

# AUTISM SPEAKS™

## *Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism Tool Kit*

*A tool kit to assist families in getting the  
critical information they need in the first 100  
days after an Asperger Syndrome or High Functioning Autism  
diagnosis.*

*Autism Speaks does not provide medical or legal advice or services. Rather, Autism Speaks provides general information about autism as a service to the community. The information provided in this kit is not a recommendation, referral or endorsement of any resource, therapeutic method, or service provider and does not replace the advice of medical, legal or educational professionals. This kit is not intended as a tool for verifying the credentials, qualifications, or abilities of any organization, product or professional. Autism Speaks has not validated and is not responsible for any information or services provided by third parties. You are urged to use independent judgment and request references when considering any resource associated with the provision of services related to autism*



# *About this Kit*

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*Autism Speaks would like to extend special thanks to the Advisory Committee for the time and effort that they put into reviewing the Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism Tool Kit.*

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# *Autism Speaks.™ Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism Tool Kit*

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
## Autism Speaks™ FAMILY SERVICES

### Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism Tool Kit

*Your child has normal cognitive abilities and has experienced normal language development, but has been diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome or High Functioning Autism, and you have asked for help. This is an important turning point in your journey. For some families, this may be the point when, after a long search for answers, you now have a name for something you didn't know what to call, but you knew existed. Many families report mixed feelings of sadness and relief when their child is diagnosed. You may feel completely overwhelmed. You may also feel relieved to know that the concerns you had for your child are valid. Whatever you feel, you should know that thousands of parents share this journey. You are not alone. There is help and reason to hope.*

*Now that you have the diagnosis, the question is: Where do you go from here? This handbook, part of Autism Speaks™ 100 Day Kit, focuses specifically on Asperger Syndrome (AS) and High Functioning Autism (HFA). It was created to help you make the best possible use of the next 100 days in the life of your child. It contains information and advice collected from trusted and respected experts on Asperger Syndrome /HFA and parents just like you.*

## Contact Us...



Ask for Help! Contact the Autism Response Team (ART). Our ART team members are specially trained to help families with the day-to-day challenges of living with Asperger Syndrome or High Functioning Autism. Contact ART for resources, support and information.

Call us at 888-AUTISM 2 (288-4762) or email [familyservices@autismspeaks.org](mailto:familyservices@autismspeaks.org).

More information... There is a wealth of information on the Autism Speaks web site. Visit [www.AutismSpeaks.org](http://www.AutismSpeaks.org)

*Share your comments. To share your comments on the kit - What was helpful? What additional information could be included? etc. - please email them to [100daykit@AutismSpeaks.org](mailto:100daykit@AutismSpeaks.org), with the word "feedback" in the subject line.*

# *What is Asperger Syndrome/HFA?*

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 The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), part of the National Institute of Health, defines Asperger Syndrome as:

A developmental disorder that is characterized by:

- repetitive routines or rituals,
- peculiarities in speech and language, such as speaking in an overly formal manner or in a monotone, or taking figures of speech literally,
- socially and emotionally inappropriate behavior and the inability to interact successfully with peers,
- problems with non-verbal communication, including the restricted use of gestures, limited or inappropriate facial expressions or a peculiar, stiff gaze,
- clumsiness and uncoordinated motor movements.


Below is the NINDS history of Asperger Syndrome, which we hope will help you to understand more about the disorder and what the diagnosis means for your child and your family:

In 1944, an Austrian pediatrician named Hans Asperger observed four children in his practice who had difficulty integrating socially. Although their intelligence appeared normal, the children lacked nonverbal communication skills, failed to demonstrate empathy with their peers, and were physically clumsy. Their way of speaking was either disjointed or overly formal, and their all-absorbing interest in a single topic dominated their conversations.

Asperger's observations, published in German, were not widely known until 1981, when an English doctor named Lorna Wing published a series of case studies of children showing similar symptoms, which she called "Asperger" syndrome. Wing's writings were widely published and popularized. AS became a distinct condition and diagnosis in 1992, when it was included in the tenth published edition of the World Health Organization's diagnostic manual, *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-10), and in 1994, it was added to the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV), the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic reference book.

Individuals who are diagnosed with autism or autism spectrum disorder who have normal cognitive abilities, and experienced no significant delay in acquiring language skills, are very similar to individuals with Asperger Syndrome. High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HFA) and Asperger Syndrome share similar symptoms and are helped by similar treatment approaches.

