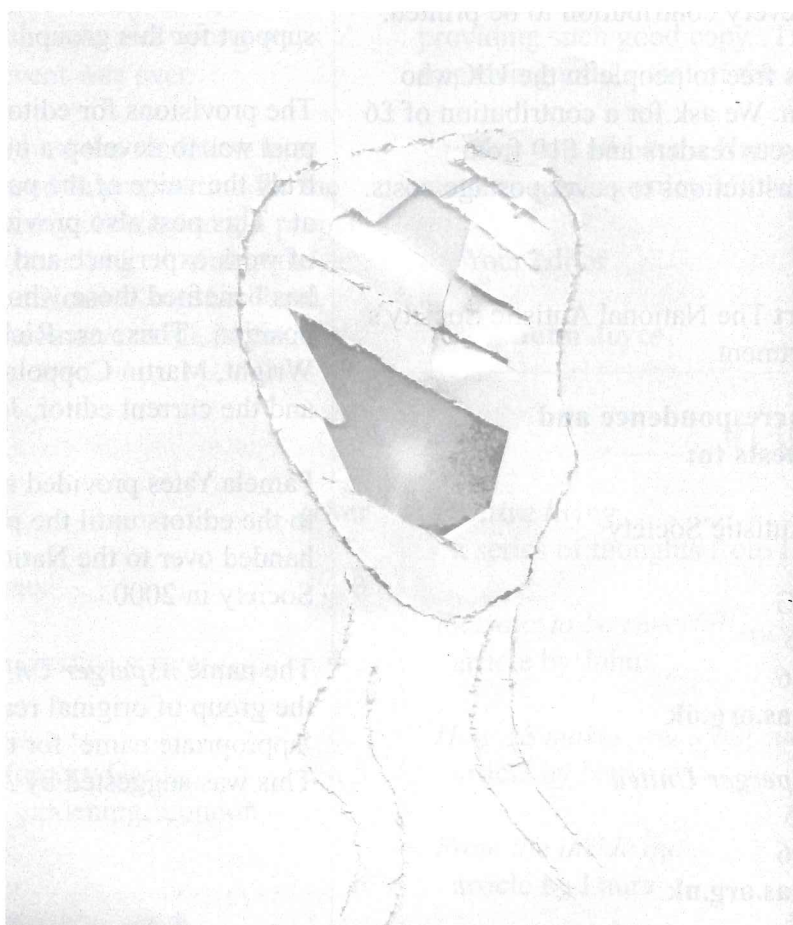


Produced by and for people with autism-spectrum conditions

# Asperger *united*

Edition 50 April 2007





*Asperger United* is a newsletter run by and for people with autism-spectrum conditions. The newsletter aims to put people with the condition in touch with each other and to share information so that they can lead more independent lives.

Please note that *Asperger United* receives over 200 letters each quarter so it is not possible to respond to every one, nor for every contribution to be printed.

*Asperger United* is free to people in the UK who are on the spectrum. We ask for a contribution of £6 per year from overseas readers and £10 from professionals and institutions to cover postage costs.

**Editor** John Joyce

**Additional support** The National Autistic Society's Publications Department

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All we need is your name and address and we will add you to the mailing list — free of charge to people on the spectrum.

Thank you to George Cox who kindly produced the illustration included here and on the pen pal page, and to Graeme Lawson for producing the *AU* logo.

*Please note that the views expressed in Asperger United are not necessarily those of the editor, the National Autistic Society or those involved in the publication of the newsletter.*

Contributions for the next issue should reach us by  
1 June '07.

*Asperger United* was founded in 1993 by Pamela Yates and Patricia Howlin, in association with the Maudsley Hospital, and Mark Bebbington and Judy Lynch of The National Autistic Society.

This was in response to a recognised dearth of services for people with Asperger syndrome and the potential for self help and networking as a means of support for this group.

The provisions for editor's and sub-editor's post was to develop a publication that was truly the voice of the people it was aimed at. This post also provided the possibility of work experience and responsibility and has benefited those who have held the position. These are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds and the current editor, John Joyce.

Pamela Yates provided support and advice to the editors until the publication was handed over to the National Autistic Society in 2000.

The name *Asperger United* was chosen by the group of original readers as the most 'appropriate name' for the publication. This was suggested by Anna Cohen.



**Dear Readers,**

Welcome to the new edition of your paper. Since the last edition my life has been very ordinary; almost neurotypical.

