

“Seven Basic Supports for the Asperger Student
in the Inclusion Classroom”

By
Annette Wilkes
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Dedicated to:

My wonderful son

Chandler Unified School District
Special Education Department
Chandler, AZ

And to:

Anyone who cares enough to make the educational
process more meaningful to an Asperger Student

Seven Basic Supports for the Asperger Student in the Inclusion Classroom

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is a result of research of literature written for parents, teachers and other professionals regarding the needs of a student with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) in the regular classroom. My interest in this topic stems from my oldest son, who is thirteen years old and was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome at age eight.

Quotes from doctors and educators, most of them having around twenty years of experience or more in teaching or otherwise working with students with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorders), fill this paper. Special education law is quoted, especially the Federal Law for students with disabilities known as IDEA. For me, one of the least enjoyable aspects of raising a student with Asperger's is the need to study special education law. For many parents with an AS student who attends school, the unfortunate fact is that not studying it is not an option.

Asperger Syndrome is a complicated neurological-based disorder, and its impact on the behavior of the AS student must not be underestimated. I do not claim that every single Asperger kid needs every one of the supports mentioned in this paper, neither do I intend this list to be all-inclusive. I simply think it may be a good starting point .

Educating an Asperger student in the least restrictive environment usually means that he will be in a regular classroom for a good part of the school day. I propose that it is unfair to the student, however, to place him in a regular classroom without several basic supports.

I have chosen the following supports to discuss because I found them mentioned frequently in the literature and because I think they are likely to be beneficial to most AS students. It must be remembered that each AS student is first and foremost an individual with his own individual needs. The supports described here address broad, major themes. Given the complex nature of the disability, it would be nearly impossible to list every single way an AS student can be supported in a regular inclusion classroom. The literature shows that professionals often agree on some of the major supports needed, however, and it is those supports presented in this paper.

My hope is to convince the reader of the importance of these supports and to see them implemented more often with Asperger students. As an added benefit, the reader will become acquainted with some of the excellent literature available regarding the student with Asperger's.

This paper is based upon the premise that Asperger's Syndrome is a type of high-functioning autism. (Cumine, 1998, Frith, 1991.)

For ease of writing, I use the masculine pronouns "he", "him" and "his" throughout this paper. The paper is meant to apply to female Asperger students as well.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It has been approximately 57 years since Dr. Hans Asperger wrote his distinguished paper identifying the disability that later came to be known as "Asperger Syndrome" (AS). Dr. Asperger was a pioneer in recognizing and treating children with this particular disability, which he originally called "autistic psychopathy", and which he believed was an inherited personality disorder. Today the term "autistic psychopathy" has been dropped, since it has been clarified that AS is a developmental disorder based in the neurological system and not a mental illness or personality disorder. Today autism spectrum disorders are believed to have a genetic basis, with environmental stressors playing a possible role in their manifestation.

There was a large gap of time between the first identification of autism spectrum disorders and their inclusion in medical diagnostic manuals. Autism and Asperger Syndrome are relative newcomers to medical diagnostic manuals. The introduction of the criteria for diagnosis of Asperger's was first included in the World Health Organization's manual in 1990 and the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in 1994.

Correspondingly, it is taking time for some school districts to recognize the term "Asperger Syndrome" and to implement adequate programs (including teacher training) to address the deficits AS student's manifest. It seems those school districts with weak programs for autistic students in general are having the most trouble with this issue. I hope to encourage our school systems to get up to date in their understanding and supports for AS students in the school environment. It is definitely no small task as a parent to secure the treatment and therapies that can make the difference in improving an AS child's quality of life. Deciding which of the many treatments and therapies to try and covering the expense (most are not covered by medical insurance) is a big job in itself, and it is only part of what is entailed in raising a child with AS. It has been documented that raising a child with AS places considerably more stress on families (Frith, 1991, Koegel, 1996). How unfortunate for any school to add to those burdens because of a lack of expertise in educating these students, especially since the literature abounds on how to do so.