## *What are the Symptoms of Asperger Syndrome/HFA?*

 Oftentimes, Asperger Syndrome is not diagnosed until a child is school age. Unlike autism, AS can generally only be determined based on a child's social interactions. Children with Asperger Syndrome show typical language development and often an above average vocabulary. However, you may have noticed that when your child interacts with others, he or she might use language skills inappropriately or awkwardly. Because of regularly developing language skills, in the early stages, symptoms of AS may be hard to differentiate from those of other behavioral issues like attention deficit



hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). As a result, your child may have first been diagnosed with disorders such as ADHD, until the issues appear to be caused by more of an inability to socialize than an inability to focus.

The following is a list of symptoms that may present themselves in children with Asperger Syndrome:

- improper or very few social interactions
- "robotic" or repetitive speech
- average or below average nonverbal communication skills, yet average or above average verbal communication skills
- tendency to discuss self rather than others
- inability to understand issues or phrases that are considered "common sense"
- lack of eye contact or reciprocal conversation
- obsession with specific unique topics
- one-sided conversations
- awkward movements and/or mannerisms

A very obvious and distinct indicator of Asperger Syndrome is preoccupation with one particular issue, from simple things like refrigerators or weather, to complex topics like President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Great Depression. They become so attentive to these topics that they strive to learn every possible fact and detail, and as a result become incredible experts. Children with AS might initiate one-way conversations with others by speaking only about the facts related to their particular topic of interest. They may not like the idea of discussing anything else, or may be unable to listen to and understand the responses of others. Your child may not be aware that his or her audience may no longer be listening, or may not be in the topic of discussion.

Another symptom of Asperger Syndrome is an inability to understand the actions, words or behaviors of other people. Individuals with AS very often don't understand humor or the implications of particular phrases or actions of other people. Subtle gestures or expressions such as a smile, a frown or a "come here" motion may not phase children with AS because they are unable to see the relationship between these nonverbal communication methods, and verbal methods like speech and language. Because they are often incapable of understanding these nonverbal cues, the social world can seem very confusing and overwhelming to these individuals. To compound the problem, people with Asperger Syndrome have difficulty seeing things from another person's perspective. This inability leaves them unable to predict or understand other people's actions. Although not universal, it is common for people with AS to have difficulty regulating their emotions.

Individuals with Asperger Syndrome may have an awkward or peculiar way of speaking. They might speak extremely loudly, constantly in a monotone, or with a particular accent. These individuals lack understanding of social interactions, and as a result, are unaware that their topics of discussion or method of speaking might be inappropriate or awkward, particularly in specific situations. For example, children who speak very loudly might enter a church and not understand that they can no longer speak at the same volume.



Another typical sign of Asperger Syndrome may be awkward movements, or a delay in motor skills. They may have an abnormal walk or a poor sense of coordination. Though these individuals might be very intelligent and might display expert language skills, they may not be able to catch a ball or understand how to bounce on a trampoline, despite the many attempts of others to teach them.

It is important to note that not all individuals with Asperger Syndrome display each of these symptoms, and that the presence and severity of each symptom is likely to vary between individuals with the same diagnosis. While displaying some or all of these symptoms, each child with autism also possesses many unique gifts.

### *What Causes Asperger Syndrome/HFA?*

■ It is important to keep in mind that autism spectrum disorders are not one disorder with one cause. Rather, the term represents a group of related disorders with many different causes. In most instances, AS/HFA is caused by a combination of genetic risk factors that may interact with environmental risk factors. Many genes likely contribute to Asperger Syndrome/HFA. These genes are believed to interact with environmental factors. A great deal of research is currently focused on identifying how both genetic and environmental risk factors contribute to autism.

There may be some common misconceptions about people with Asperger Syndrome/HFA. AS/HFA cannot be caused by the way a person was brought up, bad parenting, or emotional issues a child may have experienced at some point early on. Asperger Syndrome/HFA is a neurobiological disorder, and not the result of issues stemming from the child's life experiences.



