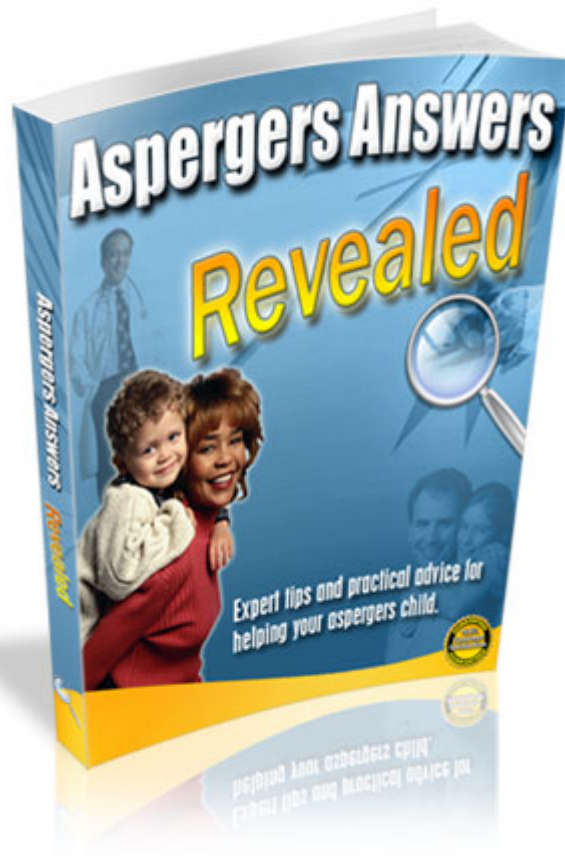


# Aspergers Answers Revealed



**"Learn How to Help, Understand & Cope with your Aspergers Child from a UK Chartered Educational Psychologist."**

**Written by Susan Bull**

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# About the Author



Susan Bull is a UK Chartered Educational Psychologist with first degrees in Education and Psychology and a Masters Degree in Educational Psychology (gained with Distinction). She has extensive experience working with children from birth to 18 years who have Special Educational Needs and has a particular interest in working with children on the Autistic Spectrum and their families and carers.

She is also the co-author of the best selling [Parenting Aspergers Resource Guide](#). As an expert on behavioral and psychological issues for Aspergers children and their family, Susan provides proven and detailed advice you can trust.

## Disclaimer

The writer of the material present in “Asperger's Answers Revealed” believes that a multi-disciplinary approach to parenting Asperger’s children is of extreme importance. This means combining the approaches of a wide variety of disciplines involved with Asperger’s children and their parents such as social workers, nurses, teachers, doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, speech therapists. Also it involves using the knowledge and information of parents themselves.

The author recognizes that within scientific, educational, social and medical fields there are widely divergent viewpoints and opinions. This material is written for the express purpose of sharing educational information gathered from the experiences of the author and other people in the areas mentioned above. None of the information contained in this e-Book is intended to diagnose, prevent, treat, or cure Asperger’s, nor is it intended to prescribe any of the techniques, materials or concepts presented as a form of treatment for Asperger’s.

Before beginning any practice relating to Asperger's it is highly recommended that you first obtain the consent and advice of a qualified health, education or social care professional. Should you choose to make use of the information contained herein without first consulting a health, education or social care professional, you are prescribing for yourself, which is your inalienable right. However, the author assumes no responsibility for the choices you make after your review of the information contained herein and your consultation with a qualified health, education or social care professional.

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## **For a parent who suspects their child may have Aspergers syndrome, what are the common symptoms to look out for?**

Aspergers syndrome is a developmental disorder that affects a child's ability to socialize and communicate effectively with others. Children with Aspergers syndrome typically exhibit social awkwardness and an all-absorbing interest in specific topics.

Signs and symptoms of Aspergers syndrome include:

- Displaying unusual nonverbal communication, such as lack of eye contact, few facial expressions, or awkward body postures and gestures
- Showing an intense obsession with one or two specific, narrow subjects, such as baseball statistics, train schedules, weather or snakes
- Appearing not to understand, empathize with, or be sensitive to others' feelings
- Having a hard time "reading" other people or understanding humor
- Speaking in a voice that is monotonous, rigid or unusually fast
- Moving clumsily, with poor coordination
- Having an odd posture or a rigid gait

Autism and Aspergers Syndrome are difficult to diagnose especially in young children where language and cognitive skills are still developing. All children are different, and many toddlers show a sign or symptom of Aspergers syndrome at some point. It's natural for small children to be egocentric, and many little ones show a strong interest in a particular topic, such as dinosaurs or a favorite fictional character. These alone aren't reasons to be alarmed!

