



Mental Toughness

Behaviour Solutions - Danny Blackford, Psychologist

Asperguys

Chapter 1

Adaptive skills and behaviours

The diagnostic ratio of AS males to females suggests that this condition occurs more in males. There is growing discussion that AS females are under-diagnosed because of their less noticeable characteristics or adaptive skills. This would indicate that previous observations have under-estimated the amount of AS females in our community. Within the cohort of male and female AS individuals, there dwells a sub group of males, who have similar characteristics to their female counterparts, are less noticeable and have well developed adaptive skills. Adaptive skills in this context refers to one's ability to conform or fit in. It also in part refers to an AS individual's ability to learn social and communication skills. If you have ever really struggled to learn a new skill such as a playing a musical instrument, learning a complex mathematical equation or a difficult foreign language then you will have some understanding or insight of what it is like for the AS individual to learn or adapt to most social situations or settings.

The AS male can easily be identified in most schools, their sometimes disruptive, aggressive, defiant or oppositional behaviors often result in them being regular visitors to the school principal's office. The female AS individual is less likely to be noticed but can be identified as un-intrusive, quiet or sometimes painfully shy. Alternatively other females on the spectrum can be recognized as gregarious, outgoing, cooperative and likeable. Sometimes words like precocious, odd, eccentric, determined, persistent even dogged, can be used to describe the female AS child, often with a quirky if not slightly warped sense of humor. There is likely to be at least one other male in the class who has similar traits or characteristics. Neither they nor their female counterparts are likely to be suspected of having autism. A closer examination can reveal to what degree common difficulties are experienced by these mostly undiagnosed male and female AS individuals.

Parents over the years have given many examples of how young children, both male and female are likely to engage in dangerous or risk taking behaviors. Frustratingly and often alarmingly they will be seemingly oblivious to or unaffected by potential imminent danger. This phenomenon may be partly due to a lack of awareness of the danger, but also because they are largely focused on whatever thought process or activity they are currently engaged in, they are genuinely oblivious to whatever peril they are being exposed to. Risk taking or impulsive behaviours can fit on a continuum that includes impulsive, compulsive and addictive behaviours. In subsequent chapters,

I will give examples of how these behaviors manifest in every day life, with sometimes tragic consequences. Some would argue that risk taking tends to be a more male dominant trait, and that these behaviours more often noticed on the sporting field or battle ground. There are many less obvious examples of risk taking behaviors that are exhibited by both males and females within this sub-group that are ‘flying under the radar’.

One of the more frequently used AS adaptive skills is mimicking or imitating others. This manifests in many ways, for example in children, it can be a unique or unusual accent. Some AS children can have a very formal or sophisticated manner of speech. Others may have derived their accent from a character the child has observed (usually on television). This form of imitation can also manifest in impersonations that are often indistinguishable from the real character. This ability to imitate can also be utilized and developed into, amongst other things, a successful career. One multi talented AS individual recites ‘Homerisms’, from the very successful long running TV series “The Simpsons”. Not only are his Homer impersonations incredibly accurate, he has memorized and can draw on an endless repertoire of random comedic utterances that generally get a laugh from his audience.

Another talented AS individual, accomplished Australian artist and academic Neil Stratford, has developed his artistic life work on photographic images and portrayals of his own and various other characters and action figures. His captured facial expressions are described by university lecturer Julie Cotter as encapsulating ‘the masquerade of behavior’. Amongst other things Stratford has cleverly adapted and developed his own unique method of representing facial expressions, he is otherwise unable to recognize.

Young children at play may often adopt the persona of their ‘super-hero’ or other like cartoon character. The AS child with adaptive skills can readily join in or mimic this play. Over time their contemporaries move developmentally to more mature interactions or activities. The AS child can become very confused as to why other children who had previously interacted with them at this level are now rejecting them or alienating them from their group. This can be a form of what is otherwise referred to as bullying by exclusion. The AS child’s contemporaries have outgrown the fantasy play and reject the AS child. This attachment to fantasy or action heroes is shared by both AS males and females and may persist well into their adult lives. Science fiction conventions are testament to this!

Similarities within this sub group of male and female AS individuals are likely to include a shared passion for animals. Boys are probably but not exclusively more likely to have an interest in prehistoric animals. Girls are more likely, but again not exclusively, to have a passion for horses. This equine obsession can extend to, amongst other things the racetrack. A study of the horse industry and its history can reveal an endless list of interesting talented and often eccentric male and female personalities.

