sacrifice my self-worth for peer acceptance.  
I am a good and interesting person.  
I will take pride in myself.  
I am capable of getting along with society.  
I will ask for help when I need it.  
I am a person who is worthy of others' respect and acceptance.  
I will find a career interest what is well suited to my abilities and interests.  
I will be patient with those who need time to understand me.  
I am never going to give up on myself.  
I will accept myself for who I am.

\* Liane is a person with AS