However, if your child has frequent problems in school or seems unable to make friends, it's time to consult your pediatrician. These difficulties have many possible causes, but developmental disorders such as Aspergers syndrome shouldn't be ruled out.

## **My 6 year old boy becomes very angry a lot of the time, what can I do to help him deal with his frustrations better?**

A great deal of stress is likely due to his Aspergers. Some people react by becoming depressed, some become anxious, and others become angry and experience rage against the frustrating events that occur in their day. Some individuals externalize their feelings and blame others, while some internalize their feelings and have a difficult time controlling their anger. There may be no particular event to his anger – just an aggressive mood or reaction to a frustrating experience.

Encourage self-control and teach your child to consider alternative behaviors. Self-control can be strengthened by teaching your child to stop and count to ten, taking a deep breath and reminding themselves to keep calm. Or for some children it is helpful that they have an agreed room or particular space that they take themselves to when they feel that they are getting anxious/angry.

Specific relaxation techniques can be practiced and your child can be taught the cues when they must calm down and relax. Explain the alternative to your child and in specific terms.

Keep in mind that your son will most likely have difficulty expressing what is making him angry. You will need to assess the situation to determine what may be provoking him.

Another alternative is to keep him engaged in activities that burn off energy and reduce his need to express the anger that he is feeling.

## **Why do Aspergers children behave in an obsessive manner?**

It is very common for an individual with Aspergers to become fascinated by a special interest that dominates the person's time. It is important to recognize what the fascination may provide for this child before attempting to eliminate it or control access to it. The fascination or obsession may provide the order and consistency he/she craves. It may also provide a method of relaxation.

Rather than try to eliminate these altogether (which is almost impossible), create a plan that uses these unusual interests as a reward for completed tasks. For example if you ask the child to complete a task that he/she is familiar with and in which he/she can be successful. Then give him time on the interest as a reward. This way your child will learn to manage and control the obsession better.

## **Why do Aspergers children have short attention spans?**

Children with Aspergers syndrome frequently exhibit problems associated with other special needs, e.g. attention problems and obsessive/compulsive disorders. Researchers and practitioners are unsure whether these behaviors are a part of Aspergers Syndrome or are comorbid, (i.e.related) disorders.

The characteristics of Aspergers syndrome include difficulties in social communication, sensory problems and organizational difficulties. All of these combined will certainly affect their ability to sustain concentration for any length of time.

For example a room may be too bright, noisy, too many pictures which are all distractions and high stimulation. problems can be an area of difficulty for people with Aspergers. This means that certain sights, noises, tastes and textures can bother the person more than they would a person without Aspergers.

Aspergers individuals will often not fully understand what is being said to them and will often misinterpret crucial verbal and non verbal information. They also find it difficult to give consistent eye contact as this sometimes interferes with their ability to take in new information.

## **I'm worried about how my child will cope as he reaches his adolescence. What advice can you give?**

Remember firstly that this is a difficult age stage for both child and parents of all children and that some of your child's behavior will be down to the onset of adolescence and not Aspergers.

However you are absolutely right in recognizing that young people with Aspergers need help that is tailored to their more specific needs.

Try reading up on books that deal with puberty and adolescence "Taking Care of Myself: A Hygiene, Puberty and Personal Curriculum for Young People with Autism" by Mary Wrobel and "Personal Hygiene: What's That Got to Do with me?" by Pat Crissey are both good choices for this subject.

It might also be worth reading "Aspergers Syndrome in the Adolescent Years" by Liane Holliday Willey and Luke Jackson. Hopefully these books will give you some coping strategies.

It will be important that your teenager eats a healthy diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables and that you try to avoid giving her food with too many additives and sugar.

Taking regular exercise would be a good idea as this has been proven to help with mood/depression etc. and is something you could do as a family.