## *Strengths and Challenges*

Created by Stephen Shore

*It is important to note that this is a general list. For every strength and challenge, you will often find examples in people that prove the opposite. For example, clumsiness is a common challenge. However, some with Asperger Syndrome have significant strengths in movement and balance, perhaps as a dancer.*

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
Attention to detail	Grasping the "big" picture
Often highly skilled in a particular area	Uneven set of skills
Deep study resulting in encyclopedic knowledge on areas of interest	Difficulty in developing motivation to study areas not of interest
Tendency to be logical (helpful in decision-making where emotions may interfere)	Difficulty perceiving emotional states of other
Less concern for what others may think of them (can be a strength and a challenge). Also known as independent thinking. Often results in novel "big picture" insights due to different ways of looking at things, ideas, and concepts.	Perceiving unwritten rules of social interaction. But can learn these rules through direct instruction and social narratives social as Power Cards (Gagnon, 2004)
Usually visual processing (thinking in pictures or video)	Difficulty processing in non-favorite modalities such as aural, kinesthetic, etc.
Often very verbal (Propensity of giving detailed descriptions may be useful in providing directions to lost persons)	Difficulty parsing out and summarizing important information for a conversation
Direct communication	Sensory integration problems where input may register unevenly, distorted, and difficulty in screening out background noise
Loyalty	Generalization of skills and concepts
Honesty	Difficulty expressing empathy in ways that others expect or understand
Nonjudgemental listening	Executive functioning resulting in difficulties planning long-term tasks
Average to above average intelligence	





# *Executive Functioning and Theory of Mind*

Individuals with Asperger Syndrome/HFA may often face challenges related to their ability to interpret certain social cues and skills. They may have difficulty processing large amounts of information and relating to others. Two core terms relating to these challenges are Executive Functioning and Theory of Mind. Executive Functioning includes skills such as organizing, planning, sustaining attention, and inhibiting inappropriate responses. Theory of Mind refers to one's ability to perceive how others think and feel, and how that relates to oneself. Both of these issues can impact the behavior of individuals with AS.

Difficulties in the area of Executive Functioning can manifest themselves in many different ways. Some individuals pay attention to minor details, but fail to see how these details fit into a bigger picture. Others have difficulty with complex thinking that requires holding more than one train of thought simultaneously. Others have difficulty maintaining their attention, or organizing their thoughts and actions. Executive Functioning difficulties can also be associated with poor impulse control. Temple Grandin once said: "I cannot hold one piece of information in my mind while I manipulate the next step in the sequence." Individuals with AS often lack the ability to use skills related to executive functioning like planning, sequencing and self-regulation.

Theory of Mind can be summed up as a person's inability to understand and identify the thoughts, feelings and intentions of others. Individuals with Asperger Syndrome/HFA can encounter have difficulty recognizing and processing the feelings of others, which is sometimes referred to as "mind-blindness". As a result of this mind-blindness, people with AS may not realize if another person's behaviors are intentional or unintentional. This challenge often leads others to believe that the individual with AS does not show empathy or understand them, which can create great difficulty in social situations.

Theory of Mind deficits can oftentimes have a large impact on individuals with AS. In the book *Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments* by Brenda Smith Myles and Jack Southwick, the authors illustrate social deficits caused by theory of mind:

1. *Difficulty explaining ones behaviors*
2. *Difficulty understanding emotions*
3. *Difficulty predicting the behavior or emotional state of others*
4. *Problems understanding the perspectives of others*
5. *Problems inferring the intentions of others*
6. *Lack of understanding that behavior impacts how others think and/or feel*
7. *Problems with joint attention and other social conventions*
8. *Problems differentiating fiction from fact*



Ozonoff, Dawson, and McPartland, in their book *A Parent's Guide to Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism*, offer several suggestions for helping children with AS/HFA succeed in the classroom. To address challenges in the area of Executive Functioning, they offer the following suggestions:

- Use a weekly homework log that is sent from school to home and back, keeping all parties informed of work due and progress.
- Assignment checklists can be used to break large, often overwhelming tasks into manageable unites.
- Day planners, including PDAs, can help organize your child.
- A posted classroom schedule.
- Allocation of sufficient time for instructions, repetition of instructions, and individual student assistance.
- Preferential desk placement near teacher and away from distractions





# Diagnostic Overview

Asperger Syndrome and HFA are terms applied to the high functioning end of what is known as the spectrum of pervasive developmental disorders, or the autism spectrum. Asperger Syndrome is a relatively new category, as it was officially recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) for the first time in 1994. In the future, it is possible that the DSM may combine AS and HFA into one category, as they are very similar and the treatment approaches for each are the same. Since AS/HFA shows a range or spectrum of symptom severity, many individuals who might meet criteria for that diagnosis are viewed as "unusual" or "awkward," or are misdiagnosed with other conditions such as Attention Deficit Disorder.