I have been known to make directional mistakes, causing me to miss events. In one case it was attending a funeral in Surrey Quays. I arrived at Canada Water Station and proceeded to go both right and wrong ways arriving when the event was over.

The second involved the reception into church of the deceased in preparation for the funeral service next day. I failed to get proper information before travelling. It was at the church of the Sacred Heart, Kingston Road, Teddington. I did not arrive at all, having

travelled to Kingston when I should have crossed the Thames and headed towards Teddington. Has any of you ever misguided him/herself?

I plan to visit Oslo and address a European Autism Congress in September, immediately after curtailing my annual visit to Lourdes.

May I appeal to you all to continue providing such good copy. The standard keeps improving unlike that of the editorial!

May you all have a Happy Easter and all mothers reading enjoy Mothering Sunday.

Your editor

**John Joyce**

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**in this edition**

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Please note that the results of the readership survey are still being processed, and it is hoped that they will be ready for the July edition.



## Asperger syndrome and the criminal justice system

by Neil

Whilst people with AS have very high and rigid moral and ethical standards and therefore less likely than an NT person to break the law, this can present its own risks of encounters with the police. Aspies have been known to be arrested because of conflicts with NT people over such things as littering, riding cycles on the pavement, parking improperly and excessive noise (ie. rigid adherence to rules). They can be misled by others into committing crimes on their behalf as a result of their naivety and lack of social skills. They can be accused of making inappropriate sexual advances or even rape due to a misunderstanding of social cues. Unexpected changes to routines can result in meltdowns which appear aggressive; or obsessional interests can result in criminal acts such as improperly obtaining access to security areas at airports and rail yards.

According to a survey carried out on behalf of the NAS by nfpSynergy in September 2005:

- 52% of the public have heard of AS compared to 85% of solicitors and 62% of police officers
- 40% of the public are aware that AS is a form of autism compared with 65% of solicitors and 35% of police
- 21% of police officers and 22% of solicitors would be confident in recognising someone with AS — of which 5% and 6% respectively would “definitely” be confident
- Only 1% of police officers believed that there was a high level of understanding of autism in their profession, compared with 4% of solicitors: the balance were uncertain or thought definitely not

- 36% of police officers and 50% of solicitors who had experience of people with AS believed that the criminal justice system treated people with AS worse than others

- 87% of police officers and 59% of solicitors believed that carrying the autism awareness card issued by the NAS would be useful in identifying people with AS

In England and Wales, arrested persons are protected under the *Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE Act)* which prevents interrogation unless one's solicitor is present. It is absolutely essential that a solicitor should be requested as soon as you are taken to a police station and you identify yourself as having AS to both the desk sergeant and to the solicitor. Arrested persons in Scotland do not have the right of legal representation at interrogation.

Without legal representation, there is a very serious risk of Aspies admitting to things that are not actually offences during the course of criminal investigations, either because they want to please the investigating officers or because they are applying a concrete interpretation of the law. For example, by admitting to fraud as a result of writing cheques when they knew that there were insufficient funds in the account even though the cheques might not have been sent off or deposited until there was cash to cover them. The police certainly will not bother to investigate further if they have a “confession” in hand, and once given, it will be almost impossible to retract.

If you are remanded in custody, this means that you will be taken to prison whilst awaiting trial rather than being released on bail where you can return home. If this



happens to you, it is essential that you request segregation as a Vulnerable Person under Rule 43 (Rule 80 in Scotland).

As autism-spectrum disorders, including AS, are identified mental and behavioural disorders in the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases, ICD-10, the provisions of the *Mental Health Act 1983* in England and Wales or the *Mental Health Act (Scotland) 1984* could apply. If so, you will avoid going to prison but will rather be treated under the mental health system — hopefully in an AS specialist facility such as the Hayes Independent Hospital near Bristol or Milton Park in Cambridgeshire.

If you have not previously obtained a formal diagnosis of AS, it is essential that your solicitor uses the services of an expert recognised by the NAS or other similar organisation such as the Scottish Society for Autism.

For some people, the first time that they learn they have AS may be — if they are fortunate — when they are psychologically assessed as part of the criminal court process. Why fortunate? Because very, very few criminal justice system professionals are familiar with the condition and therefore alert to its possibilities, and fewer still forensic psychologists and psychologists have expert knowledge of it. For example, in Scotland, only one psychologist — Dr Elizabeth Matheson at the Killearn Centre in Maryhill, Glasgow — is accredited by the NAS and is prepared to provide expert testimony in court. Unfortunately, she only covers the Greater Glasgow NHS area.