Walking in the countryside would be good if this is possible or if she would prefer some sort of exercise class or a martial art like Taekwondo might be enjoyable.

There are several groups on the internet designed by young people with Aspergers specifically for them, these include [www.aspiesforfreedom.com](http://www.aspiesforfreedom.com) and [www.aspergerinformation.net](http://www.aspergerinformation.net)

## **I don't want my child to be on medication for the rest of his life. Are there any non-drug treatments available?**

Some parents introduce specific diets for their children with Aspergers in an attempt to improve the condition or relieve uncomfortable physical symptoms. The most widely known diet for people on the autistic spectrum is the Gluten/Casein free diet (GF/CF diet). In this diet all wheat and dairy products are removed.

Reported effects include the reduction of any existing gut/digestive problems, improved attention, eye contact and general behavior. The diet has many devoted followers but all evidence at this time is anecdotal and nothing has been proven.

However if you decide to try the diet it is important to do as much research as possible before you start and to consult your doctor. You may find your doctor is not supportive as this approach is not, as yet, widely accepted by the medical profession; although some doctors may be sympathetic.

Another diet followed is the Feingold Diet which eliminates all artificial colors, preservatives, flavors, etc. and encourages fresh, natural foods.

Vitamin supplements may be used and fish oil supplements are cited as particularly beneficial although this is still a matter of debate. It makes sense to feed any child a healthy, additive free diet and thankfully the medical profession is now acknowledging the effects of diet on behavior.

As with any other diet you may introduce to a person with Aspergers it is wise to consult your primary medical practitioner and to extensively research it via books, the web and through talking with other people who have used the diet.

Do not remove whole food groups from your child's diet or introduce large doses of vitamins and minerals without specific medical advice.

## **My 7 year old daughter has been diagnosed with Aspergers and it's a constant struggle to get her to pay attention or even look at me! She seems in a world of her own sometimes. Any suggestions?**

Adults who are diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome have suggested that it is easier for them to make eye contact if they don't have to listen. Some describe situations where having to make eye contact causes breaks in their concentration. So clearly there are some problems for the person with Aspergers if they have to do more than one task like this at the same time (i.e. eye contact and listening).

It is also difficult for a child with Aspergers Syndrome to understand what an individual is communicating through eye contact. Others actually describe the experience of having to make eye contact as frightening.

It is important to recognize that Aspergers Syndrome is a neurological disorder (caused by a medical problem with the brain) and the child is not choosing to behave this way. In fact it may well be a way of the child coping with their environment.

You can create a conducive environment by:

- 1.) Minimizing distractions - Minimize the distractions for your daughter, provide direction in simple one-two step directions and provide ample times and cues (verbal and/or visual) for completing the task.
- 2.) Frequent breaks - Allow her to take frequent breaks, or break work into small blocks; she will be able to perform better.
- 3.) Providing structure - Providing structure to her day and routines, where the same activities occur at the same time everyday, will let her know what to expect.

4.) Break tasks down - Break tasks into small segments; start with 5-10 minute blocks to see what she can handle. Then provide her with a visual cue (like a clock, or timer) to help her monitor her own behavior.

5.) Physical activity - At the end of the segment, provide 5 minutes of activities that will burn some energy and allow her to focus better.

## **I understand Aspergers is a form of autism? But how does it differ?**

Aspergers is also described as an autism spectrum disorder, in that it shares many of the same characteristics of more “classical” autism. Although they are both on the same continuum there are definite differences between children with Aspergers Syndrome and Autism. You can see this in their social interactions, language and development over time.

High Functioning Autism is very much like Aspergers Syndrome except that the professionals seem to apply that diagnosis to children who were non-verbal when they were younger.

Because people with Aspergers Syndrome usually do not have delayed language they are usually considered to be at the higher end of the autistic spectrum (also can be known as higher functioning).

Children with Aspergers have a number of indicators which are outlined below:-

- Aspergers is much more common in boys than in girls. In fact the boy to girl ratio is about 10 boys to each girl.
- People with Aspergers have problems with social skills, have difficulties with transitions or changes and prefer things to be the same.
- They often have obsessive routines and may be preoccupied with a particular subject of interest.

