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## Asperger syndrome from childhood into adulthood

Tom Berney

**Abstract:** Asperger syndrome, a form of autism with normal ability and normal syntactical speech, is associated with a variety of comorbid psychiatric disorders. The disorder is well known to child psychiatry and we are beginning to recognize the extent of its impact on adulthood. This article reviews the diagnosis and assessment of Asperger syndrome and its link with a wide range of psychiatric issues, including mental disorder, offending and marital capacity. It also describes the broader, non-psychiatric management of Asperger syndrome itself, which includes social and occupational support and education, before touching on the implications the disorder has for our services.

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This review focuses primarily on clinical issues. More academic aspects have been reviewed by Whiteley et al (2006).

### Diagnostic classification

Asperger syndrome comes not only with its own characteristics (Elliott, 1), but also with a wide variety of comorbid conditions such as depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), tic disorders, and personality difficulties (including antisocial problems) (Eisenmajer, 2003). It may be difficult for individuals to receive services and care effective to their mental capacity and level of responsibility as well as their ability to have services put to best use. The syndrome can colour psychiatric disorder, affecting both presentation and management for children and adults across a wide range of functional ability. Families have taken an active legislative approach, affecting misdiagnosis and mistreatment and demanding clarity in the relationship between Asperger syndrome and the diagnostic criteria.

As in autism, Asperger syndrome shows impaired reciprocal social interaction and restricted, repetitive or stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests and activities. Unlike autism, intellectual ability and syntactical speech are normal. Wing and Gillberg place the emphasis on current presentation of normal IQ and speech, but ICD-10 and DSM-IV require their presence from early life. The later presentation is unusual but was stipulated in order to define a disorder that would be as otherwise to autism (rather than just a variant or subtype). It is not clear whether many of the cases described by Asperger would have met ICD or DSM criteria. Gillberg and colleagues proposed a set of diagnostic criteria that approximate to Asperger's original clinical description (Larsen et al, 2005). Asperger syndrome and the diagnostic criteria distinguishing Asperger syndrome from 'high-functioning autism' is more without generalised learning disability and the issue is clouded by the variety of definitions in use. Where absence of a mode for ability, there appears to be little real difference between the two except in terms of severity (Frith, 1998; Gillberg et al, 2001; Howlin, 2003) although self-assessments remains to be explored (Eisenmajer, 2003).

Tom Berney is a consultant in developmental psychiatry with the Northgate & Finsbury Health Trust, (Oxfordshire, England). He has published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, and *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. He is currently consultant in European Institute for People with Autism, a registered charity that provides community services.

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## Adolescents with Asperger syndrome

Three case studies of individual and family therapy

KEVIN P. STODDART *Kevin Cook*

**ABSTRACT:** Clinicians in the field of autism are increasingly identifying individuals with Asperger syndrome. Individual and family therapy for individuals with this condition has received little attention in the literature. This article presents three case examples of individual and family therapy with such adolescents. Implications for Asperger syndrome. Common parenting issues and treatment interventions are recommended that may apply to others diagnosed with this condition.

**KEYWORDS:** adolescents; Asperger syndrome; family therapy; individual therapy

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**NOTE:** The names used in each case study were changed to protect the identity of the young men and their families.

### Introduction

One approach to addressing the needs of individuals with Asperger syndrome and their families is through individual and family psychotherapy. In the literature, however, there is almost a total absence of discussion of psychotherapy for individuals with this condition. A subgroup that might particularly benefit from therapy is the adolescent with Asperger syndrome. These adolescents struggle with the process of individuating from their family, frequently experience low self-esteem, and have to deal with an increasing self-awareness that they are different from their peers. Mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety may exacerbate the problems faced during this developmental transition. Parents often report that they need professional support with respect to their adolescent, and these adolescents themselves recognize the need for therapy.

Both individual and family therapy can be helpful in treating people with Asperger syndrome and may be an integral component of an overall treatment plan. However, some professionals argue that in most cases of high-functioning autism or Asperger syndrome psychotherapy is not indicated, although it has been used successfully with and without pharmacological interventions (Gillberg and Eklöv, 1998). Mesibov suggests that "individual counselling can be valuable for adolescents and adults with

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# Asperger's Syndrome in Gifted Individuals

by Lynnette M. Henderson

Asperger's Syndrome (AS) is a pervasive developmental disorder on the autism spectrum characterized by social deficits, relatively normal language and cognitive development, and the presence of idiosyncratic interests. Repetitive speech or actions and pedantic speech, often concerning the person's intense interests in a restricted subject matter, and clumsiness may co-occur (Myles & Simpson, 1998; Klin, Volkmar, & Sparrow, 2000). AS may occur in gifted individuals.



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