Contrast this with the psychologists and psychiatrists employed on a permanent and consultant basis at the State Hospital, Carstairs and the Scottish Prison Service: according to replies following requests under the *Freedom of Information Act*, not one psychologist or psychiatrist employed by either organisation

has undertaken any specialist training in AS or is regarded as an expert in the condition.

The NAS provides information sheets on *Autistic spectrum disorders and involvement in the criminal justice system* and *Autistic spectrum disorders and prison*, available from the NAS Information Centre.

*The NAS produces an information pack, called Autism: a guide for criminal justice professionals which addresses some of the issues raised in this article. The NAS also provides an online learning resource for criminal justice professionals on the NAS website ([autism.org.uk](http://autism.org.uk)).*

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## letters to the editor

Dear John,

I am disturbed by an article in one of the *Asperger United* mags about a self-defence class for adults with Asperger syndrome which would be suitable for me. It seems to me that you could be arrested for using force to defend yourself. I feel upset and would like to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights, but I would need strong support to present my case.

Yours sincerely,

David

The Editor responds:

*It is true that you can be arrested for defending yourself, but that does not mean you will go to court. If you are arrested, you will be taken to a police station and interviewed. This is so that the police can sort out what actually happened. If the force you used was just enough to protect yourself and no more, and you didn't cause the incident, you would then be asked to make a formal statement of what happened. Then, either taken back to where you were arrested, or home (your choice, as long as you don't live very far away, but if you did they would probably agree to drop you at a bus stop or railway station).*

*If you are arrested, you should tell the police about your diagnosis or self-diagnosis, as this should make them treat you in ways that will be less stressful. This is a situation where an Autism Alert card would be useful (these can be purchased from the NAS).*

*Please understand that it is hoped that things published in AU do not cause anxiety in readers; please let the Goth know about any submissions that you find distressing. The Goth can be contacted at the usual AU postal and email addresses.*

## Probability of developing an autistic spectrum disorder

The November 2006 edition of *Scientific American* contained some new research into causes of autism. The neuroscience was too technical for me, but I noted a statement that susceptibility to autism is inherited. This was qualified by the statement that environmental factors also seem to play a role.

What concerns me is that, if I have a gene which caused me to be susceptible to autism, then my close relatives presumably carry this gene in an inactive form, and it could manifest in their descendants. I don't have any information that would help me to determine which parent I inherited the gene from. (To be totally accurate, there must also be a small probability that both my parents carried it.)

I'm unlikely to ever have children myself, but for my family's sake I would like to know the level of risk. Does anyone know of any research bearing on: 1) The percentage of the population that carry susceptibility to autism in their genes; and 2) The probability, given that someone has the susceptibility, of actually developing an autistic spectrum disorder? I think that these two quantities should be statistically related, so that if you know one (and given information on what percentage of people have an ASD), you can estimate the other.

Having some idea of the level of risk would be helpful to my brother's and cousins' families.

Colin





# How to reply to Pen Pals

- Please remember to let us know the name and number of the person whom your letter is for.
- To contact a pen pal, please send your letter to *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.
- We will pass your letter on to the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.
- Please note that all pen-pal letters sent via *Asperger United* are opened before being passed on.
- Those under the age of sixteen must have parental permission before placing a pen pal advertisement in *Asperger United*.

**\*\*Important notice — please read\*\***

*Asperger United* is happy to publish pen-pal advertisements but we must stress that we are not a pen-pal or introduction organisation. We do not match people up and we cannot monitor letters (other than the first letter, that is sent via us) so please be cautious when releasing personal details in your letters. The National Autistic Society / *Asperger United* cannot intervene or be held responsible for any ensuing correspondence between letter-writers.

**Please note that from now on, pen pals will be numbered, so as to avoid confusion. Please include the number of the pen pal on your letter.**

## Pen pal number 1

**Name supplied** but withheld, 27-year-old female, full-time publishing professional with AS diagnosis at 18, whose interests include music (with a preference for playing it as opposed to listening to it); studying philosophy and watching foreign films; seeks well-educated correspondent of any age and gender, for intelligent discussion on all manner of topics.

## Pen pal number 2

**My name is Amy.** I'm 18, I live in Somerset and I'd like a pen pal who has AS like me.

My hobbies include singing and spending time with my best friend Jenny and my boyfriend Michael. I sing ALL THE TIME!!! at Yeovil College in front of my friends and in the bath! I attend Yeovil College in Somerset and I'm studying there to get a couple of NVQs for a career in childcare.