The sporting and performing arts industries provide an endless list of amazingly talented individuals who are sometimes labeled as ‘oddballs’ or ‘freaks’ based on their sporting or creative abilities. These people have often also become notorious

because of their sometimes outlandish, excessive or over-the-top behaviors. As you read this, you may have already recognized or identified some of those individuals. Some within the acting community whilst being able to convincingly portray their cinematic character they are seen to lack or have no personality in their real life. These individuals can often be described as very private or shy people. With the breaking down of cultural and societal barriers leading to greater participation by women in previously male dominated areas, the frequency of extremely talented but 'different' females is likely to become more apparent.

If one explores further, in other specific industries, you will inevitably discover quirky unusual and or talented individuals. Occupations that tend to 'attract' AS individuals include emergency and armed services, legal and law enforcement agencies, science, engineering, hospitality, food preparation and customer service. Personal fitness and grooming, education and other 'helping' professions including medicine and nursing are areas of employment that you are more likely to find AS individuals.

AS individuals are often stereotyped with varying degrees of adulation or admiration, they are also likely to be subjected to mocking, ridicule or condemnation. Their experience of being popularized and then subsequently derided can be endless. Those who survive may well be successful in their field but are still likely to live a lonely or isolated existence. They continually struggle to understand other people's sometimes not so well meaning intentions!

Music is a form of communication that many AS individuals seem to 'naturally' adapt to. Whilst there are examples of child prodigies playing and composing music from a very young age, there are also many AS individuals who have an ability to play or sing music with little or no training. They often teach themselves and become masters of one or more musical instruments. Again we can observe and envy some individuals in the performing arts who are multi talented, being able to act sing and dance! It may also be worth noting the often ceaseless and tireless hours some individuals put in. This can require an enormous amount of discipline and rehearsing with an infinite attention to detail, traits or characteristics common amongst AS individuals. Once they have chosen to head in a certain direction they can be almost impossible to dissuade, expending enormous amounts of energy to focus and achieve their objectives.

Certain AS individuals are ridiculed for their clumsiness or lack of coordination whilst others have amazing physical endurance and or abilities. This contrast between individuals' abilities is a reflection of why the most recent definition of autism includes the word 'spectrum'. Possessing or lacking certain traits or abilities sometimes to extreme degrees to extreme degrees is probably one of the most frustrating and debilitating aspects of autism. On the one hand the person has an amazing ability that is sometimes not developed or recognized and more often than not completely taken for granted or dismissed by the AS individual. On the other hand the area or areas that they lack competence in or have absolutely no awareness of can cause them much grief.

Some people seem to have an innate ability to see or understand how things work or go together without being able to explain how they do this. Creative people in all fields of endeavor have insight knowledge or skills that could perhaps be described as 'inherited' or 'genetic memory'. There are also countless examples of very skilled, talented people who lack insight or awareness of their own behavior, sometimes appearing as somewhat naïve or innocent. Others can act out with incredible lack of forethought, dumbfounding their fans and creating much media space with their apparent stupid behaviors or actions. This can also manifest in seemingly unending relationship problems or difficulties. History is also littered with the unfortunate downside to being a creative or talented genius often resulting in damaging outcomes. A disproportionately high or alternatively low libido can be a common or shared trait between adolescent and adult males and females. Sexualized and other obsessive, impulsive, compulsive, risk-taking, self-harming, dangerous and often addictive behaviors, in certain cases can result tragically in premature death.

Shared or common interests between male and female AS individuals can be extended to many realms, including engineering or mechanics. Whilst these have traditionally been male dominated industries, there is a group of females out there who equally love noisy, fast cars or four wheel drives and would otherwise be described as 'petrol heads'. Some AS females possess a passion or obsession for hobbies such as fishing and other traditional male endeavors. These females have never considered their hobby or interest unusual, just totally engaging. For both genders the activity, hobby, interest or passion can be a means of making social connections and or a means of disengaging from the otherwise confusing and difficult social world. Sharing a common interest is the safest way of maintaining an AS relationship, however the AS individual may still need to learn 'sharing skills'!

An AS individual's skills knowledge and abilities in certain areas can be often far beyond their developmental age. They can be recognized as 'gifted' or 'wise beyond their years'. Unfortunately their skills or knowledge are often narrow and limited to apply to certain areas. The AS individual has gaps, blanks or blind spots in their knowledge base and cognitive processes. In the frequently asked questions section of Maxine Axton's book "Asperger's in love", the question is posed as to whether AS individuals can experience empathy. These 'blanks' or 'blind spots' represent situations, circumstances or events that the AS individual has not experienced therefore cannot imagine or foresee occurring. Once an AS individual has had the experience, they are then more likely to gain insight and place themselves in 'someone else's shoes'. Having first hand experience enables them to understand what the experience is like for others. This is particularly relevant for dangerous or risky situations where the AS individual simply does not see or recognize the inherent danger or risk.

