

# Strategies for Teaching College Students with Asperger Syndrome and other Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Cindy Clemson, Coordinator  
Services for Students with Learning  
Disabilities

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## Pervasive Developmental Disorders

- Autistic Disorder
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder – NOS
- Asperger’s Disorder
- Rhett’s Disorder
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder

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## Asperger Syndrome: Knowing it When You See it

- Doesn’t understand nonverbal/social cues
- Avoids eye contact
- Has a flat affect
- Exhibits poor reciprocal conversational skills
- Has unusual prosody
- Has sensory sensitivity/sensory integration problems
- Exhibits an unusual, awkward gait
- Is a loner
- Has concrete thinking
- Is verbose on focused issues
- Has central coherence difficulties

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### **Prevalence of Autism and Asperger Syndrome**

- Autism Society of America reports an increased frequency and is reporting that autism is the fastest growing developmental disability with estimates of:  
**1 in 150 live births**
- The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry estimates the incidence of AS at between 0.024 and 0.36 percent

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### **Number of Students with AS in College Populations**

- There are no clear statistics on the number of people attending college who have been diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of students with AS continues to grow rapidly.
- It is clear that many students with AS have been present on college campuses but their disorders simply went unrecognized.
- Despite the ADA, many students with AS are falling through the cracks and it is our job to seek more advanced training on our campuses.

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### **Inside the Asperger Mind**

- Temple Grandin – college professor and consultant in the livestock industry is a sought after public speaker and author. She expresses her perspective as being like “an anthropologist on Mars”.
- Others express similar thoughts – Joliffe explains her life as being like an alien.
- Morris states that people with AS see things in more dimensions than “neurotypicals”.

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## How We See Students with AS on Our Campus

Problems with:

- Social skills, body language and theory of mind
- Communication
- Literal thinking
- Unexpected change
- Sensory sensitivity
- Preoccupation with a subject

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## Accommodations and Support Strategies

- Functional limitations of each individual with AS determines the accommodations and support needed.
- Just like color blue there are many variations in students with AS – no one student is exactly like others.
- Most of the limitations have to do with the triad of impairments: social problems, communication problems and intense interests and repetitive behaviors.

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## Accommodations and Support Strategies (continued)

- Once the functional limitations are determined then we must link them with the appropriate accommodations:
- Classroom accommodations:
  1. Priority seating
  2. Use of audio recorders
  3. Use of volunteer note taker
  4. Access to power point presentations or instructor's notes (preferably in advance)
  5. Behavioral guidance (not code of conduct issues)

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### **Accommodations and Support Strategies (continued)**

- Testing accommodations:
  1. Extended testing time
  2. Testing in a distraction-reduced environment
  3. Use of computer with word-processing
  4. Use of organizational software such as Inspiration for writing down ideas
  5. Use of noise-reducing devices such as white noise machines and head phones
- Other accommodations
  1. Single/private dormitory rooms
  2. Priority registration
  3. Assistance of dorm staff in emergency situations

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### **Individuals with Asperger Syndrome have Strengths**

- Reliability
- Punctuality
- Attention to detail
- Good memory
- Staying on task
- Staying out of office politics

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### **References**

- Harpur, Lawlor, Fitzgerald. Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome (2002)
- Bedrossina, Pennamon. College Students with Asperger Syndrome: Practical Strategies for Academic and Social Success (2007)
- Organization for Autism Research

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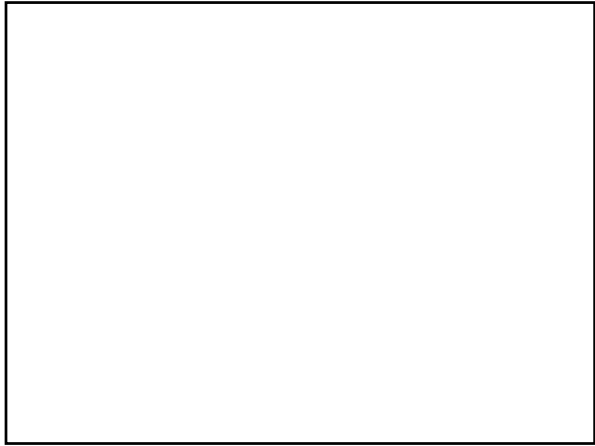
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