I don't mind who my pen pal will be, but I would prefer a female aged 18-25 who's happy to read my joined-up writing.

I look forward to hearing from you!



## An Asperger in Bohemia

by Abby

Singular; a word often associated with Sherlock Holmes, the Baker Street detective and his confidant, Doctor Watson. A word peppered liberally throughout the stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. What self-respecting Holmes addict does not feel a tingle at the mention of the very word? It is that word which led me to look deeper into Holmes' psyche. Perhaps it is time to bestow the title "Most Famous Asperger" upon him and let it sit alongside "World's Greatest Detective" as it is my conjecture that Holmes was without doubt an undiscovered case of Asperger's syndrome until now.

For those people who feel left out in the cold by the term "Asperger syndrome" then let me try and enlighten you. We are delving into a world which is covered by the autistic banner. Named after the late Doctor Hans Asperger of Austria, Aspergers are said to be in the higher echelon of the autistic spectrum. They exhibit exceptional skills in specific areas; are supposedly, selfish, aloof, have poor communication skills (which on closer examination seems to be shown in what appears as bad manners and surliness) and flounder socially. They hone in on the minutiae and see the world through their own brand of rose-coloured spectacles. Most Aspergers are usually bereft of empathy and seem somewhat naïve. Their study of that which they find interesting borders on classic Holmes. They can seem unattached or ungrounded in reality but I believe that an uncluttered mind is simply a vessel awaiting greatness.

So, now we have the term Asperger syndrome, how do we apply it to the world's greatest detective? First we must examine the possible and eradicate the improbable. In

keeping with his methods we must begin by looking at the facts.

We are dealing with an individual, a singular individual, who in order to stay several steps ahead of his quarry writes a detailed paper based on the ash from various cigars, pipes and cigarettes. These methods soar far beyond the realm of "normal" detective work and suggest obsessive behaviour though I prefer to call it "highly interested" as "obsessive" smacks of deviant. Holmes sees what others do not. May I once again draw your attention to the facts surrounding the uncluttered mind?

While we are on the subject of drawing attention to all things Asperger may I also draw your attention to *the Curious incident of the dog in the night-time*, a book written by Mark Haddon, a non-Asperger, writing as an adolescent male Asperger and his fascination with all things Holmes hence the title. (Title liberally borrowed from one of Doctor Watson's journals entitled *Silver blaze*.) Perhaps the writer of the work formulated notions along the lines of my own? I wonder? Does he see Holmes as something much more than a stereotypical English eccentric or something akin to my own theory, that Holmes was that noblest of all autistic beasts, an Asperger?

We read of Holmes and his inability to empathise with clients who generally appear in his Baker Street rooms in a state of dishevelment. His disregard for both their feelings and their plight are given little or no regard as he relies on cold hard facts and nothing whatsoever can stand in the way of his own brand of logic. Those needy individuals who so often seek his help allow wringing

hands, collapsing fits, personal attacks and normal human emotions to stand in the way of fact and detail. Emotional traits are baggage, it seems, which only serve to temporarily cloud the salient points and hinder the tale being told. Watson, too, is regarded by Holmes as a distraction, little more than a crutch, never warmed to as a true friend, and it is only moments of realisation, when Holmes sees his "friend" left out in the cold that he patronises him with detail. The doctor serves only as a sounding board and little else, a witness to each triumph. One exception, however, merits our attention. If we take *the Adventure of the Devil's foot*, from *His last bow*, Holmes endeavours to experience the effects of "Radix pedis diablo" also known as "Devil's foot root" a hallucinogenic which first induces madness in whoever is foolish enough to use it, followed by a writhing death. To partake of the said root one burns enough to fill the air and once inside the lungs, the nervous system is attacked. Holmes, taking his life into his own hands, lays on a small experiment whereby he breathes in a sufficient amount of the burning root to render him and his usual demeanour defenceless. He is seen screaming, writhing and lashing out. It is only Watson's intervention that saves him. Watson aids his colleague and Holmes eventually returns to a compos mentis state although before he does so he calls out for John, John being Watson's Christian name. Only in a medicated state is Holmes seen to tap into his emotions, a problem he shares with many Aspergers.

Though this is by no means a detailed account of either Asperger syndrome or Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street, I do hope that my theory expressed herein has captured your attention sufficiently and opened the door to possibility. Now, perhaps in future, we will read the word Asperger and think it synonymous with both Sherlock Holmes and his singular manner of deduction.

