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Revised Report

WHAT EVERY AUTISTIC OR ASPERGER'S SYNDROME CHILD WOULD WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND

As a parent with a high functioning Asperger's syndrome child, it has been drawn to my attention that there is a growing population of children and adults with a form of Autism. It is becoming more prevalent in today's society. There are many who do not have a clear understanding of what Autism is, or even the different spectrums there are; Asperger's is just one of them. Some are diagnosed with high functioning autism (HFA), while others are diagnosed with Asperger's (AS) syndrome.

Asperger's is a lifelong disability that affects how a person makes sense of the world around them and how they process information. Its conditions vary in each ASD person, but all seem to have some common ground. It really is a hidden disability, meaning you can't tell that someone has the condition from their outward appearance. Most commonly, the ASD individual would want you to know they have challenges with social skills making friendships, and social interaction such as conversations.

High functioning Autism and Asperger's are both parts of the 'autism spectrum'. The main difference between the two is thought to be in language development when they are younger. (Lawson, Wendy)

As soon as we meet a person, we make judgments about them. From their facial expression, tone of voice and body language, we can usually determine if they are happy, sad or angry and respond accordingly. Those with Asperger's syndrome can find it harder to read the signals that most of us take

for granted. They have difficulty reading between the lines. This in turn creates difficulty in communicating and interacting with each other; many who are interacting with these people with Autism disabilities are unaware of this at times invisible disability. This causes these children with Asperger's to feel anxiety, confusion, anger and depression.

While there are similarities with Autism, those with Asperger's have fewer problems with speaking and are often of average, or above average intelligence. Typically they do not have the accompanying learning disabilities associated with Autism, but they may have specific learning difficulties such as poor handwriting, understanding other's feelings, or fitting in socially with the right types of support and behavior management. Many with Asperger's can lead full and independent lives that do not impair them. (Lawson, Wendy. "Autism and Asperger's Syndrome: An Introduction, 2011)

Another thing that a child or adult with Asperger's would want you to be aware of is that behavior is their way of communicating. All behavior occurs for a reason. It tells you even when their words can't just how they perceive what is happening around them. Negative behavior usually means that they are overwhelmed by disordered sensory systems, so they cannot communicate their wants or needs effectively.

Asperger's or Autism individuals would want you to never assume anything, without factual backup, assumption is merely a guess. They may not always know or understand the rules of life and getting along with others, such as in a classroom because they only "heard" the rule, but did not comprehend them.

Other ideas and concepts of an HFA or ASD child would want you to look for sensory discomfort first. A lot of their resistant behaviors come from their sensory discomfort. One example is fluorescent lighting, which has shown over and over again to be a major problem for children. The "hum" sound it produces is very disturbing to their hypersensitive hearing, and the pulsing nature of the light can distort

their visual perception, making objects in the room appear to be in constant movement. (Kingsley, Jessica. “The adolescent and the adult neuro-diversity handbook” pp115)

Sounds such as raising the pitch or volume of your voice with an ASD child only causes overstimulation; they hear only the yelling, not the words. Sarcasm and mimicking embarrasses them as well. It’s important as a parent raising a child with ASD to know that bringing up past events, or invoking a double standard, or even comparing them to another sibling doesn’t help. I have found this as a parent with an ASD child, it only causes angry and episodes to go into an episode of fits and yelling and pointing the finger back at you that you are the bad parent to put them in that place to begin with.

When there is a type of criticism or guidance to their behavior, it should be don’t gently. Disciplining them when they are angry, distraught, shut down, anxious or otherwise they will not be able to interact with you. Basically showing them a better way to handle a situation next time such as giving choices that are both acceptable behaviors. (Zaks, Z. “Life and love: positive strategies for autistic adults, pp 87)

Something that I have personally worked with on with my son by offering options has decreased the anxiety and helped him to respond to what is expected of him. Setting a timer when you want a task done is also another good way to motivate the ASD child to do the work that you would want them to responsibly do.

Offering real choices, such as “Do you want..?” unless you are willing to accept no for an answer. “No” may be an honest answer to, “Do you want to read out loud now?”, or “Would you like to do this?” It’s hard for them to trust you when choices are not really choices at all. Autistic children have limited choices, which is why it can be harder for them to feel confident about what they say and do. Giving them choices will help them to learn of the appropriate behaviors, but to also understand that there will be times when they can’t do something they want such as play a video game right then. When that happens, they won’t get as frustrated and upset if they understand why.

There are no inherent limits on achievement for those with ASD. They can sense far more than they can communicate. The number one thing they can sense is whether we as their parents, teachers, leaders, and friends are there for them. Encouragement to them is everything and essential to their well being in succeeding in this world. Many children with ASD who are now adults have some interesting stories to tell you, they are real and some have gone on to be huge success stories.

From the words of Temple Grandin, the Autistic woman about whom a television movie was recently made, “genius itself can be considered an abnormality”. (Grandin, Temple. “Using Consequences and Rewards to Improve Behavior”. Dec 2011 Digest)

Understanding those with ASD or HFA and managing their behaviors will help improve your relationship with them, and you just may come to find out that they are amazing people with abilities that you and I may not even comprehend!