

## Resources

### General

Always ask people who have disabilities what their particular needs are and make reasonable adjustments according to their specific requirements. Two people with the same disability may not have the same needs.

### Asperger's Syndrome

Asperger's Syndrome is identified by three primary characteristics: an impairment in social interaction (e.g. the student will find it very difficult to interact with his/her peers, and may give socially inappropriate responses), difficulties with the use of language for communicative purposes (e.g. the student may take speech very literally, and may have limited/inappropriate facial expressions) and a rigidity of thinking (e.g. the student is likely to dislike any changes to routine). In addition, the student may be clumsy with poor fine motor skills, and may have sensory difficulties with an extreme aversion to some noises, textures or lights.

### Support

Do not expect the student to be able to evaluate their own performance and seek help if there is something amiss. Just because the student is not complaining, it does not necessarily mean that everything is fine; for this reason, do keep a close eye on the student's progress and attendance. If anything is missed intervene immediately.

#### 1. Instructions

- If you are giving a list of verbal instructions, be aware that students with Asperger's will have difficulty remembering the sequence. Write instructions on the board at the same time, or give out a handout. Try to check that the student knows what he needs to do.
- Break directions down into smaller steps.
- If your instructions have not been understood the first time, don't assume that simply repeating them will help the student. Try re-phrasing your directions.

#### 2. Questions

- It may be the case that the student will take a few seconds to respond to questions, in order to process the question and formulate the answer. Don't interrupt his train of thought immediately.
- Try to avoid asking vague questions, including 'how are you', and essay-type questions. You may not receive a reply.

#### 3. Attention

- When you're talking to the student, make sure they have your attention – being by using their name.
- Some students with Asperger's look as though they're not listening to you when they really are. Don't assume that just because a student is not looking at you he is not hearing you. Please don't try to force a student to look you in the eyes. This is actually incredibly uncomfortable for some people.
- Don't overload the student with information.

#### **4. Language**

- Sarcasm and some other forms of (attempts at!) humour will not be understood; therefore use and interpret speech literally. Until you know the individual, try to avoid:
  - idioms (e.g. save your breath, jump the gun)/double meanings
  - sarcasm (e.g. nice jumper!)
  - nicknames (you plonker)
  - Avoid ambiguities.
  - Avoid verbal overload – use shorter sentences, particularly when relaying important information.
  - Do not tease the student – even in a good-natured way – it will only be understood literally and be taken as criticism.

#### **5. Organisation**

- People with Asperger's syndrome have trouble with organisational skills, regardless of intelligence and age. Be aware that a student who might be brilliant at their subject may not remember to bring items such as paper or pen or homework to lectures. If your course is one where work must be handed in regularly every week on a particular day, tell the students and if possible, ask the student to write it on their timetable.
- Breaks from routine tend to be very difficult to cope with; be very clear if your lecture/class takes place at a different time or in a different place for a single time.
- Writing speed as well as organisation of notes is often an issue with students with Asperger's. Consider providing the student with handouts of your lecture notes at the end of each week. This may be something that a personal tutor can investigate.

#### **6. Testing and examinations**

- Particularly for CA tests, give notice of exactly when and where they will be as soon as possible. For your modules, let them know exactly which topics will be examined on which occasions, as well as the format of the paper (multiple choice/simple solution/essay. Again, written lists are the preferred format.
- In written examinations, if there are particular instructions, it would be useful to have written lists, particularly when sitting more than one paper in a single sitting. Write down exactly how long each test will take, and what to do with the papers when the student has finished the first, etc.

#### **7. Group work and presentations**

- Some students with Asperger's will find presentations in front of a group, even a tutorial group, extremely difficult. If this is the case, please discuss with either the Disability Rep or the DRC the suitability of alternative methods of assessment. For example, it may be that a mini-viva/video presentation may be more appropriate.
- If the students are asked to work in small groups, e.g. for project work or partnering for labs, consider choosing the groups yourself.

#### **8. General**

- For some students, certain noises, smells and sights can be very uncomfortable and probably distracting.
- Free choice can cause anxiety: be aware of this when offering options to the students, including which modules they are choosing for the coming academic year. Be prepared to offer advice/assistance or contact the DRC if this might be a problem.

For more information, see  
Developmental Adult Neuro-Diversity Association (DANDA) <http://www.danda.org.uk>  
The National Autistic Society <http://www.nas.org.uk>  
University students with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome <http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~cns/index.html>

Source: Dr Hazel Went, Disability Officer, University of Exeter, Disability Resource Centre, Old Library, Prince of Wales Road, Exeter, EX4 4SB.

## Sensitive Responses to Disability

Think about the words you use.

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Use instead</b>
the handicapped	disabled people
the disabled	disabled people
Cripple, invalid	disabled person
Spastic	person who has cerebral palsy
afflicted by, suffers from, victim of...	has or with... (the condition or impairment)
mentally handicapped, retarded, subnormal	learning impaired
confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	wheelchair user
able-bodied	non-disabled
disabled toilet*	accessible toilet*

Source: [www.scope.org.uk](http://www.scope.org.uk) (\*not on the scope list)