### Pen pal number 3

**Hi, my name is Mike**, I am 17 years of age and suffer from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and Asperger syndrome. Due to this I have a very short attention span which shows in class majorly, but I am improving this by using my school's fitness suite (gym) and taking an omega-3 capsule called Effalex which helps me concentrate. I am only just studying for my GCSEs, which I am taking this year (2007).

I used to find it hard to make friends with anyone older or the same age as me due to my low maturity levels, so compensated by making friends with people younger than me, and even more so since I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome about seven years ago, so a pen pal of a younger or similar age and of any gender would be appreciated. I prefer to type my letters, due to my poor handwriting skills, and am a great fan of Pokemon, Harry Potter, basketball, and the book, movie and game of Eragon.

I live in a town near Reading, but go to a boarding school near Tavistock in Devon. Please write as soon as you can, bye.

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### To Whom It May Concern

I have just read the article by Elizabeth in the latest edition of *AU* and want to tell her that she does not need the receipts in order to use credit card type vouchers. The amount of money is stored in the card and all she has to do is take the card to the checkout and they can tell her how much is on it. Please can someone pass on the information to her.

Thanks,

Judy



## Is life becoming harder for people with an ASD?

by Colin

It is regularly reported that the percentage of the population known to have an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) is rising sharply, although it's still quite small. Sometimes sceptics pick on this statistic — they say that there is no reason why cases of autism should be increasing, therefore the diagnoses must be mostly wrong, and it follows from this that there is no reason to channel extra resources into helping people diagnosed with an ASD.

I wonder whether we can identify other reasons for the increase in cases, and thus demonstrate that the need for more help for people with ASD is real. I don't claim to have a definitive answer; I'm just writing from my own experience, aiming to share some ideas and hopefully spark off a debate which will produce more insight. I suspect that we know more about ASD, from our own experiences, than many of the doctors who try to treat us.

People with an ASD generally like stability and are averse to change. Nowadays, changes in life are frequent. There was a time when people could get a job and expect to keep it for life, but now we can be relocated or made redundant at an employer's whim. This is generally regarded as a good thing, because it facilitates the working of the market economy. I question that judgment. When it comes to economic theory, I'm firmly in the E.F. Schumacher camp. In his classic book *Small is beautiful* (subtitled *Economics as if people matter*), Schumacher demonstrated that what we believe to be good economics is a consequence of the assumptions that we start from. I believe that it's OK for people to become rich by their own efforts, but not by exploiting others. In earlier times, I would probably have inherited a family trade, giving me a secure job, or possibly entered some sort of monastic community to pursue my spiritual and academic interests. Either of these would have made my life less stressful than it now is.

Also, we used to grow up in communities which were quite stable; nowadays market forces and the general breakdown of family life make our communities unstable. Note that again it's market forces which are driving people to move home, thus disrupting communities. Some social mobility is necessary, otherwise we would all be trapped by the class structure, but I think that we have too much at present. In earlier times, I would have been helped by my community to form a relationship leading to a stable marital commitment by friends match-making on my behalf. If I'd grown up in the same community through my whole childhood, knowing the same girls in my late teens as I did at junior school, I might even have overcome my shyness enough to develop such a relationship without help. Again, I think this would have made my life less stressful. If you combine that with the changes envisaged in the previous paragraph, I would never have manifested the stress levels which led to me being diagnosed with an ASD. I would still have been an Aspie, but no one — not even myself — would ever have known.

We used to have an agreed moral order, but nowadays many children get little grounding in morality, no stable home life, and they turn into bullies and we are among those who become the victims. I suspect that this may be a major cause of the rise in ASD diagnoses in childhood. When I was young, I was different to other children, but it didn't matter enough for my parents to feel the need to seek help. Nowadays, our differences do cause children problems, so parents do feel compelled to seek advice, and ASD diagnoses are one result of this.

Finally, Asperger people used to be able to shine academically, thus gaining a measure of respect and self-esteem that way. This was my experience at junior school in the late 1960s.



Nowadays school standards have slipped so much that it must be a lot harder to stand out in that way. A friend who works in education has told me that teaching methods have changed, in ways that work against children with an ASD. I understand that children are now taught several ways to do the same sums, and are invited to choose between them. This is more confusing than being taught a single method. Lower self-esteem in children, caused by reduced performance in school, probably leads to problems for which parents seek help, thus increasing the likelihood that an ASD will be spotted.

