

ASPERGER'S SYNDROME



Introduction

Asperger's syndrome is considered to be an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Such disorders include Asperger's syndrome in adults and Autism in childhood. These conditions affect social interaction, communication and an individual's interests and their behaviour.



A lifelong disability

Asperger's syndrome is a life-long disability, often initially presenting in childhood. It affects how you make sense of the world when you are required to relate to other people, both at home and work.

Difficulties experienced by Asperger's sufferers

Individuals who suffer with Asperger's are often of normal or above normal intelligence. They often have learning difficulties and many also suffer from Dyslexia, Dyspraxia or ADHD.

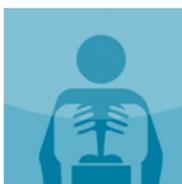
People who suffer from Asperger's syndrome find it hard to pick up the visual clues in communication, such as a person's facial expression, their body language or their tone of voice. This can lead to communication difficulties.

They often have difficulty understanding gestures or knowing when to start or finish a conversation. People with Asperger's syndrome have difficulty maintaining friendships and often fail to understand jokes or sarcasm.

Because people with Asperger's syndrome have difficulty understanding social rules or etiquette this often leads to behavioural issues and embarrassing situations. In the workplace, individuals suffering with Asperger's syndrome can find colleagues unpredictable or confusing and as a result become withdrawn or behave inappropriately.

There are approximately 500,000 people with Asperger's syndrome in the United Kingdom. That equates to 1 in 100. Men are more affected than women and unfortunately there is no cure or any specific treatment for the condition.

Individuals suffering with Asperger's syndrome have a limited range of activities. They often become obsessive and they experience sensory difficulties with noise and light.



How to assist and support a colleague with aspect syndrome at work

Employees with Asperger's syndrome thrive on routine. They feel comfortable with routine and find changes in routine, or a role that does not allow them to build their own routine, a challenge.

Employees with Asperger's require clear, unambiguous instructions phrased in short sentences. It is important when speaking to somebody with Asperger's to be concise and avoid jokes or sarcasm.

Individuals with Asperger's syndrome are challenged by bright lights or fluctuating flashing lights. They are also challenged by loud noises or sudden noises.

It is therefore important to risk assess vehicle movements in an open plan working environment, warning sounds, lighting controls and the use of moving and handling equipment.

Employees with Asperger's syndrome find psychological pressure difficult to manage and therefore I would recommend that management using the HSE risk assessment process to review with such an employee their perceived levels of pressure within the workplace. It is important for management are aware that what they consider normal levels of pressure may be difficult to manage for individuals with Asperger's syndrome. This will come to light in the risk assessment process (www.hse.gov.uk/stressful/standards)

Community services to support employees with Asperger's syndrome

A variety of community services are available in the United Kingdom. The NHS provides a directory of services which can include:

- **Social learning programmes** to help individuals cope and manage social situations
- **Leisure activity programs.** These involve employees taking part in leisure activities such as games, exercises and going to the cinema or theatre usually in a group with other people; again to improve their social skills.
- **Skills for daily living programmes.** These are particularly important for those individuals who have problems carrying out daily activities such as eating or washing.



Conclusion

Employees who suffers with Asperger's, or other forms of the Autism spectrum, with the right support have much to offer. They are often accurate, reliable and have a good eye for detail. Being a supportive working environment can help such individuals develop greatly.