- They have trouble understanding nonverbal cues (such as body language) and often a person with Aspergers has difficulty understanding proper body space (or “personal space”).
- They may also be overly sensitive to sounds, tastes, smells, and sights.

It's important to remember that the person with Aspergers sees the world very differently.

## **Is it always necessary for an Aspergers child to go to a specialist school?**

Many children with Aspergers attend mainstream schools and most western countries have introduced legislation to support the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs in mainstream settings.

One question to ask is what resources your local school can offer. Prior to the start of the school year, you will need to meet with teachers and school personnel who will be involved in your child's life. The purpose of this meeting is to help them learn about your child and special needs your child may have. Remember that you are serving as your child's advocate.

Your child's school will prepare an educational plan, called the IEP (Individual Education Plan) or some equivalent. Make sure you understand what that plan entails, and if you don't, then ask questions until you do. The rationale included in this plan will be a determining factor to your child's success in school. Your ability to assist in this process will also be determined by your comprehension of the plan.

Your child's teacher will need you to inform them of changes that occur in your child's routine, in your child's life, or in your child's demeanor. As the AS child has difficulty in transition, these are critical changes in your child's life.

Some parents actually prefer a special school setting as they feel the teachers are more specialized and knowledgeable and the resources are better. May have a variety of allied professionals including speech and occupational therapists onsite and also have extra facilities like soft play areas and even fully equipped sensory rooms.

Try to look at all the options and decide which environment your child is likely to be happiest in. He/she will learn best in a place where he/she feels safe and secure.

### **My son doesn't make friends easily because of his Aspergers. I'm worried he'll be bullied when he starts school. What should I do?**

Children with Aspergers have a difficult time establishing friends. This is due in large part to a general lack of social skills. Helping your child gain social skills will provide a base on which friendships can be built. Your child may have a difficult time joining in with others and may even experience anxiety if forced to join a group. This may in turn lead to inappropriate behaviors, which may distance them even more from the group.

A child with Aspergers often does not seem motivated or know how to play with other children of their own age. When involved in joint play, there can be a tendency to impose or dictate how the activity will occur. Social contact with other children may only be tolerated as long as the other children play by their rules. Playing with other children means that they have to share and also that they have to cope with different ideas.

Many children with Aspergers prefer to be left alone and participate in their own activities without interruption. You can help your child by teaching them social skills that may make them more comfortable in social situations but also help them to interact appropriately and less likely to be a target for teasing.

Carol Gray developed a technique called Social Stories that has been shown to be effective in increasing social skills. This technique involves creating a story board that describes a situation and include appropriate actions and expressions. It can be like a cartoon sequence of events that give your child an idea of how to act in a certain situation.

For example there may be a social story on how to play board games. This would show from start to finish what you do and explain things such as the need to take turns, why everyone must stick to the rules, why it can be fun etc. For more details on social stories visit [www.thegraycenter.org](http://www.thegraycenter.org)

Other things you can do include teaching your child how to start maintain and end play. Teach flexibility and cooperation in interactions with others. Invite friends to the house and make sure the occasion is a success, maybe by planning the activities with little room for error.

## **Our youngest daughter has been diagnosed with Aspergers and demands a lot of our attention. What can I do to reassure her two elder sister's that we're not neglecting them?**

Explaining Aspergers syndrome isn't easy no matter who you are talking to. It's not something that can be described in a single, snappy sentence. There are problems because you cannot tell by looking at someone if they have Aspergers syndrome. Also because the causes of Aspergers are yet to be clearly identified it can sometimes be difficult convincing people that the condition actually exists.

You could try explaining to older children that, people with Aspergers basically have problems in 3 major areas. This is usually part of the criteria for diagnosing Aspergers syndrome.

These areas are:

### **1) Social communication**

This means knowing what to say to other people and understanding the meaning of what they are saying to you. Just imagine how many times a day the basics of social communication come into your child's life; at the shops, at home, at school, in the street.

People with Aspergers Syndrome can have problems when talking to other people as they can take things people say literally. An example would be if you say to someone with Aspergers "I laughed my head off" they may become alarmed believing that your head really did come off of your body.

It can be very hard for people with Aspergers to understand when someone is joking and that is why they may become angry or upset by something you have said that wasn't meant to be hurtful.