I believe that it is possible to envisage an economic and social order in which high-functioning autistic people are not disadvantaged, either in adult life or at school. You may be thinking that economic theory and social morality are not Asperger issues. I submit that they are, because they create the circumstances in which having an ASD puts us at a disadvantage.

So, in conclusion, I think that the rise in ASD cases is a product of the changes in society. There were probably as many people with ASDs in the past as there are now, but they weren't noticed because mild autism was not as much of a handicap as it is nowadays. Our gift as Aspies is to see the world differently. I hope this article stimulates people to think creatively and differently, about how to create a more Asperger-friendly world.

*The NAS has a questionnaire for adults with an ASD (with a second part for parents and carers). The information collected will be used to campaign for better services for adults with ASD. Copies can be requested from Mia on 020 7903 3558 or you can fill it in on line:*

***[www.autism.org.uk/questionnaire](http://www.autism.org.uk/questionnaire)***

### Positive living

A series of thoughts by **Daniel**

#### Think positively

This doesn't mean ignoring the negative, but turning negatives to positives and behaving nicely to people. I fear talking aggressively. The advantage of this is that I am considerate and friendly. I am careful so as not to offend.

#### Appreciate the moment

This doesn't mean ignoring the past or the future, but not getting lost in the past or the future. What is there about the present that you like? What do you have that you appreciate?

#### Be careful of traps

One trap is the perfectionist trap. I don't find life easy, because I think of myself as not being perfect and I don't like this. It has been easier for me to concentrate on my problems. I have developed a social fear. I fear that I might influence others to feel negative. I also fear having disrespect toward God. Both of my problems stop me from thinking positively and appreciating the moment. I need to get out of this trap. I need to not think of myself as not good enough nor deserving.

#### Turning fears to positives

To feel better, to achieve this, I could turn my fears to positives. Fearing having disrespect makes me very considerate. So does fearing that I might influence others to feel negative.

#### Changing for the better

To get better, I need to change what I think. If I could think more positively, then perhaps I will feel better.

## Reasons to be cheerful!

by John

Asperger syndrome does cause a lot of problems for people who have it, but it also offers many advantages. This article is a celebration of all the good things about Aspergers:

- We generally have high intelligence. Neurotypicals understand and appreciate high intelligence, so this is a good point to start with.
- We are reliable. If we are expected to be at work at, say, 9am only exceptional circumstances will make us late.
- We are honest.
- We have good memories, especially for facts. If you want to recruit another member for a quiz team, look for someone with Asperger's!
- We can be persistent in fighting a cause till we win, though the converse is that we perhaps sometimes are too persistent when we should back down.
- We are loyal, eg. a person with Asperger syndrome will be dedicated to his employer and someone with Asperger's who is married is unlikely to have an affair.
- We are very logical thinkers. Quite a few Aspergers become lawyers as the legal system is very logical.
- We are able to use very precise language. Again, this is a very helpful trait for potential lawyers.
- Our special interests can have very positive effects. Often if an Asperger has work connected with their interest they can do that job very well, eg. someone who is into computers can be a very useful employee. Similarly, hobbies can be positively used.
- We are good at giving specialist advice. We can get to know a subject well, especially if it relates to our specialist interests, and be good at helping others with it.
- We are straightforward, not pretentious.
- We have a strong sense of fairness and justice.
- We can sometimes think laterally in situations. I would like to give a personal example of this. I find I can make jokes because I think differently to others. The first time I realised I could do this was when a colleague at work said, "There's a load of rubbish in the canteen today." I, of course, realised she meant the menu was no good, but I knew what she said also had a totally different meaning, so I replied: "You'd better ask the porters to take it away then".
- We have good eye for detail. If you want someone to do some proofreading, an Asperger is a good choice.

Whilst we have to be aware of our problems, Asperger syndrome is far from all gloom and doom. We need to emphasise our strengths and exploit them as much as we can, eg. when looking for a job, try to find one that uses our unique abilities.



## How AS makes you a big success

by Nick

How do I fail? I fail because I have money in my bank account; I have money in my pocket. There are many people in this world who do not and that is why I fail.

I fail because I am rich: I can afford to buy books and CDs and eat in restaurants. I get more than £3,000 a year but less than £10,000 a year; I apologise for not being more precise. I feel that to have more money than I have now would be detrimental to my ability to function, so this is a prized gift from nature.

