

Special Connections

A newsletter connecting our Special Kids, Families and Schools

Asperger's Syndrome from A Student's Point of View

Claire Thorsen, MS

Asperger's syndrome is a neurobiological disability that is within the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Individuals with Asperger's differ from those with Autism in that they have average or better intelligence and most learn to speak before age three. Many individuals with autism are non-verbal. A young man with Asperger's Syndrome dictated the remainder of this article that is in quotes to help us better understand his world.

"Hi, I'm in the tenth grade this year. I often go to Mrs. Fritz's special education room to work on my assignments, study for tests, or just "chill" out. Mrs. Fritz and I make "plans" to keep me from getting into trouble. I learn plans quickly and don't get into trouble as much as I used to. My problems usually start when something changes and I don't know what to do."

Students with Asperger's can be argumentative, rigid and demanding.

"Since I don't like change, I have a hard time in some of my classes, especially when there is a substitute. Mrs. Fritz has talked with the teachers, principals and substitutes and now I can go by the office and see if there is a substitute. If so, I leave the classroom and go quietly to my special classroom or the gym to "get in control" and finish my work. Exercise really helps me."

Students with Asperger's frequently have a preoccupation with certain subjects.

"Some of my teachers know I am smart and help me do a great job in my subjects. Most subjects are easy as long as I have structure, clear directions, a daily schedule and another student's notes. Every day, I copy my assignments off the board. The teachers re-direct me if they see I'm confused or agitated. Since I'm smart and I don't make many mistakes. I don't like people to correct me in front of the class, especially, if they do it repeatedly and make a scene. That upsets me! One time I slammed

down my books and picked up my chair because I was mad. The teacher had the students leave and sent me to the office. I was really in trouble. Mrs. Fritz told me to pay attention to my feelings. If I start feeling "fiery" inside, I should leave the classroom and go to her room before I explode."

The two disabilities are similar in that social rules and interactions are not understood and consequently making friends is difficult. Empathy and perspective taking do not develop without intense training and application..

Claire Thorsen, MS, has served individuals with special needs as a speech pathologist, special education supervisor, college instructor and consultant in residential, hospital, clinic, and public school facilities in Illinois and Indiana since 1972. As a statewide consultant she is called upon to serve as an expert witness on autism. She directs a state initiative to train parents and educators in the art of facilitation. Claire frequently serves as a neutral facilitator for ARD meetings and has been a nationwide trainer of the 4GL School's Facilitated ARD training for four years.

"I've always had trouble making friends, until high school. Now, four boys let me hang with them. However, they do get mad at me because I don't consider their feelings or opinions before I say or do things. This really doesn't make any sense to me."

Individuals with Asperger's know they are different, but are willing to try to meet social expectations with our support.

"I know what I want to do and how I want to do it; so, what's the problem? My teacher said that I was having difficulty understanding social rules and that all my friends didn't think like me. We developed some rules to help me get along with and keep my friends. I wrote the rules down and now review them every morning and at noon."

Sensory/motor difficulties are present for people with Asperger's and Autism. These difficulties result in poor coordination, writing and sensory management.

"For fun, I run track and I swim. My mother didn't want me to be in sports. Since I have Asperger's and am a large boy, she was afraid the guys would make fun of me. Now, I have been helping the team win, and they don't bother me any more than any body else."

"In two years, I want to go to college and learn more about computers. My counselor is looking for some colleges that have programs for students with Asperger's Syndrome. I'm pretty excited about that."

Cy-Fair ISD

School Notes

Should you have any questions regarding your child and/or special education services, you may contact the Diagnostician or High School Support Specialist at your child's campus.

There may be times when you need to contact the district's special education office.

The contact information is as follows:

Jane Flinn, Director of Special Education
10300 Jones Road, Houston TX 77065
Phone: 281-897-6416
Fax: 281-897-6403
Email: jane.flinn@cfisd.net -or-

Nadine Fidler, Assistant Superintendent
Phone: 281-897-6416
Fax: 281-897-6403
Email: nadine.fidler@cfisd.net

ChildFind

The Cy-Fair ISD provides support services for students with disabilities residing within the district. Through Child Find efforts, eligible children, birth to 21, may be identified for needed services. Anyone who has a child or knows of a child who may qualify for services should call the Special Education Department (281-897-6400) or the child's home campus for information.

Education Service Center

The state of Texas is divided into 20 regions served by Education Service Centers. Our Education Service Center is Region 4 and is located in Houston. Region 4 has staff trained in special education who may be a resource to parents. The telephone number of the special education department at Region 4 is 713-462-7708.

The next featured article will be about "Nutrition and Learning".

What is AYP?

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the term **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)** Act of 2001 uses to explain that your child's school has met state reading and math goals. Your school district's report card will let you know whether or not your child's school has made AYP. Each state sets an annual target for AYP, which indicates the minimum percentage of students that must achieve grade level standards in math and reading as well as graduation. The law requires states to set AYP targets that apply to "all students" including each major student subgroup. Students with disabilities or English language learners may comprise a subgroup. If a major student subgroup misses the AYP target, the school or school district does not make AYP.

One of the main principles behind AYP is that all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic background, should be proficient in reading and math. In order to achieve this objective, the federal government has mandated that 100% of students perform at or above grade level standards on state reading and math assessments by 2014.

However, the "progress" in Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) does not necessarily recognize schools' efforts in helping individual students to improve from one grade to the next. For example, low performing schools in high-poverty areas may have to achieve a rate of progress that is more than double that of the highest performing schools.

To Modify or To Accommodate, That Is The Question

Ginger Sewell

Children gain confidence as they become more competent and they become more competent as they gain confidence.

It is our responsibility to carefully weigh the options for our children based on their specific learning needs. Do they need accommodations or modifications? Which will give them the confidence they need to increase their competence or the competence needed to increase their confidence?

Modifications are changes in the delivery, content, or instructional level of any subject matter or assessment. Modifications lower expectations for the student, thus, creating a different standard for students with disabilities than for those without disabilities. Modifications change an assessment so that it no longer measures what it was designed to measure. Modifications are developed formally within the IEP process and are based on individual needs of your child.

Accommodations provide different ways for students to gain information or communicate their knowledge back to the teacher. Accommodations do not lower the expectations for students. Accommodations do not create a different standard for students. They make adjustments to the manner in which material is presented or tested to ensure students have equal access to the standard curriculum.

Accommodations do not change the curriculum. Accommodations do not change the material that is tested. With accommodations students learn the same material as other students but perhaps, in a different way. With accommodations students are tested on the same material as other students. Tests measure what they are designed to test.

Careful thought and preplanning allow us to provide our students with the appropriate accommodations or modifications. Students that have modifications when an accommodation would allow them to progress through a standard curriculum are penalized and suffer in acquiring competence and thus confidence. Students that have accommodations when a modification is more appropriate are penalized and suffer in acquiring confidence and thus competence.

Ginger Sewell is the parent of a young adult with a disability and a former Director of Special Education. Currently an educational consultant, she is the recipient of both the Parent of the Year and Professional of the Year awards from the Learning Disabilities Association