



Supporting friends with
Autism or Asperger
syndrome



Leaflet compiled by Kate Wall 2010

What is Asperger syndrome?

Asperger syndrome (AS) is a form of Autism which predominantly affects communication and social interaction.

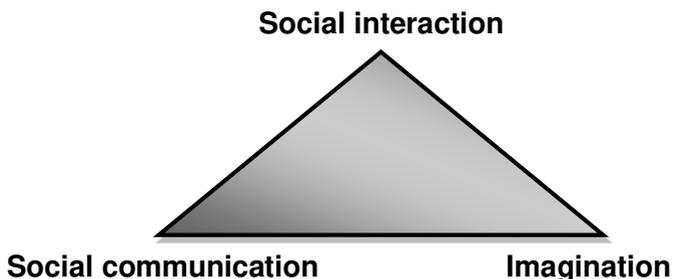
Yet whilst many people with autism may have learning problems and poor basic verbal communication skills those with AS are generally more fluent and are of average or above average intelligence. This enables the majority of adults with AS to progress through mainstream education and into further or higher education.

It is in Higher Education that further difficulties can come to light and it is therefore imperative that all their friends have a broad awareness of AS so you can offer useful support quickly and effectively, as guided by the Disability Support team.

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The 3 key areas of difficulty – known as the TRIAD OF IMPAIRMENTS



So what are the characteristics and what can you do?

- **Social interaction:**

Students with AS generally want to have friends and to be included in student life (academic and social) but may have difficulties

- understanding non-verbal signals, including facial expressions and gestures
- establishing relationships with others (eg. In group work and/or social situations)
- maintaining relationships as they do not understand the 'rules' of relationships
- appreciating the boundaries of interaction eg: being too close or touching inappropriately
- as they stand outside of a social group and may be perceived as being rude
- be excluded during social times eg: coffee breaks and meal breaks

As friends you can:

- *speak clearly and in shorter sentences when in 1:1 situations.*
- *be prepared to prompt and give clues when necessary*
- *support friendships, perhaps with other students*

- **Social communication:**

Students with AS generally want to engage in student communication (academic and social) but may have difficulties

- understanding the 'rules' of communication eg: may dominate a conversation or interrupt at inappropriate times or talk for long periods on a favoured topic without being aware others are bored
- speech may sound laboured or precise
- common speech may be learnt eg: Hello my name is xxx, what's your name?
- understanding metaphors or slang phrases such as "She ran like the wind" – as understanding can be literal!
- behaving inappropriately in lectures eg: shouting out or answering questions and excluding participation by others

As friends you can:

- *model conversation rules in 1:1 situations without losing patience*
- *inform them that they have said enough on a subject that is becoming laboured or give them a physical clue*
- *be patient if they take time to respond or talk in a precise manner*
- *avoid metaphors and slang phrases*
- *access support from the Disability Support team to advise or support your friend during lectures*

3 Imagination:

Students with AS may have difficulties:

- thinking in abstract ways
- accepting changes to routines
- be limited to specific favoured activities and be unable to think in other ways eg: enjoy playing pool but not ten-pin bowling

As friends you can:

- *model and discuss how we think in abstract ways*
- *ensure they know of any forthcoming changes eg: a room change or fire drill*
- *support student with academic work*



**Students with AS have the right to a university education and it is our responsibility to support them appropriately.
So let's make it happen!**

For more information:

Visit the National Autistic Society website: <http://www.autism.org.uk/>
Or read: Wall, K. (2007) *Education and Care for Adolescents and Adults with Autism*. London: Sage