While we wait for our schools to develop competency in educating these students, those of us who are involved with a student with Asperger's need to "do our homework" in order to understand these unique students and their needs. I hope this paper aids parents and teachers as well as other school personnel who are seeking to improve supports for AS students.

1. AN INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN (IEP)

A carefully thought out and implemented IEP is something that every student with Asperger Syndrome who is struggling to cope with the demands of school deserves. By a carefully thought out plan I refer to one in which the parents and educators alike can have a reasonable degree of confidence. It is an important step in supporting an AS student.

There is a much literature on how to produce good IEP's for students within the autism spectrum. Beth Fouse, Ph.D. has written a great how-to manual for parents and educators entitled *Creating a 'Win-Win IEP' for Students with Autism*. She has over twenty years of experience in the public schools both as a teacher and an administrator and is a retired Associate Professor in the Department of Special Services, School of Education and Psychology, at the University of Texas at Tyler. She writes and she speaks at conferences on the subjects of autism, behavior and the IEP. The following quote is from *Creating a 'Win-Win IEP' for Students with Autism*:

“IDEA (Federal Register, 1992 & 1999) mandates that the Individualized Educational Program be tailored to meet the individual needs of each child. The student's chronological age; needs of the family; medical, social interaction, and functional skills development needs; as well as generalization and maintenance needs (Smith, Slattery, & Knopp, 1993, p.1) should be considered.”¹

AS students vary greatly from each other in the severity of their behaviors that impede learning. It follows that they vary greatly in the specific supports they need in order to cope with the demands of the school day. Parental input is invaluable in identifying problem areas and methods that work with the student.

It should be remembered the student's parent has a perspective on the student that is unique among the other members of the IEP team, knowing the totality of the child's history. Of all the members on the IEP team, the parents usually hold the most vested interest in the student. It is the parents who will continue to live with the student when the school year is over; the parents are the ones who will see the student through to adulthood and beyond.

Teaching Children with Autism is edited by two Ph. D.'s involved in research at the University of California at Santa Barbara. From *Teaching Children with Autism* we read: “According to IDEA, parents are to be key players in the IEP process”² . . . “Crawford (1978) urged parents to demand that the goals of the IEP be specific, clear cut, and theirs as well as the professionals”³.

It must be remembered that AS affects not only the student's ability to learn academics, but also affects his ability to learn social-life skills, and oftentimes affects fine and gross motor skills. I am using the phrase “social-life skill” to distinguish between the social skills that are “nice” to have and the ones that are more severely life impacting. Examples of what I mean by social-life skills are: paying a cashier, knowing where to turn for help, and knowing whether someone

is truly your friend or someone trying to take advantage of you. Learning to advocate for himself is another important social-life skill. In the area of fine/gross motor skills, handwriting is often affected by this disability, and it is important to know how it is impacted and to what degree in the student with AS.

The Autism Society of America has produced a great little booklet entitled *Shaping our Future*. It is about educating students with autism and in it we read that “all areas of the student’s development should be addressed specifically in the IEP, including academic achievement, social and adaptive behavioral goals, and development of fine and gross motor skills. The development of communication skills (critical for students with autism) should be a vital component of the IEP.”⁴

2. HELP IN DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS

It is critical to the development of an AS student to receive help in the development of their social skills. Dr. Ami Klin at the Yale Child Study Center is actively involved in autism research. Dr. Klin and Dr. Fred Volkmar, with the support of the Learning Disabilities Association of America have written a booklet entitled *Guidelines for Parents: Assessment, Diagnosis, and Intervention of Asperger Syndrome*. They write, “More typically, autistic persons are withdrawn and may seem to be unaware of, and disinterested in, other persons. Individuals with AS, on the other hand, are often keen, sometimes painfully so, to relate to others, but lack the skills to successfully engage them.”⁵