Information or facts are often the AS individual's lifeline, if they stick to the facts they are less likely to get into trouble. Literal interpretation can be a problem when presented with information that may not be entirely accurate or even false. The AS individual can lack the ability to discern between fact and fiction, which leads to them being identified as gullible, naïve or even at times foolish or foolhardy. Gathering information can be an AS individual's best friend or worst enemy the saying 'ignorance is bliss' is particularly relevant in this context.

Whilst other people can be quite impressed with their level of knowledge skills or abilities in particular areas, the AS individual is likely to fail to detect the warning signs of 'information overload'. This is seems to be a trait experienced more commonly but not exclusively by AS males. Information overload often occurs because of the AS individual's eagerness to share. Others showing interest in what they are disclosing can be interpreted as that person 'liking' or 'accepting them'. Sharing information is fine, providing the person you are sharing with has identified a need for this information. Ways of avoiding giving others too much information is to get regular feedback and clarify what is being said.

Collecting random information is common amongst AS individuals. One AS individual spontaneously announced to his group that a tram car weighed twenty tons. This disclosure drew some mirthful bewilderment from other group members but resulted in the establishment of a "book of useless information". This book subsequently became the source of much amusement and derision within the group. Another group member also revealed that they had memorized every make and model of motor vehicle produced over a thirty odd year period. This individual particularly enjoyed identifying more obscure or older model vehicle, sometimes to the bewilderment or amazement of others.

A passion for digital information co-exists between male and female AS individuals. The ever-expanding access to the computer based technology and the internet has highlighted the connection between the autistic brain and computer-based technology. It has also expanded the AS individual's ability to become an 'expert' in their special interest or obsession. Many readers would be familiar with a currently popular electronic game, some times referred to as computerized building blocks. This game is currently worshipped and idolized by both male and female AS children.

Many of the common or shared attributes between AS male and females thus far described could easily be interpreted by the AS uninformed reader as common traits that nearly every human experiences. Whilst to some degree this may be true, the level, intensity or sometimes complete absence of that trait or characteristic helps to define the AS individual. This may also highlight or give people pause to reflect that the otherwise insignificant or sometimes annoying or bewildering behavior of others may be more than just someone being 'stubborn', 'naughty', 'difficult' 'obnoxious' or worse. It is also important to recognize that many male and female AS individuals have been very successful in their fields of endeavor.

Asperguys

Chapter 2

School

In Australia, modern tertiary institution-based teacher training courses include little or no mental health content. Whilst there are mental health and autism specific programs and training available for education staff to access once they gain their teaching qualifications, generally they are over-burdened with excessive demands, workloads and inadequate budgets. Some schools have autism specific awareness training and skilled staff, many schools claim to have, but in reality don't. Often a child is recognized as being naughty or difficult without anyone identifying the child's underlying mental health problem and associated learning difficulties that are likely to be autism related. Whilst an AS child may be more vulnerable to symptoms of anxiety and depression it is their school experience that is likely to cause or trigger these symptoms.

I have spent many years interviewing AS adults, often parents who have presented because of concerns they have had for their child. Most of these adults have also had an underlying predisposition to anxiety. Over time I conduct complete histories on these adults including usually their first childhood memories. Most of these individuals report little or no memory of their kindergarten or preschool experience. In Australia children usually attend one year of preschool or kindergarten at around four years of age. When these adults are questioned on how they know they actually attended preschool they will often reply that they have seen photographic records, but have no memory of that experience. Others can also relate this to their early primary school experience, whilst others have difficulties recalling any of their primary school and sometimes large gaps of their secondary school experience. One adult could not recall his preschool experience but at the same age could remember playing in his backyard hunting for lizards and digging in the dirt. In one setting, at home, his memory of events was quite clear. In the alternative setting preschool, his memory was effectively blank.