## *DSM-IV Criteria for a Diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome*

*A. Qualitative impairment in social interaction, as manifested by at least two of the following:*

- 1. marked impairments in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interaction*
- 2. failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level*
- 3. a lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people (e.g. by a lack of showing, bringing, or pointing out objects of interest to other people)*
- 4. lack of social or emotional reciprocity*

*B. Restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities, as manifested by at least one of the following:*

- 1. encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus*
- 2. apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals*
- 3. stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)*
- 4. persistent preoccupation with parts of objects*

*C. The disturbance causes clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning*

*D. There is no clinically significant general delay in language (e.g., single words used by age 2 years, communicative phrases used by age 3 years)*


*E. There is no clinically significant delay in cognitive development or in the development of age-appropriate self-help skills, adaptive behavior (other than social interaction), and curiosity about the environment in childhood*

*F. Criteria are not met for another specific Pervasive Developmental Disorder or Schizophrenia (DSM IV, p. 77)*



# Diagnosing Asperger Syndrome/HFA

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 Presently, there is no medical test for Asperger Syndrome/HFA. A diagnosis is based on observed behavior and educational and psychological testing. As the symptoms of AS/HFA vary, so do the routes to obtaining a diagnosis. You may have raised questions with your pediatrician yourself. Some children are identified as having developmental delays before obtaining a diagnosis of autism or AS and may already receive some Early Intervention or Special Education services. Unfortunately, parents' concerns are sometimes not taken seriously by their doctor and an accurate diagnosis is delayed. *Autism Speaks* and other autism-related organizations are working hard to educate parents and physicians so that children with autism spectrum disorders are identified as early as possible.

Many issues can commonly arise when trying to diagnose a child with Asperger Syndrome/HFA. These difficulties can occur since children with AS/HFA are usually able to function very well in many aspects of their lives, and exhibit only a few peculiar or different behaviors. You may have noticed that your child has advanced skills in certain areas and may be very smart. These observations can make it more challenging to get an early diagnosis for your child and as a result, may delay the process of getting the help and assistance you need. As you continue to take steps toward helping your child receive the proper diagnosis, it is important to explore different options and reach out for support.

Your role as the parent is crucial in helping to diagnose your child with Asperger Syndrome/HFA, since you are the one observing your child's growth and development on a daily basis. If certain behaviors develop, such as preoccupations, unusual habits, favorite activities, it may be a good time to visit your child's pediatrician. If your child's pediatrician is concerned, you will be referred to a specialist who will evaluate your child. The specialist will usually take a very detailed history of your child, including his or her development, language skills and various aspects of their social behavior.

When a doctor is trying to assess your child and investigate the possibility that your child may be on the autism spectrum, he or she will take the time to ask about social issues and development. It is important for the doctor to know if there have been problems in school, issues with making friends, or struggles with general social interactions. This evaluation will show areas where your child may struggle, but also areas where your child exhibits numerous strengths.

*"This experience comes with many challenges that we must surmount in order to lovingly support our children and to assimilate their acute sensory sensitivities into a world that is oftentimes overwhelmingly intolerant of diversity. But it also comes with a myriad of gifts if you can be open to seeing this perspective. Your child requires you in their life; and indeed, dozens of parents have told me they are better people than they would've been had they not been blessed to raise this child. Rest assured, given the proper respect, appreciation, and opportunity, your child will change the world in ways that are right and true and good and kind."*

— William Stillman, *Empowered Autism Parenting*



# *How are Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism Different?*

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■ Once your child receives a diagnosis, you will have many questions and be looking for the answers. One question that you may have is how is AS different and similar to other autism spectrum disorders? Asperger Syndrome exists as part of the autism spectrum but differs in early development of language from classic autism and other pervasive developmental disorders. After the diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder, it is important to explain and understand both similarities and differences between disorders on the spectrum.

Asperger Syndrome and high functioning autism (HFA) are often referred to as the same diagnosis. While they currently exist as two separate diagnoses, there is an ongoing debate about whether that is necessary. It is possible that, in the future, they may be combined into one category. Individuals with HFA and AS have average or above average intelligence but may struggle with issues related to social interaction and communication. The diagnosis of either High Functioning Autism or Asperger Syndrome can oftentimes feel frustrating to a parent and the child as it may seem that the terms are not clearly defined. It is essential to remember that both AS and HFA do present themselves largely the same way, and as a result may be treated in a similar way. The primary difference is that a diagnosis of HFA requires that, early in development, the child had delayed language whereas in AS, the child did not show a significant delay in language development.