The Indiana Resource Center for Autism at Indiana University supports families and individuals diagnosed within the autism spectrum with a lending library of educational materials and through other means. Stine Levy’s booklet entitled *Identifying High Functioning Children with Autism* reminds us that “the most persistent disability of high functioning persons with autism lies in their difficulties in interacting and relating to others in a meaningful way.”⁶

Many educators have demonstrated that autistic individuals can be taught the social skills that neurotypicals take for granted. From *Teaching Children with Autism* we learn that simply being included in a regular classroom does not give the student with AS an opportunity to learn social skills. “Typically functioning children in regular education classrooms naturally have the opportunity to expand on their social competencies. Children with autism do not share in that opportunity without support and careful planning. Social integration should be an equally important goal for these children and should be worked on separately.”⁷

Several other publications share similar thoughts. The medical community and educators worldwide recognize Asperger Syndrome. *Asperger Syndrome: A Practical Guide for Teachers* is written by psychologists and an educator from Lancashire, England. They tell us, “These children do not learn the necessary semantic and pragmatic skills from simply being surrounded by a communication-rich environment”⁸ and they remind us that “. . . .these children are not antisocial. Rather, they are asocial—at times wanting to be part of the social world, but not knowing how to enter it.”⁹

“They] do not pick up social skills incidentally, they need to be specifically taught. Intervention must start at the child’s level of interaction—recognizing he is socially immature—whatever his level of academic performance. It must be borne in mind that the child may be content in solitary pursuits. We should not force the child to join in, but take the approach of enhancing his social skills. The classroom environment should take account of the anxiety that a child can feel by being part of a group. There should be opportunities for the child to have his own ‘space’ at times. Other people need to understand the difficulties posed by the child with Asperger Syndrome, and the reasons why he behaves the way he does. These children appear to find it easier

to relate to adults than to others their own age. This may be because adults make more allowances, and modify their own behavior towards the child”¹⁰

Autistic and Asperger students can be taught social skills, and the teaching of social skills is a vital component of their education. Karen Williams, from the University of Michigan Medical Center Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Hospital, shares that:

“Most children with AS want friends but simply do not know how to interact. They should be taught how to react to social cues and be given repertoires of responses to use in various social situations. Teach the children what to say and how to say it. Model two-way interactions and let them role-play. These children’s social judgement improves only after they have been taught rules that others pick up intuitively. One adult with AS noted that he had learned to ‘ape human behavior.’ A college professor with AS remarked that her quest to understand human interactions made her ‘feel like an anthropologist from Mars’ (Sacks, 1993, p.112)”¹¹

If we choose to ignore the social deficits these students live with, we are probably asking for trouble. Dr. Brenda Myles and Richard L. Simpson from the Autism Resource Center at the University of Kansas Medical Center have written a helpful book entitled *Asperger Syndrome: A Guide for Educators and Parents*. In it we read that “without assistance, most children and youth with Asperger Syndrome will display a variety of socially incorrect, unaccepted, and nonreciprocal behaviors. Moreover, without support these individuals are vulnerable to emotional stress and apt to become agitated by social situations that they misinterpret.”¹²

One last area that I think is worthy of consideration regarding the social skills of students is the concept of the “hidden curriculum”. It is an interesting arena in the realm of social skills needed to get along at school. This material is also from *Asperger Syndrome: A Guide for Educators and Parents* :

“Every school has a hidden curriculum—the dos and don’t that are not spelled out, yet everyone somehow knows about (Bieber, 1994). For example, everyone knows that Mr. Garcia, the English teacher, doesn’t really care if you don’t turn in your daily assignments, as long as you do well on the end-of-chapter tests. Everyone knows that Mrs. Farquhar, the assistant principal, is a stickler for following the rules, so no one curses or even slouches in her presence. Everyone also knows that the really tough guys (the ones who like to beat up unsuspecting kids) hang out behind the slide, just out of teacher view. Everyone knows these things—that is,

everyone except the student with Asperger Syndrome. Students with Asperger Syndrome are at a disadvantage because they do not understand the hidden curriculum. . . . [these] students require direct instruction on the hidden curriculum. Understanding the hidden curriculum can make all the difference to students with Asperger Syndrome—it can keep them out of detention and help them make friends.”¹³

