High Functioning Autism/Asperger’s Syndrome
Educational Strategies

Protect the student from developing a sense of inadequacy as a result of peer rejection. Help him/her better understand their limitations and directly teach strategies to help develop social skills and gain an understanding of subtle social rules. Understand that this student may be unable to cope with certain peer group situations. Carol Gray’s Social Stories curriculum is good, particularly the comic Strip Conversations. You may want to assess the individual’s understanding of subtle cues and social language through interview (Can you tell me the rules for your classroom? Why do we have rules in school?, etc.)

Build self-esteem by focusing on strengths and expanding upon them. Choose extracurricular activities that may be appropriate. Use these strengths to involve the student in the educational process.

Give direct attention to organizational skills. Give clear visual cues and step-by-step prompts (written to do lists). Teach the student to use lists to organize themselves.

Be as concrete as possible, use objective tests rather than essay. Vague questioning does not tend to work well.

Depersonalize behavior. Recognize unwanted behavior as a maladaptive response to situations where skills are lacking or anxiety becomes an issue. Understand that anxiety can cause extreme over reactions to seemingly small issues and using a confrontational correction strategy at times of high anxiety can actually increase the behavior and hinder the student’s ability to regain control.

Expand on preservative subject matter rather than refusing to listen to it. Use this seemingly narrow interest to actively engage the student in learning and interactive activities.

Use a tape recorder for an individual with low affective vocal tone so that he/she can recognize the issue and work on it. Video taping can also help a student work on recognizing non-verbal gestures and their own body language.

If the student is not getting a new concept or task, break it down into small concrete steps. Present the material both visually and verbally.

Because people with Asperger’s tend to misread social interactions and gestures, be aware that they may begin to feel victimized. This is particularly true with hall passing, and teasing or jokes.
Prepare your student for up-coming changes in the schedule. The use of a calendar is helpful for big events that may be anxiety producing (vacations, household guests, a big project, etc.).

Some students may engage in repeated questioning. Keep a journal of repetitive questions, the student’s question and your written response and refer the student to the journal if they ask. Recognize that repeated questions are often times a product of anxiety resulting from a need for predictability. Be patient with the student, this may be an adaptive response to the anxiety they are experiencing.

Close communication between home and school is essential since the student may not relay messages reliably. Again, because the student may misperceive such things as tone of voice or plays on words, they may feel they are being mistreated and report this to a parent or teacher.

Set the student up for some successful social interactions through the use of small groups and interactions where he/she can demonstrate talents.

Recognize possible problems in shifting attention from one event to another, especially from visual to auditory cues. Some research indicates that the person may be missing cues due to this slow shift of attention.

Be aware of any perceptual or sensory difficulties. Although these are more often seen in people with an autistic diagnosis, the distinction between autism and Asperger’s is often subtle and is debated within the field. As an educator, I have found it best to not make too many assumptions about the differences.

It is essential for teachers working with student(s) with Asperger’s Syndrome to have current information regarding the neuro-biological basis for observed behaviors. Students may end up being punished for behavior or habits that are actually neurological symptoms of their condition.

These students will almost never tell their teachers that they don’t understand. It is important to check-in to be sure he/she has it. A trained classroom aide is often needed to ensure the student does not get too far behind in the work.

Be aware of possible over-lapping neuro-biological disorders (Tourette Syndrome, Depression, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder).

Teaching students with Asperger’s can be a tremendously rewarding experience. Most students have incredible potential, but need an understanding and interested teacher to help them realize that potential.

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