## *How Asperger Syndrome is Similar to Classic Autism*

■ According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), children with Asperger Syndrome find it difficult to identify and express their feelings, just like those with HFA. They find it challenging to connect with others, often don't hold eye contact and have trouble reading other people's faces and gestures. Many children with AS flap their hands, a behavior often associated with classic autism; speak without much emotion (or have otherwise unusual speech patterns), need to follow schedules rigidly, and are intensely, even obsessively, interested in one specific subject, so much that they become veritable experts in that field. They also exhibit sensitivities to various stimuli, from sounds to clothing to food items.

## *How do AS/HFA Diagnoses differ from Classic Autism?*

■ Compared with classic autism, children with Asperger Syndrome/HFA have IQs that fall in the normal or even superior range. To many, they may seem just like other children but not quite: children with AS are socially awkward in a manner that's not easily understood.

This explains why healthcare providers may miss seeing Asperger Syndrome/HFA symptoms in their young patients, or may misdiagnose it completely. The late onset of complex social skills, such as peer interaction, also explains why some parents don't seek help until much later compared to those whose kids display a more profound or more obvious set of symptoms from a very young age.





# *How Will I Deal with the Diagnosis? How Will this Affect My Family?*

Even though it is your child who has the Asperger Syndrome/HFA diagnosis, it is important to acknowledge that autism spectrum disorders “happen” to the whole family. They affect every member of the household. Asperger Syndrome can be difficult to deal with, both for the person diagnosed, and the family. It can lead to many changes in the family, both inside and outside the home. Luckily, with heightened awareness, there are many places to go for support and help. As you move forward with your child and your family as a whole, the staff at the Mayo Clinic has come up with the following advice to help you on your journey:

- *Learn about the disorder. Just 15 years ago, many pediatricians hadn't heard of Asperger Syndrome/HFA. Now, there are numerous books and Web sites dedicated to the disorder. Do some research so that you better understand your child's challenges and the range of services in your school district and state that may help.*
- *Learn about your child. The signs and symptoms of Asperger Syndrome/HFA vary for each child, and young children have a hard time explaining their behaviors and challenges. But, with time and patience, you'll learn which situations and environments may cause problems for your child and which coping strategies work. Keeping a diary and looking for patterns may help.*
- *Find a team of trusted professionals. You'll need to make important decisions about your child's education and treatment. Find a team of teachers and therapists who can help evaluate the options in your area and explain the federal regulations regarding children with disabilities.*
- *Help others help your child. Most children with Asperger Syndrome/HFA have no visible sign of disability, so you may need to alert coaches, relatives and other adults to your child's special needs. Otherwise, a well-meaning coach may spend time lecturing your child on "looking at him while he's talking" — something that can be very difficult for a child with Asperger Syndrome/HFA.*
- *Help your child turn his or her obsession into a passion. The tendency to fixate on a particular narrow topic is one of the hallmarks of Asperger Syndrome/HFA, and it can be annoying to those who must listen to incessant talk about the topic every day. But a consuming interest can also connect a child with Asperger Syndrome/HFA to schoolwork and social activities. In some cases, kids with Asperger syndrome can even turn their childhood fascination into a career or profession.*



## *Explaining the Diagnosis to Your Child*

■ According to experts, it is essential for parents to explain the diagnosis to their children. Oftentimes, this can help put children on a path to self-acceptance, and can allow them the time to understand and ask questions. With no knowledge of their diagnosis, children with Asperger Syndrome can often compare themselves to others and come to unfounded conclusions about themselves and their own well-being.

Children younger than eight years of age often do not think they are different from their peers, so the bigger picture of a developmental disorder may be too complex for them to understand. When talking to your child, remember to use age appropriate words and to think about it from his or her perspective, in order to improve the communication between the two of you. It can help to talk to your child about being an individual and explain that differences exist between all people. Using play, and sometimes books, can also aid in helping children with AS to better understand themselves and their diagnosis. Be sure to emphasize your child's strengths as well as his or her areas of challenge. It is helpful to point out that everyone has areas of strength and weakness.

## *Telling Family Members*

■ The following article, adapted from *Does My Child Have Autism?*, by Wendy L. Stone, Ph.D., provides some helpful information for talking to your parents and close family members about the autism or AS diagnosis.