3. PROTECTION FROM BULLYING AND TEASING

AS students frequently have to deal with relatively constant teasing and bullying from other students. The characteristics that they display make them relatively easy targets. They tend to be trusting and naïve, and sometimes desperately want friends. They usually don't have the skills needed to thwart teasing. Their peers find them entertaining targets, so they become targets for repeated teasing and bullying. My son refused to go to school as a result of just such a situation towards the end of sixth grade, and was only persuaded to go back by the profuse apologies of his classmates.

Uta Frith provided the first translation into English of Dr. Hans Asperger's paper in which he described Asperger Syndrome as a recognizable clinical entity. Her book *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, published by Cambridge University Press, has become well read among those in the field of psychology wishing to better understand the syndrome and how it relates to autism. She writes, "[Dr.] Asperger pleaded for the recognition of such children, pointing out the potential that they had to offer society, and from the start he argued that they should be given very special education and guidance. He warned of them being teased and bullied at school, and of being misunderstood by teachers".¹⁴

When an individual has Asperger Syndrome, an important part of our work with them is helping them to understand the perspective of other people, including what they are thinking and possible reasons for why people do the things they do. *Asperger Syndrome: A Practical Guide for Teachers* introduces us to the concept of "the Asperger lens of interpretation" and cites case studies in which it was necessary to look at the behavior from the perspective of the student with AS in order to introduce interventions leading to better behavior from the student. Following is one such case study:

"Case Study 6:

JEFF: This secondary school boy is described as 'dangerous'. He's brought a screwdriver into school and intends to use it against boys who, he believes, are teasing and bullying him.

Theory: Recognise the lack of subtlety in his social interaction. Understand his vulnerability to teasing and bullying, and intervene to prevent it.

Original Intervention: Staff threaten exclusion and, after investigation, find no evidence of bullying.

BUT: What would the Asperger lens show us?

A specialist teacher observes 'low-level' teasing and bullying in corridors and yard, not apparent to school staff.

Jeff has no strategies for 'shrugging' this off, or dealing with it with humour.

He becomes angry, anxious, and isolated.

New intervention:

A welfare assistant, who has been given specialist training, is provided for Jeff at break and lunchtimes.

He sees her as an 'ally'.

He is taught specific strategies for dealing with unwanted comments and approaches."¹⁵

The "low level" teasing referred to can be happening in the classroom, quite unbeknown to the teacher, and can have a negative impact on the AS student's ability to do his work.

Carol Gray has done much to further our understanding of how individuals within the autistic spectrum learn social skills. She has over 20 years of experience as a consultant to students with Austistic Spectrum Disorders in Jenison Public Schools in Michigan and is the creator of the concept of Social Stories. Her workshops are fascinating. In the May-June 2001 issue of *Autism/Asperger's Digest Magazine* she wrote an article entitled "Teasing and Bullying". She writes:

"[Your child] is entitled to a learning environment that is physically, emotionally, and socially safe. . . . The research is quite clear that children who are targeted [for bullying] are frequently alone. Children who are anxious, insecure, and have a low self-esteem, and/or who lack social skills or have few friends, are at a high risk of becoming targets of bullying"¹⁶

Some suggestions included in her article:

- "Draw a map of places your daughter visits frequently, including home, school, and church. Make a circle around those contexts where bullying is frequently a concern. If possible, identify the time slots when bullying is most likely to occur within those settings. This process defines the problem, and is critical in making the most effective use of resources as an intervention plan is developed.
- Improve supervision of your daughter in high-risk settings. The research is clear that increasing supervision in high-risk settings can decrease bullying behavior, especially when the consequences for bullying behavior are clearly identified and consistently enforced.

