

Introductory input

1. Section from book
2. Comments from children
3. Whether or not a person is bullied depends on level of vulnerability and reaction
4. Risk Factors. In general specifically in relation to children on the autistic spectrum

- The report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (1993) was unequivocal in its assertion that childhood autism is ‘ recognised as one of the most severe developmental disorders affecting children’ (p.140)
- Triad of impairments Wing (1979) Jones (2002) The areas of normal development in reciprocal social interaction, verbal and non-verbal interaction and flexible thinking and behaviour are missing or delayed in all children with autism

Dr Hans Asperger described a distinct syndrome with average intellectual and structural language abilities. This was manifest by a consistent pattern of behaviour especially in boys

1. Lack of empathy
 2. Little ability to form relationships
 3. One sided conversations
 4. Intense absorption in a special interest
 5. Clumsy movements
- ‘The nature of social difficulty in ASD’s is probably the most defining feature and potentially the most disabling

Characteristics of Students with Asperger Syndrome in school

- Deep seated difficulties in understanding and relating to the thoughts and feelings of others
- Mind blindness
- The social cues of body language, facial expression and tone of voice are not read
- A stiff gaze accompanied by clumsy and gauche body language set students apart from their peers
- The crucial skills of listening to and monitoring others have no place in a self-focused world of often obsessional interests and inappropriate and irrelevant outbursts
- The hidden curriculum of the school
- The literal interpretation of language obliterates the world of metaphor, irony, idioms and humour
- Inflexibility of thought and a lack of social imagination leave the Asperger Syndrome student constantly relying on learned rote strategies to deal with everyday situations
- The transition stages of their lives are particularly difficult. This stress can lead to emotional outbursts
- Can lead to an attempt to dominate and control in social settings
- Hypersensitivity to sound and touch
- Groupwork

- Involvement in PE
- Being loners and different from their peers, the Asperger child is frequently a target for bullying in mainstream schools (Mc Kernan, 1998, p.53)
- Tolerance of difference. Quote from book. It is the growing realisation among their peers, especially in adolescence that they are different in startling and unpredictable ways that marginalises students with Asperger Syndrome within the school community
- The INTO guidelines on educational provision for pupils with ASD 2002 sees the intervention strategies 'not to normalise, rather to appreciate that the individual is different and allow the student to function and live in an alien world' p.14
- The disturbing statistic in the guidelines that 50% of pupils with Asperger's Syndrome drop out of the system by 13 years makes effective intervention an imperative

School Based Interventions

- A buddying or Mentor System plays a major role in befriending and shadowing students in the critical days before and after entry to the school
- Asperger students do not engage their peers in a reciprocal fashion and fail to appreciate the fine nuances of meaning in social discourse. The opportunity for other students to make fun of and compromise Asperger pupils is to be expected given their propensity for rigid thinking and social naivety. The willingness to tell on another member of the group, failure to engage successfully in group activities especially in PE and practical subjects and the inability to stand in another's shoes often results in apparent indiscipline and insensitivity. There is a particular poignancy in the inability of a student with Asperger Syndrome to ask questions or seek help in a classroom situation. The inability to imagine a world of shared experience excludes him/her from imagining anybody else having a role to play in resolving confusing instructions or misunderstood statements. Asperger students have not mastered the art of conversation-frequent interruptions and the monopolising of another's attention often leads to rejection and ridicule. The use of workbooks, cards and photographs help to identify and put language on emotional responses. The use of a diary to record and express feelings, learning I messages to better express emotions all help to reduce stress and encourage social interaction. Feelings/hard facts?
- Two people can possibly help in this context- the Resource teacher in teaching social skills and the counsellor to help with an understanding of their own feelings and the feelings of others. Despite the many interventions Students with Asperger Syndrome still experience high levels of stress and manifest this in emotional outbursts and rhythmic repetitive body movements.
- The difficulties experienced in adolescent students intellectually aware of their own inability to fit in and unable to cope with their emerging sexuality require careful monitoring. The counsellor plays an important role in providing a safe place for students

- A planned strategy to help the student to seek help could include a visual sign or movement to indicate difficulty
- Important role of the SNA

Topics for Discussion

- What do you remember about bullying when you were at school?
- What are the differences between bullying in primary and post primary school for children in general and children on the autistic spectrum?
- Should the class be informed about a child who is on the autistic spectrum? At what age could/should this happen?
- How do children on the autistic children feel when they are bullied?
- What worries you most about bullying?
- What advice would you give to a child who is being bullied?
- Is bullying inevitable?
- How can students on the autistic spectrum benefit from counselling?
- What would you like schools to do about bullying? Make a list.

Format for Parent Workshops

1. Introduction

2. Characteristics of Students with Asperger Syndrome in school

3. School Based Interventions

Each parent at the workshop would have a copy of a similar handout to this one.

There are nine topics for discussion. At the outset of the workshop, I would ask if parents would like to include any further topics for discussion.

I would propose interspersing the topics for discussion throughout the day. Four parents in each group would probably be the optimum. After each period of discussion feedback would be taken on a flip chart.

I think that the last point for discussion is particularly important and the workshop could finish with a detailed discussion of this point.

The optimum length of the workshop would be three hours.