*Reactions vary widely. But whatever reaction you get, it will be very important to educate your parents about the nature of autism after you have told them about the diagnosis. To begin your discussion, you might talk about specific behaviors. For example:*

*"You know those behaviors we've been confused about for so long? Well, now we have a name for them and an explanation for why they occur. Howie doesn't act the way he does because he's spoiled or because he's shy or because he doesn't like us – he acts that way because he has autism. Autism explains why he doesn't speak or use gestures and why he doesn't seem to understand what we say. It explains why he's not as interested in interacting with us as the other children in the family have been and why he plays with spoons and bottles instead of toys. I know this is upsetting news for all of us. But the good news is that the disorder has been diagnosed early, and there are a lot of things we can do to help him. He'll be starting some therapies soon, and I'll be learning about things I can do to help him at home. I know that you will need some time to think about all of this. But if you have any questions as we begin his therapy, I'll be glad to try my best to answer them. I know we're all hoping for the best outcome possible." After the initial conversation about this diagnosis, continue to keep your other children and your extended family in the information loop.*



## Telling Others

■ The following article from the book *Overcoming Autism*, by Lynn Kern Koegel, Ph.D. and Claire LaZebnik, offers a suggestion for how to tell people, and explains why for some people, it can make life easier for you and your friends.

*You should, you know. Tell people. You don't have to walk up to strangers on the street or anything, but confide in the people who love you. That was one thing we did right: we told our families and our friends right away. First we called them, and then we copied a good comprehensive article someone wrote about autism and annotated it with specifics about Andrew, and we mailed it out to everyone we knew. (You could do the same things with sections from this book, by the way.) None of our good friends pulled away from us because our kid had autism. Just the opposite – our friends and families rallied around us in amazing ways and have continued to cheer Andrew's progress on year after year. In all honesty, telling people what we were going through only made our lives easier. Before then, we worried that Andrew's occasionally aberrant behavior was off-putting. But once he had a formal diagnosis, everyone cut us a lot of slack, and instead of wondering what the hell was wrong with us as parents, most people we knew admitted to a newfound respect for us for dealing with so much. Real friends don't love you more for being successful or less for having problems. If anything, it works the opposite way – we're all so busy that sometimes we forget to stay in touch with friends when everything's fine for them, but we rush forward when they need us. Now is the time to take advantage of that. Talk your friends' ears off, complain, bitch and moan to them. You're dealing with a huge challenge, take advantage of every minor plus it has to offer.*

## Telling Peers

■ Talking with peers and other students is crucial to helping a child with AS become more comfortable in school or social settings. If peers are aware of their classmate with AS and understand the reasons behind their sometimes odd behavior, this will increase acceptance and limit bullying or taunting. It is important to explain Asperger Syndrome to children in a way that they will best understand their friend or classmate. For example, talk about the fact that many of us have challenges. While one classmate might be unable to see and might need glasses as a result, this other child has trouble in social situations and needs support as a result. It may help to identify one or two peers who can serve as "buddies" to help your child feel more comfortable in school.

Stephen Shore developed a four-step process for disclosing AS, which he has found effective in a number of settings. In essence, it's a tool for placing a child's AS in context, and helping others to understand that AS is not a "handicap," but rather a collection of strengths and challenges. Through accommodations and support, people with AS can not only succeed but can even thrive.





*Start by delineating your child's strengths and challenges. Use the word "challenges" instead of "weaknesses" because you can address challenges. If Joe's been in class for a little while, a parent might say "Joey is very good at following the rules. When there's a change in the schedule, though, you'll see Joey get a little anxious."*

*Try to find a strength that your child uses to accommodate for a challenge. For example, during lecture parts of class, your child might use a computer to take notes. A parent might say "Joey finds that writing by hand is very tough, so this is how he takes notes."*

*Talk about other people's characteristics to place your child in a broader context. A parent might say, "Joey has these strengths; other people have other strengths. We all try to build on our strengths to lead to productive lives."*

*Lastly, bring out the label. Explain that AS is a set of traits, strengths and challenges, and that doctors and scientists have identified these characteristics as Asperger syndrome.*

## ***Join a Support Group***

■ Consider joining a support group. It may be helpful to listen or talk to people who have been or are going through a similar experience. Support groups can be great sources of information about what services are available in your area and who provides them. You may have to try more than one to find a group that feels right to you. You may find you aren't a "support group kind of person." For many parents in your situation, support groups provide valuable hope, comfort and encouragement.