- Consider creating alternate activities for high-risk times, like recess and lunch. For example, a reading club during recess, or a quiet lunch with a few friends in a quiet setting, may serve two purposes: 1) provide time to relax and recharge, while 2) avoiding bullying interactions that are most likely to occur during unstructured times.”¹⁷

4. TRAINED TEACHERS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS

Beth Fouse, Ph.D. contributed an article found in the November 1999 issue of Autism/Asperger's Digest. In it we read:

“Section 300.382 (IDEA Federal Register, 1999) goes on to say that states must ensure that all personnel who work with children with disabilities (including professional and paraprofessional personnel who provide special education, general education, related services, or early intervention services) have the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of children with disabilities. It appears that the IDEA Amendments of 1997 and the Final Regulations published on March 12, 1999 place a new emphasis on paraprofessional training for persons working with individuals with disabilities.”¹⁸

In *Shaping Our Future* we find the statement, “Failure is certain when the child with the disability is placed within the regular education setting with no backup support, no specialized training of the teachers, and no education of the classmates (Gresham, 1982) “¹⁹. We also find in *Shaping Our Future*, “Essential to an appropriate educational program is ongoing training of teachers, as well as support systems for parents and guardians to help the child to generalize learned skills to all settings.”²⁰

Dr. Tony Attwood is a distinguished clinical psychologist from Australia who has worked with many Asperger patients over the past 25 years. He lectures extensively and has produced some very helpful materials including a video presentation and a book entitled *Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals*. According to Dr. Attwood, “Parents, other family members and professionals have to understand the point of view of people with Asperger's syndrome in order to work with them effectively.”²¹

Finally, there is an excellent list of “Teacher Interaction Strategies” in *Asperger Syndrome: A Guide For Educators and Parents*. At the top of their list of effective teacher characteristics we find, “has a working knowledge of the characteristics of students with Asperger Syndrome.”²²

If teachers do not understand the characteristics of AS students they are likely to have unrealistic expectations of them. Some examples of unrealistic expectations may be: keeping up with a fast pace, doing unmodified assignments or assignments that are not modified enough, or coping with unexpected schedule changes. Expecting the student to be on task all day long may be another unrealistic expectation. Unrealistic expectations may lead to a variety of unwanted behaviors such as the student shutting down and refusing to work. Refusal is a well-documented characteristic of these students. It is imperative that teachers understand that an AS student who is refusing is most likely sending a message other than a wish to test the teacher's authority.

5. POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS

In *Asperger Syndrome: A Guide For Educators And Parents*, we find that:

“ Although behavioral problems are not universal among individuals with Asperger Syndrome, they are not uncommon. These problems often involve feelings of stress, fatigue, or loss of control or inability to predict outcomes. Thus, children with Asperger Syndrome do not have typical conduct problems, but rather behavior problems connected to their inability to function in a world they see as unpredictable and threatening. . . .when persons with Asperger Syndrome do experience behavioral difficulties, their problems are typically due to social ineptness, an obsessive and single-minded pursuit of a certain interest, or a defensive panic reaction.”²³

Reed Martin, J. D. is an attorney who has specialized in special education rights for over 30 years. He has an excellent web site and has been featured in the *Autism and Asperger's Digest Magazine* in their Special Education Law section. In the January-February 2001 issue of this magazine his article, entitled “Changing Behavior in the Schools”, helps us to understand the importance of positive behavior interventions. He also reminds us that “The IDEA statute clearly requires, at 20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(3)(B), ‘The IEP team shall, in the case of a child whose behavior impedes his or her learning or that of others, consider, when appropriate, strategies, including positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports to address that behavior.’”²⁴

Brenda Smith Myles and Diane Adreon's book *Asperger Syndrome and Adolescence: Practical Solutions for School Success* was published in 2001. In this book the authors state, “To most effectively and efficiently intervene with a problem behavior, it is important to understand the causes or functions of that behavior. The goal of functional assessment and related intervention procedures is not simply to eradicate a behavior but to help a student learn new and more appropriate ways of getting his needs met.”²

If we are not providing the AS student with a carefully thought out program, we are almost certain to invite behavior problems. A well thought out program is not a guarantee that there won't be any behavior problems, but the parents and school can better work as a team to overcome the problems when the parents have confidence in the overall program that is being provided for their child.