## **2.) Social Understanding:**

This means knowing what to do when you are with other people. People with Aspergers have difficulty understanding social relationships, they do not understand all the rules involved in social relationships.

As we grow up we learn how to behave appropriately in certain situations, for example we learn not to say things to people like "you look fat" (unless we are deliberately trying to be hurtful).

A person with AS usually doesn't meant to be rude, even though it can sometimes appear so, it's because their understanding of how to behave is confused.

## **3.) Imagination**

This is the ability to think about things that aren't real.

Children with Aspergers syndrome tend not to be interested in games that involve pretending to be someone else (like cops and robbers). Some children with Aspergers can be very interested in things that aren't interesting to other children or exclude social interaction.

They may like collecting items that seem dull or unusual to us.

One book I have come across that is aimed at children ages 7-15 is "Can I Tell You about Aspergers Syndrome? A Guide for Friends and Family" by Jude Welt. Some other books written by young people with Aspergers are "Freaks, Geeks and Aspergers Syndrome: A User Guide to Adolescence" by Luke Jackson written by a boy with Aspergers who was 15 at the time and "Aspergers Syndrome, the Universe and Everything" by Kenneth Hall.

There are also websites that provide a great deal of information about the condition.

A good one is Sibnet, set up by the Seattle Children's Hospital Project. Sibnet is specifically for siblings of disabled children and is for both young siblings and adult brothers and sisters.

The site contains information and resources for siblings of disabled children and allows them to subscribe to the site - a place where they can share information and discuss issues they may be facing.

## **It can be exhausting coping with my 9 year old. I often feel like a failure because I struggle to cope sometimes. Is that normal?**

The diagnosis of a serious disability such as Aspergers brings many changes and demands to the family. It is not uncommon for family members to feel depressed and the NAS Autism Helpline receives thousands of calls a year from families who are under many pressures. So you are not alone!

Having a child with Aspergers has the potential to place a great deal of strain on families. Couples struggle with issues of blame, whose fault is it, and guilt. Daily routines are a constant challenge. A special needs child often comes with additional financial costs to the family.

Dealing with the school can seem like a full-time job. The time that it takes to care for a special needs child can leave other family relationships with no attention.

So in order to avoid burnout, parents must make time for themselves.

Parents often respond to this suggestion by saying that they don't have any time to do that!

However, what you need to keep in mind is that even a few minutes a day can make a difference.

Some parents just do such simple things as apply hand lotion or cook their favorite dinners to make themselves feel better.

Parents, just like individuals with Aspergers need rewards in order to be motivated. Parents who have children with autism have even more of a need to reward themselves, because parenting their child is often frustrating and stressful.

In addition to rewarding themselves, family members need to reward one another. Spouses need to acknowledge the hard work that each is achieving. Also remember to thank siblings for watching or helping out their brothers and sisters.

It is also important that spouses try to spend some time alone. Again, the quantity of time is not as important as the quality. This may include watching television together when the children are asleep, going out to dinner, or meeting for lunch when the children are in school.

Families may also want to occasionally engage in activities without the individual with Aspergers. This may include mom, dad and the siblings attending an amusement park together. Often families feel guilty not including the individual with Aspergers, but everyone deserves to enjoy time together that is not threatened by the challenges of Aspergers.

Search your area for support groups or networks. It gives us comfort to know that we are not the only ones experiencing a particularly stressful situation. In addition, one can get the most useful advice from others struggling with the same challenges.

Support groups for parents, siblings and grandparents are available through educational programs, parent resource centers, autism societies and Developmental Disabilities Offices. In addition, there are now online supports available for family members.

## Useful Aspergers Resources & Further Reading

**[Parenting Aspergers Resource Guide](#)** – Written by Dave Angel with Susan Bull, this best-selling ebook provides more in-depth advice and solutions for parents of Aspergers children.

**[www.AspiesForFreedom.com](http://www.AspiesForFreedom.com)** – Forums, chat rooms and articles about Aspergers & Autism

**[www.theGrayCenter.org](http://www.theGrayCenter.org)** – Non-profit organization dedicated to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and their carers.

**[Sibnet](#)** – Community Support Group for siblings of people with special health, developmental and emotional needs.