

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

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Asperger's Disorder

Asperger's Disorder is the term for a specific type of pervasive developmental disorder which is characterized by problems in development of social skills and behavior. In the past, many children with Asperger's Disorder were diagnosed as having autism, another of the pervasive developmental disorders, or other disorders. While autism and Asperger's have certain similarities, there are also important differences. For this reason, children suspected of having these conditions require careful evaluation.

In general, a child with Asperger's Disorder functions at a higher level than the typical child with autism. For example, many children with Asperger's Disorder have normal intelligence. While most children with autism fail to develop language or have language delays, children with Asperger's Disorder are usually using words by the age of two, although their speech patterns may be somewhat odd.

Most children with Asperger's Disorder have difficulty interacting with their peers. They tend to be loners and may display eccentric behaviors. A child with Asperger's, for example, may spend hours each day preoccupied with counting cars passing on the street or watching only the weather channel on television. Coordination difficulties are also common with this disorder. These children often have special educational needs.

Although the cause of Asperger's Disorder is not yet known, current research suggests that a tendency toward the condition may run in families. Children with Asperger's Disorder are also at risk for other psychiatric problems including depression, attention deficit disorder, schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Child and adolescent psychiatrists have the training and expertise to evaluate pervasive developmental disorders like autism and Asperger's Disorder. They can also work with families to design appropriate and effective treatment programs. Currently, the most effective treatment involves a combination of psychotherapy, special education, behavior modification, and support for families. Some children with Asperger's Disorder will also benefit from medication.

The outcome for children with Asperger's Disorder is generally more promising than for those with autism. Due to their higher level of intellectual functioning, many of these children successfully finish high school and attend college. Although problems with social interaction and awareness persist, they can also develop lasting relationships with family and friends.

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