6. RESPECT FOR HIS COPING LIMITATIONS AND A “SAFE PLACE”

AS students are susceptible to experiencing higher levels of stress than their neurotypical peers. The AS students' stress level needs to be monitored by those who work with them.

Brenda Smith Myles, Ph.D. and Jack Southwick have co-authored a helpful book entitled *Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments : Practical Solutions for Tantrums, Rage, and Meltdowns*. The first chapter of the book is entitled, “An Overview of the Characteristics of Asperger Syndrome That May Impact Behavior”. In it we read:

“When stress affects a child with a neurological disorder, the child is less able to access the ‘thinking’ area of the brain. Therefore, the child does not act in what others perceive to be a logical or rational manner A rule of thumb: The child with neurological difficulties has an emotional maturity level that is significantly below his/her chronological age. Particularly during the period of ages 9 and 19, children with Asperger Syndrome may appear to have the emotional maturity of someone two-thirds their age.”²⁶

Much of the stress AS students feel is generated by the normal social demands of the school day. From *Asperger Syndrome: A Practical Guide for Teachers* we read, “School life becomes easier for children with Asperger syndrome when the adults around them recognize the extent to which social demands result in stress.”²⁷

Many professionals advise the implementation of a “safe place” or at least a “safe person” to aid the student in the management of his stress. In *Asperger Syndrome: A Guide For Educators And Parents* we read:

“Students with Asperger Syndrome often view school as a stressful environment that presents several ongoing stressors of great magnitude, including difficulty predicting events because of changing schedules, tuning into and understanding teacher directions, and interacting with peers. . . . What can educators do to help these students manage their stress at school and at home? In addition to instructing students on how to recognize and manage their stress levels, teachers can create a safe ‘home base’ for students with Asperger Syndrome. This is a place where students can go when they feel the need to regain control. Resource rooms or counselors’ offices can be safe places. When a student feels the need to leave the classroom, she can take assignments to the home base and work there in a less stressful environment.”²⁸

Susan Moreno is the founder and editor of Maap Services, a quarterly newsletter that serves families of more advanced individuals with Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, and PDD. ("Maap" stands for "More Able Autistic Persons"). Maap Services, Inc. maintains a website which contains a document entitled, "Tips for Teaching High Functioning People with Autism" authored by Susan Moreno and Carol O'Neal. From that document I quote:

"An increase in unusual or difficult behaviors probably indicates an increase in stress. Sometimes stress is caused by feeling a loss of control. Many times the stress will only be alleviated when the student physically removes himself from the stressful event or situation. If this occurs, a program should be set up to assist the student in re-entering and/or staying in the stressful situation. When this occurs, a 'safe place' or 'safe person' may come in handy."²⁹

Dr. Tony Attwood states, ". . . with Asperger's Syndrome the most stressful activity is having to socialize" and, "for young children, and even some teenagers and adults, it is necessary to have islands of solitude throughout the day."³⁰

It is important to keep the level of stress being experienced by the AS student under control. Chronic high levels of stress can lead to disorders such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or depression requiring psychiatric care. (Attwood, 1998, Cumine et al, 1998)

7. A MODIFIED CURRICULUM (INCLUDING HOMEWORK MODIFICATIONS)

In *Shaping Our Future* we find:

“To understand how children with autism learn, one must be cognizant of the core deficits that define autism and impede the development of the fundamental prerequisite skills essential for learning. Some unique learning characteristics of students with autism may include, but are not limited to:

Attention difficulties

Auditory processing impairments

The inability to *generalize* (easily transfer knowledge from one setting to another)

Difficulties with learning by observation and imitation

Troubles with task/event sequencing

Uneven patterns of strengths and weaknesses

Problems with organization and planning

Difficulties with time concepts and making transitions

As most students with autism do not learn in the same manner as their typical peers, modifications to the curriculum may be necessary to help a child with autism succeed (Wagner, 1998).”³¹

Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Educators and Parents reports, “Because of their IQ level, students with Asperger Syndrome are often expected to perform at the same level as their peers. Although some students can meet this expectation, many cannot.”³²

In *Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments* we read:

“Currently, researchers and practitioners recognize that although the vast majority of students with Asperger Syndrome have average to above-average intellectual abilities and are included in general education classrooms, they experience academic problems. Indeed, social and communication deficits combined with obsessive and narrowly defined interests, concrete and literal thinking, inflexibility, poor problem-solving and organizational skills, difficulty in discerning relevant from irrelevant stimuli, and weak social standing often make it difficult for students with Asperger Syndrome to fully participate in and comprehend unadapted general education curricula and instructional systems. As a result, a number of children and youth with Asperger Syndrome are thought to have learning disabilities.”³³

The following is a true story regarding a fifth grade AS student and his homework. I know it is true because it happened to me. I repeatedly asked for a reduction in my son's homework load. My requests were denied. My son's teacher, school counselor and I went to a daylong conference given by Dr. Tony Attwood and Carol Gray. During his lecture Dr. Attwood voiced his opinion that kids with AS should not be given homework, and he asked the parents in the room to raise their hands if they agreed. Many parents enthusiastically raised their hands. Shortly after we returned from the conference, my son's teacher and school counselor told me that Tanner didn't have to do any homework any more. I wanted him to do some homework, however, so we lightened his load accordingly. This helped to lower the stress level in our home significantly.

In *Asperger Syndrome and Adolescence: Practical Solutions for School Success*, we find:

“Numerous challenges are inherent in assigning homework for students with AS. Attending a day of school is extremely stressful for these students. Therefore, stress level needs to be taken into account when deciding whether or not to assign homework to a given student. Often homework requirements are lessened or waived for students to allow them to focus on ‘de-stressing’ and relaxing when they get home from school. Also, parents sometimes use after-school hours to provide practice in social skills learned at school and to follow up on individual student interests.”³⁴

In *Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments: Practical Solutions for Tantrums, Rage, and Meltdowns* we read: “Parents and teachers should work together to ensure that the requirements for homework are not too intensive for the child.”³⁵

CONCLUSION

Students with A.S. tend to be very different from one another in the severity and manifestation of their neurological problems . For example, differences are seen in the degree in which their sensory systems are affected, the degree in which the student is able to learn without having relate everything to their primary interest, their activity level, and how much they have or have not compensated for their lack of social skills with their peers. There are many other areas of difference also, and we must not forget that they have their own personalities, level of intelligence, and sometimes learning disabilities or other diagnosis.

This is where having background on the student is essential. Parents, and hopefully the students' IEP, are good sources for this information. Does fluorescent lighting drive him to distraction; can he tolerate being bumped by other students in lines? Does he need visual cue cards or other visual reminders from his teacher? To what degree is he able to take notes, if any? What are the signals he is becoming stressed and what is to be done when it is noted? Where staff and parents are having difficulty overcoming challenging behaviors in the classroom, consultants familiar with AS can be called in to trouble shoot and make recommendations.

Most students with Asperger's Syndrome are very verbal and very bright. They can be very engaging with adults who are interested in the topics of their conversations. They are often good at verbal displays of their vast array of knowledge. While this a wonderful strength of AS kids, it is important that their challenges are not ignored or minimized. They need special supports (often many supports) in the school environment. I hope these students receive the support they need, for these students are wonderful people capable of great achievement (Asperger, 1944, Frith,1991, Attwood, 1998).