If I did have too much money I'd want to keep buying things and I feel like I couldn't control the obsessional urges I feel would result. I had these obsessions before and they took over my life. I fought so hard to rid myself of them and I do not wish them to return. I find it difficult to cope with money, as it is very difficult to cope with organisation. I have little desire to earn more money than I have now; what I have now, though, I need. It gets on top of me. I would much prefer to work to just keep the amount of money I have now.

I am a success, I feel, because AS has allowed me to feel I have enough money: that's good. Lots of money would make my life more complicated and disorderly. My goal in life is to keep what I already have; I need it because I'm used to it and I know I will still want and will get more but the money I have now lets me stay in control. I feel perhaps that individuals with AS may have the potential to become some of the most outstanding and successful stewards for the development of our moral evolution. People with AS, I feel, seek a humble existence; it is their enterprise in life. It seems perhaps that many people with AS don't see the point of a system in which society is graded into different classes. They perhaps have the great potential to see all individuals as equals in stature.

It also appears that great people with AS often stick to rules, do not want to hurt others as much as the common person generally seems to want to. I seek a job where I don't have to earn a living and where I am not paid. I just want to get the money I get now for not working and work in a position where I can help people with autism.

The most successful people are, perhaps, people who work to help others because they feel they should. Perhaps more than those trying to get as much money as possible for themselves. I feel you cannot be a successful person if you make lots of money for just yourself, to be humble and noble is stardom. Lots of people have so little money, which makes them superstars. You have to care to be top. What one owns is not the story of success. It cannot be a success to have excess. What we do to help our fellow humans is what counts.

If you feel wrongly a failure all you have to do to be a superstar is this:

- have consideration for others
- stick to the rules of our society
- be kind.

Like me you will fail lots, but it's the trying that's important. I feel having AS is a gift that allows people to be humble and noble. Be very proud to have AS. It can be a gift that can make you a very nice person.

It does not matter if you don't always succeed because your disability makes it so very hard for you, as long as you try.

I feel nature gave people with AS to the world because nature experiments to find a better way. People with AS ain't perfect just like those without.



## From the inside out

by Laura

I live on the inside. I am always looking out. I can sometimes join those on the outside for brief periods of time, but they can never come inside and join me.

Some say my Asperger's prison is self-imposed. If only that were so. I am an adult diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. I am no longer an adorable, bright eyed child who can be gently coaxed outside by a knowledgeable therapist or teacher. There were no such programs available when I was young. I was told that I could venture outside my Asperger's shell if I just had the will to do so.

As a child I did attempt to come outside and join the others. I still attempt to do that on occasion. However, the possibility that a loud noise, a bright light, an unanticipated touch or an incomprehensible social situation will arise and send me back inside is very real and always inevitable.

I look at the others as if they had the magic map to successfully navigate through the maze of life. Of course, they don't possess such a map. No one does. But they seem to be able to run through the portals of appropriate social interaction, the high hedge of give-and-take verbal communication and climb the brick walls of friendship with an ease I envy. They run through the maze like a cheetah. I get through the maze like a blind turtle.

I don't understand friendship. They wonder why I don't reciprocate their friendly gestures. I think that reciprocation means giving someone a gift or a card, something tangible and expected at a certain time and for a certain purpose. If I give someone a gift that is unexpected, they seem confused and cynical. They think I am trying to buy their friendship. Then I get confused and cynical. I don't understand why they feel awkward when I try to express friendship in the only way I know.

They think I am shy. I'm not shy. I love to recite lines in a stage play, give a speech or a musical performance. I write poetry and sing in three different languages. These hobbies are solitary activities which I find enjoyable. I don't mind if I am doing them in a private or a public forum. I like it that others find these things enjoyable too. It is my only means to connect with the others who live outside.

Going outside of my world requires all the acting skills I have learned and the timing of a practised magician. It is a tremendous energy drain. The older I get the easier this becomes, yet afterwards I need a lot of personal space and decompression time. My social behaviour is a staged act. It consists of interconnecting memories of previous social encounters and scripted conversations woven together like a spider's web. This web will hold as long as the wind doesn't blow. An unanticipated, new, or spontaneous situation will cause a mental thunderstorm which tears a hole in the web. A black hole where the memory of "what to do next" should be, but I'm not able to locate it there. Then the strong gravitational forces of the black hole suck down all the confidence and carefully memorised scripts and finally they suck down the entire web too. I then need to flee, either mentally or physically. Then I leave a wrecked relationship hanging there, blowing away in the storm. It will be sucked down the black hole too, never to return.

I sometimes envy my cat. Nothing is expected of cats. They act according to their mercurial moods, yet nobody blames them for being aloof. They just are. They are cats.