Again in Australia primary school years generally range from ages 5 to 11 years, and secondary school ages 12 through to 17 years of age. Details that some adults can recall may be the names of individual teachers or one or two fellow students who they have befriended. It is not uncommon for these friendships to have occurred in preschool, maintained throughout their school experience and still often exist in their adult life. Others can recall particular events such as a school excursion. A disturbing number describe ongoing difficulties they experienced in a school setting. These included being ostracized in the classroom and playground, having few or no friends

with subsequent intense isolation. Some recalled a particular teacher they related well to whilst others related ongoing battles with all or most of the teaching staff in their school. They were often labeled as troublesome, disobedient, willful or just plain unmotivated ('lazy').

The consistent lack of memory during particularly their early school experience is quite alarming when considered in the context of what if anything the child actually learned during their classroom time. In fact this may help to explain why ultimately many of these people left school at an early age due to a disconnection with the education process.

Recent neuroscience research evidence outlines the connections between arousal and processing or one's ability to think when agitated or in a distressed emotional state. Other research in this area suggests that the part of the brain, the amygdala, triggers emotional responses and at the same time shuts down our ability to think. This response is sometimes referred to as fight/flight and the rationale goes along the lines of the following. Walking from your cave down the path to the river you are confronted by a very large threatening sabre tooth tiger. At this stage you are usually speechless and probably frozen, a multitude of responses occur simultaneously. The hair on the back of your neck may stand up, your stomach may go cold. This last phenomenon is experienced as a direct result of your blood supply being redirected from the digestive system to the outer extremities of your body (arms and legs). Your adrenal system kicks into overdrive preparing you to perform some serious physical exercise ie run like crazy or stand and defend yourself or even attack the Sabre tooth before it gets you!! As part of this experience the thinking part of your brain is receiving signals to shut down.

Effectively the message goes something like this, if the AS individual responded the way modern day civility dictates they may have addressed the potential threat in the following terms. Staying calm, and inquiring as to whether they could sit down and rationally discuss the fact that the sabre tooth tiger wanted to eat them. Most people experiencing a potentially life threatening situation are not likely to respond this way. Only the coolest well disciplined heads are capable of such acts. One mother described this situation very succinctly by suggesting that if the child was in a wheel chair they would not be expected to get up and walk. AS individuals are repeatedly expected to do what most people would consider almost impossible!

The problem is that the AS individuals symptoms are mostly hidden or unrecognizable. Some externalize these by running away or escaping, others may display oppositional and or aggressive acts. Many internalize their stress, often leading to long-term serious mental and often physical health problems.

Neuroscience research is also indicating that the area of the brain that is responsible or triggers this state of arousal is larger in AS individuals. This helps to explain why AS individuals have such intense emotional responses. These intense overwhelming emotions are not always noticeable in the AS individual until it is often too late. Many AS individuals struggle on a daily basis trying to manage or keep these emotions in check.

Tony Attwood gives the example of the AS child having another student wave to them from across the school playground. The AS child may become quite confused, and distressed, not being able to understand the intention of this signal. They can worry or focus on this act for extended periods of time. Depending on their existing stress levels, sometimes taking it back to class, spending the rest of the day worrying or ruminating about what the signal or message meant. This can simply explain one of the numerous ways an AS child can become distracted in class, missing out on valuable information and learning opportunities.

Being labeled as difficult, naughty or disobedient is not a totally AS male dominated industry. In her book "Finding a different kind of normal" Jeanette Purkis describes how she acted out with aggression and violence. Female and male aggression can be sometimes more subtle but may also be likely to occur more often at home. This is a more commonly reported incidence of male aggression and domestic violence. A child's aggression can be verbal but also physical often directed at siblings but also at vulnerable others (including parents or carers).

The parent(s) of an AS child can experience extreme levels of concern. Despite their child's apparent good demeanour and academic achievement in a school setting, outside of school the child's behavior can be quite excessive, demanding, outlandish or uncontrollable. Many of these parents may express their concerns to their child's classroom teacher only to be informed that whilst at school their child is for all intents and purposes a 'model student'. This is in complete contrast to the child's behavior outside of school, particularly in a home setting. Difficult behaviors can begin manifesting as soon as the child enters through the door (car or home). The child will often become very demanding (or worse) arguing, yelling or generally throwing a tantrum. When the suffering parent describes this behavior to others such as teaching staff, school principals, doctors and even paediatricians., they experience a sense of dissonance or 'unreality'. The adult they are trying to explain the problem to have not witnessed child acting out in such a manner and will look at the parent with surprise or incredulity. The parent is left with a sense of inadequacy, self doubt and frustration .Others including family who have not observed these types of behaviors in the child simply do not believe the parent. They have difficulties accepting that the child is capable of such acts, or that the parent is somehow lacking in parenting skills or is otherwise unable adequately manage or respond to these behaviours.