"Our civilization would be extremely dull and sterile if we did not have and treasure people with Asperger's Syndrome."

Dr. Tony Attwood

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Beth Fouse, Ph. D., “Creating a Win-Win IEP” for Students with Autism (Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons, Inc., 1999), p. 6.
- ² Robert L. Koegel and Lynn Kern Koegel, eds., Teaching Children with Autism: Strategies for Initiating Positive Interactions and Improving Learning Opportunities (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 1996), p. 150.
- ³ Ibid., p. 164.
- ⁴ Shaping our Future (Bethesda, MD: Autism Society of America, 1999), p. 7.
- ⁵ Ami Klin, Ph. D. and Fred R. Volkmar, M.D, Guidlines for Parents: Assessment, Diagnosis, and Intervention of Asperger Syndrome (Pittsburgh, PA: Learning Disabilities Association, 1995), p. 6.
- ⁶ Stine Levy, Identifying High Functioning Children With Autism, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Resource Center for Autism, Indiana University, 1988), p. 6.
- ⁷ Robert L. Koegel and Lynn Kern Koegel, eds., Teaching Children with Autism: Strategies for Initiating Positive Interactions and Improving Learning Opportunities (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.: Baltimore, MD, 1996), p. 61.
- ⁸ Val Cumine, Julia Leach and Gill Stevenson, Asperger Syndrome: A Practical Guide for Teachers (London: David Fulton Publishers, 1998), p. 37.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 39.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 39.
- ¹¹ Karen Williams, “Understanding the Student with Asperger Syndrome: Guidelines for Teachers,” FOCUS ON AUTISTIC BEHAVIOR, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Austin, Texas: PRO-ED, Inc., 1995).
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Endorsements

January 15, 2002

To Whom It May Concern,

I have been delighted with the responses I am getting from parents and professionals alike who have read my paper. I would like to share the following endorsements in particular. They have meant so much to me.

Sincerely,
Annette

On 11/14/01 I received the following e-mail messages from Susan Moreno:

Dear Annette,

Please feel free to put my comments with your paper. Please inform one and all that I consider you to be insightful, creative, and VERY knowledgeable about the needs of students with Asperger Syndrome.

Sincerely,
Susan

Dear Annette,

I have now read all of your paper. I truly apologize for the delay. I have been completely swamped with work. I think your paper is EXCELLENT, Annette.

You know, I have worked in the field of autism since 1984 . . .and even before that, I have been reading about autism since 1975 when my daughter was diagnosed. Yet, I will never be able to read all I should read and learn all I should learn. Papers like yours help me with that. I gained some info I'd not read before (never read "Asperger Syndrome: A Practical Guide for Teachers"). As a result of your wonderful paper, I am now ordering some additional materials. Your bullying chapter gave me a new idea about helping students in school with a special "cultural guide".

I'll be mentioning that idea in further writings and presentations. YOU did that for me, Annette. Thank you for that.

I think you are very intelligent and motivated. I hope you will go far, both in your efforts to help Tanner, and in your professional pursuits. I wish you every success.

Sincerely,
Susan

Jerry Newport is an advocate for Asperger people, author ("Your Life is Not a Label: A Guide to Living Fully with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome"), and national and international speaker. He has created support groups for adults with Asperger's named AGUA, Adult Gathering, United and Autistic. "60 Minutes" did a documentary about him and his group in California. He is 52 and

was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome at age 47. He is now a resident of Tucson, Arizona.

He sent this e-mail message to me 11/20/01. I use it with his permission:

Annette,

Excellent paper on hot topics. I wish you had read my book as it would be fun to be listed as a resource. You did a great job of reading the current stuff and that gives your paper a solid footing.

Thanks for sharing it with me.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Jerry Newport