And so we just are. We are Aspergers. Adults and children of a different temperament. Intelligent, humorous, loving and capable of many things, with different aptitudes and abilities just like the others on the outside. We exist, side by side. As

husbands and wives, children, sisters and brothers, students and co-workers we live alongside those on the outside while concurrently living on the inside.

We are on the inside looking out. We know there is a window to the outside, for we can see the others through this window, but this window doesn't readily open. We reach out, but the glass panes stop us from going

further. We search for a door, an opening, a secret passageway to the outside. Some of us find the door and can go outside for varying lengths of time. Some never find the door, but sit, still and silent, staring out the window to the outside. Some stop looking for the door altogether.

We are. We are adults with Asperger's. Like cats, we just are.

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### Autism and employment study

Understanding autism and employment is important for people with ASD.

These are important issues that we believe have a huge emotional, physical as well as financial impact on people with autism spectrum disorders and their families. For this reason, we would like to know more about your feelings and experiences. To do this, we are conducting a simple questionnaire study to identify the employment-related issues that are most important to you, both as carers of children with autism and as adults with an autism spectrum disorder.

We would like to hear from you if you are either an adult with a diagnosed autism spectrum disorder, or if you are a parent of a child (young, or adult) with a diagnosed autism spectrum disorder.

We would like your responses if you work full-time, part-time or not at all. If you would be happy to take part in our study, go to

[homepages.gold.ac.uk/autismandemployment](http://homepages.gold.ac.uk/autismandemployment)

You will then be given some more information about the study, which you should read. Finally you will be asked a few questions about your own employment experiences. This should take no more than fifteen minutes.

You do not have to provide your contact details, but at the end of the questionnaire you

will be given the opportunity to provide these. If you do so, you may be contacted from time to time to tell you about related projects that may be of interest to you. You are under no obligation to take part in these projects unless you wish to do so.

Any information that you provide will be confidential. It will only be available to the researchers on the study. You may opt out from the study at any time and we would remove your contact details from our database.

The research findings will help us to establish the priorities of future research. A summary of our research findings will be posted on the website.

We hope that this first wave of research will allow us to identify the employment-related issues that are most important to you, both as carers of children with autism and adults on the autism spectrum. We will then follow-up the issues that seem most relevant and important to you in further studies. If you have provided contact information, we may ask you to take part in these further studies. We will also use the information that you provide to form the basis for advice and guidance for employers and employees.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr Elisabeth Hill, Psychology Department at Goldsmiths, University of London. Email: [e.hill@gold.ac.uk](mailto:e.hill@gold.ac.uk), Tel: 020 7919 7886



## *The Complete Guide to Asperger Syndrome* by Tony Attwood

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers (ISBN: 918-1-84310-495-7) £17.99

### Review by Neil

This hardback book is the one that I think we've all been waiting for: a clear and well-written definitive guide to AS covering every aspect of life from early childhood to its effect on adult relationships and employment.

One of the leading experts in AS, Tony Attwood has provided a "one stop solution" to any questions that one might have about the condition. He describes the possible causes and indications of the syndrome; the various diagnostic criteria currently available; theory of mind; emotions in one's self and others; social interaction, including friendships and long term relationships; sensory problems and problems with cognitive abilities and comprehension of language; psychotherapy and other intervention; and career prospects.

Throughout the book, suggestions for adaptive behaviours are made which, if implemented, could be key to a changed life free of the worst drawbacks of the condition.

Each chapter ends with a checklist of points raised, which acts as an excellent aide-memoire. The book ends with a FAQ chapter, which covers issues of possible offending behaviour by people with AS and the long term outcomes.

This is 400 pages jam-packed with everything that most people need to know about AS. This is the book that every parent with an AS child, every AS adult (and their partners!) and every professional person working with people with AS should own.

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## *Friendships the Aspie way* by Wendy Lawson

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers (ISBN 1-84310-427-X) £15

### Review by the Goth

This is a very well-thought-out and -written book, which looks at each aspect of friendships in turn, starting with the more basic. At 150 pages it's quite long for a self-help book for autists, which might put you off, but friendship is a complicated subject, and much longer books have been written about it.

The book includes anecdotes, silly diagrams and poetry as well as the factual stuff, which provides plenty to think about and try to understand. I think this an excellent book for learning more about friendships, whether you are just starting or have already studied quite a lot.

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Both these books are available from the NAS online shop ([www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk) and type the title into the search box) and all good bookshops.

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