Cracks may first begin to appear in the AS student's 'public' persona, early in their school life. Teaching professionals can describe certain students as polite, cooperative and generally well behaved. The observant professional or classroom assistant (often another parent) may notice a certain quirkiness or odd, unusual behaviours in a child. One of these observations has been described as the "death stare". This has usually been directed at another student. Subsequent polite and subtle investigations can reveal that these glares are likely to be the first manifestations of this AS child expressing their displeasure at another student's non compliance with their wishes. This response is partly about the AS individual's need to control their environment be 'in charge' or be 'the boss'. Their response may also be partly due to a sense of frustration because of an underlying unrealized assumption that the other person should be able to understand and comply to their needs without them being clearly stated or expressed!

Aggressive responses towards others can occur in both AS males and females, beginning as early as preschool or kindergarten. Whilst some learn that using aggression can actually gain compliance in others, they fail to recognize that their aggressive behavior engenders fear and resentment. Other children are likely to interpret this in terms of “I don’t like you or want to play with you (often) because you are too mean and or bossy”. The ultimate consequence of these circumstances are that the AS child quickly becomes unpopular or ‘friendless’ except for perhaps one other child who has high tolerance levels or recognizes the usually good natured character behind the AS individual’s bossy, aggressive or at times dangerous behaviours.

The AS individual is change averse and can be very resistant to change sometimes leading to temper tantrums or meltdowns. As part of their fight flight response some children take to escaping or running away. As a means of coping with these situations some schools have resorted to all types of questionable practices considered to be safety measures. These include locking or otherwise confining children to a room, physically restraining the child to a point where the child sustains bruises or other injuries. AS children have been known to hide under desks, tables or in cupboards. They will also flee from the classroom and sometimes the school grounds. Some schools have been obliged to lock their school perimeter gates, as a means of trying to contain the seemingly out of control child. The ‘runaway’ child may be quite nimble and able to avoid physical capture or simply scale the fence or gate. One young man reportedly ran out of a classroom after a confrontation and was pursued by the teacher. This young man ran straight to a tree in the playground scaling it with lithe dexterity. The frustrated teacher obviously concerned for the child safety stood at the base of the tree with hands on hips warning the child that if he did not climb down out of the tree she would be obliged to call the police. The young man was alleged to have responded with words to the effect of “You can call the (expletive) army for all I care I am not coming down!!!

One of the primary forces or motivation for being ‘stubborn’ or a ‘control freak’ is driven by what the AS individual’s interprets as seemingly random experiences with negative consequences or outcomes. They are likely to be punished or chastised without understanding why. Often the action or behavior they are being condemned for to the AS individual it is a totally justifiable or normal response to something that someone else has done to them!! It is virtually impossible to ‘punish’ an AS individual for this reason. ‘Doing something to them’ can be as simple or as complicated as trying to persuade an AS individual to cease an activity that they are engaged in or otherwise enjoying. At the very least they will interpret this as ‘unfair’. This situation can be exacerbated if the activity they are engaging in is giving them some sense of comfort or relief. They are likely to interpret that they are being punished when informed that they have to stop whatever it is they are doing. They can then become very resistant often leading to sometimes aggressive or escaping behaviors if the issue is forced. Boys are likely to display these behaviors, but they also occur within the female AS population.

The AS child with better adaptive skills can ‘learn’ from these experiences and develop their communication skills. They instinctively realize that they are likely to

be admonished and are then likely to utilize their mimicking skills usually by developing a relationship with one other child who they admire, who is also likely to be autistic. These friendships once established in early childhood can last well into and beyond mature adulthood.

AS boys and girls are far more likely to survive in a school setting if they are academically gifted or at least competent, the 'nerd' or 'geek' tends to be less of a target if they are getting good marks. I recall my own school experience and now recognize one girl in particular that went through most of secondary school without uttering a word or interacting with the rest of the class. She clearly excelled academically and from memory topped the class in maths and science. I would formally like to apologize to her on behalf of the rest of our class for one occasion when she was targeted and mocked by other students. This behavior was done in a jocular fashion that was clearly not understood by the recipient. She subsequently became hysterical and to everybody's shocked amazement became quite agitated and had a meltdown right there in the classroom.

One of the commonly identified ASD diagnostic criteria amongst children is poor use of visual discrimination when learning. This characteristic does not seem to be limited to either males or females. An example of this in the adult world, is sometimes jokingly referred to as having a 'man's look' for an apparently missing item. Subsequent investigation by the person who has an awareness of, and has usually placed the otherwise missing item in, its current position will deride the person who is searching for the item, as being 'blind' or 'stupid'. In the AS world if this 'deficit' is not recognized, it can at the very least cause hours of senseless frustration and disappointment. In the context of learning and the classroom this problem has potentially disastrous long term ramifications. Many AS individuals report countless hours trying to see or locate an object or concept. If they are fortunate they will have a supporting individual point out the missing piece or pieces before their frustration levels get too high and they give up or throw a 'wobbly'. When they discover the 'missing piece' they are more than likely feel embarrassed because of the apparent obviousness of whatever it was that they otherwise could not grasp or 'see'. This process has the potential to generate negative thoughts that precede symptoms of anxiety and depression. I will expand on this in chapter 4.

In the classroom this can manifest when the teacher explains or outlines a concept to be learnt by the class. The relevance factor is often omitted, that is why the concept needs to be learned and what practical application it will serve. The AS student cannot make the connection, 'see' or is 'blind' to the concept, therefore not understanding or grasping it. For example if the AS student could see that they may have a future need to use the foreign language that is that is being taught in class they may pay more attention. The neurological pathways are far more likely to be activated if the AS student was made aware that as an adult they may very well travel to areas where this language is use. These neurons may even become more aroused if it was brought to the AS student's attention that having a working knowledge of this language would be extremely valuable to them! School curriculums and current teaching practices often fail to make these connections for the AS student. Switched on teachers often use visual aids to help children learn or grasp a concept, plugging in to a child's

imagination is a very effective step in the learning process, this particularly applies to the AS student!

Many children experience learning difficulties that in some cases may be diagnosed as a language learning disorder (LLD). Some children will disguise their learning difficulties behind other behaviours that are often disruptive. For example talking to the child next to them when the classroom teacher has just finished explaining a task, exercise or activity. "Any questions or does anyone not understand?" The teacher may ask. The child with the learning problem is very unlikely to volunteer that they have no idea because they would then risk being mocked or ridiculed by other students or even the teacher.

The AS child who is talking to the student next to them may very well be asking "what is it we have to do?" This is likely to happen for one or more reasons. The child may have initially grasped concept or task that had been described but due to working memory difficulties cannot 'hold' the information in their head long enough to apply it. This apparent failure in communication could simply be that the child was otherwise distracted or 'daydreaming' and not connected with the learning process. Simple, dismissive or trite explanations often overlook the underlying cause of the problem. Labeling a child as 'timid' 'lazy' 'shy' or even the 'class clown' is a failure to recognize that whatever behavior the child is exhibiting, it (the behavior) is the child's lack of ability to recognize or otherwise communicate their own thoughts, feelings, desires or needs.

If we consider the definition of an Autism Spectrum Disorder that is deficits in communication, social interactions and stereo typed or repetitive behaviours and apply this to LLD's a challenging revelation can occur. If I have difficulties joining letters together to make a word, or putting words together to make a sentence or putting sentences together to make paragraphs, then am I not experiencing communication problems/deficits? Whilst I may be quite capable of recognizing words my ability to make sense of/or give them meaning is the problem.

For young children, a formal multi disciplinary assessment is essential. In Australia this usually involves a paediatrician, psychologist and speech pathologist and or occupational therapist. Many parents have spent countless hours and money trying to secure a diagnosis for their child consulting numerous professionals. Problems that can arise from this process may be the inadequacies of the professional's training or experience. Many professionals claim to have an AS working knowledge, but often lack or do not receive adequate training in diagnostic procedures and symptom recognition.

This diagnostic assessment then becomes the basis of the child's individual learning and behavior plan. The assessment needs to identify all of the difficulties the AS child is likely to experience in a school setting. If any school refuses to implement strategies to support the AS student then the parent needs to carefully consider their options. These include changing schools, home schooling and a discussion of their situation with the disabilities discrimination office or human rights commission.

Some of the more innovative programs being developed for AS children in schools include a camera or robotics club. The camera club can give AS children an

opportunity to have their photographic skills developed and displayed in a public gallery. The AS child's attention to detail and often associated technical skills means that they are likely to excel in these types of activities that includes photography or building and programming a robot. These types of activities can be very AS friendly as they help develop the AS child's teamwork skills as well as providing them with a sense of belonging or inclusion possibly and often tragically for the first time in their school lives. The 'geek' is suddenly regarded as 'cool' because of their often superior creativity, IT skills and knowledge.