The Asperger’s Syndrome
Survival Guide

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The Aspergers Survey of Parents and Professionals

Craig Kendall
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Dedicated to my wonderful family and to all who desire longer life so they can serve more
The Asperger’s Syndrome Survival Guide

By Craig Kendall

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Asperger's is not a curse - it is just a difference, and a difference that can be worked around.
Chapter 6

Treating Asperger’s Syndrome

What can be done to treat Asperger's?

So, you have come this far in learning about Asperger's, but you still have one (or more) burning questions on your mind. How do you treat this thing? Can you treat this thing? What are the current options in treating it? Well, have no fear, in this chapter we will explore all of the current options there now exist in treating every aspect of Asperger's Syndrome.

Can Asperger’s Syndrome be cured?

First of all, you should know that while there is treatment to help some of the symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome, there is no cure for it. Asperger's is not curable. If you have it, you have it. There will likely never be a cure for it, because it has to do with the very genes you were born with.

As a side note, some scientists are working on a prenatal screening that would screen for babies with autism or Asperger's and allow the parent the option to abort the baby. This would, in effect, "cure it," but has raised an uproar for some in the autism community who feel it would be like eradicating a whole population of people who, despite their many difficulties, have some unique strengths to offer the world. Imagine what the world would be like without Albert Einstein or Bill Gates, for example - quirky, intelligent people who think outside the box. Others, of course, seeing the many challenges of Asperger's, are all for such a thing. It is not likely to happen any time soon, however, and so remains just an idea. There is no cure or any plans for any cure for any living person who has Asperger's.

Do the symptoms of Aspergers lessen with age?

It should also be known, though, that as the person with Asperger's grows older, some of the symptoms may likely abate on their own; they will find new ways to cope with the world; they will find a place where they fit in
where their strengths are recognized and appreciated. So how a child with Asperger's interacts with the world is not necessarily how the same adult with Asperger's will interact with the world. This is, of course, different for everybody.

Can Aspergers be prevented?

Asperger's is not preventable. It is largely thought to be caused by genes. Therefore, there is nothing you did that caused it. Most likely, but not in all cases, if you look hard enough in your family history, you will find other people in your family with similar, but less pronounced, traits! It is something you are born with. The symptoms might not show up clearly until a child is older, but it cannot just start happening when a child is older or an adult; it is something you either have when you are born or not.

There are some people who believe that the mercury preservatives in vaccines can cause autism and Asperger's. There is no real clear scientific evidence either way on this question, but it is generally believed that autism is caused by genetics. The official government view is that vaccines do not cause autism, but many parents have taken issue with that statement. This is something that one would have to decide for themselves, if they think it has any merit or not; but, in general, the most popular belief is that autism is caused by genetics.

In the future, when more is known about Aspergers there might be prevention in a sense. If some cases are found to be caused by environmental factors, then things could be changed. If it is caused by food allergies, then these children could go on a special diet. If it is caused by vaccines, they could be reformulated. However, if it is caused by genetics, management may be more likely. A miracle drug that reverses the damage and causes the centers of the brain to grow properly could also be in the future. However, much more research will need to be done to determine a cause before we can talk about any cure for Aspergers.

TREATMENTS

Treatments for Asperger's have been discussed briefly in previous chapters and will be explored in more depth here. Basically, Aspergers is treated by training the child how the world outside of their mind works. Because they have trouble recognizing that other people are having different thoughts
than them, they have to be taught this. Once they have learned that, they can be trained to respond to other people in a way that will help them get what they need. Then they will be taught about relationships and the give and take of conversations and friendships. Because there are many social rules that human beings abide by, years of this type of learning is needed. They will learn to recognize social cues, body language, emotions, figures of speech, and what their own body is telling them. Physical interventions will help them get over clumsiness. Speech problems can be addressed. There are a great many current treatments that are used by various therapists -- some more common than others.

**12 Categories of Treatments for Asperger’s Syndrome**

1. Occupational therapy may help with writing and drawing.

2. Physical therapy to help them with physical issues like clumsiness, balance and stiffness.

3. Behavior Modification therapies can include but are not limited to...
   - Positive Behavior Support
   - Applied Behavior Analysis
   - Preventative Classroom Management
   - Pro-social Behavior
   - Moral Education
   - Play Therapy
   - Assertive Discipline
   - Reality Therapy
   - Aggression Replacement Training

4. Social issues are addressed by Social Problem Solving Social Stories, and Social Skills Training which teach children social
5. Family Therapy is recommended to assist the formation of good family relationships and interactions.

6. Sensory Integration Therapy can be helpful for children with bothersome sensitivities.

7. Effective Communication Models or Communication Therapy help the child with verbal communication skills.

8. Picture Exchange Communication Systems is a treatment that allows children to communicate with pictures.


10. Dietary Modifications may be tried to eliminate the possibility that the child is responding to a food allergy or nutrient imbalance.

11. Supplements can be tried as recent research has found a possible link to supplements and behavior improvements.

12. Serious negative behaviors are sometimes managed by medications such as Antidepressants, Benzodiazepines, Antipsychotics and Stimulants.
What are the preferred treatment options?

Behavioral Modification, social stories or other social skills therapies and medications (when needed) are accepted as the most effective treatments.

All in all, there are many current treatments for Aspergers. Some of these treatments are less than obvious and we will discuss them in more details.

- **Occupational therapy**

Occupational therapy helps a person learn to cope with their specific difficulties in a way that works best for them. They work a lot with kids and adults with Aspergers. One area that kids with Aspergers have many problems with is sensory issues. Things are too loud, too bright, too chaotic, clothes are too tight, etc. Occupational therapists can do different forms of sensory integration therapy to help the child with these issues.

When we say that kids with Aspergers have sensory issues, we mean that they have trouble processing sensory information. All around us, every day, we receive tons of sensory information. People with a normal system will tune out most of the things they do not need to be aware of at any given time. People with sensory issues, though, cannot process or filter out ANYTHING. Everything is too loud, too bright, too tight, too distracting, their nervous system reacts over and over again to all of the sensory stimuli in their environment. There are some techniques a therapist can use to help kids better modulate sensory information that they are receiving.

- **Auditory integration therapy**

For example, if the child has overly sensitive hearing, one thing the therapist can do is called auditory integration therapy. This basically involves having the child listen to specially prepared tapes of different tones and frequencies, and special kinds of music that can actually change the way the brain processes auditory information. This will make the child less over stimulated by loud noises and such. Headphones are used for this, and usually around twenty or so (the number can vary) half-hour sessions are required before any improvement can be seen. This does not work for everyone, but has been shown to help many.
Wilbarger Deep Pressure technique

Another thing that can help kids who are sensitive to touch, or have problems with the feeling of clothing, is something called the Wilbarger Deep Pressure technique. Basically, the child's skin is brushed in a certain way with a certain type of brush. This helps stimulate certain nerves and receptors in the body and brain and, over time, can make the child more tolerant to the feeling of certain fabrics and more tolerant of things touching him or her. It also helps the child mentally organize himself, and improves mind-body communication. Since many children with Aspergers crave deep pressure, this can help them relax. Generally, this is done every couple of hours for a certain time period, by someone who is trained in the method (most occupational therapists who work with kids on the autistic spectrum are).

There are many other things, often referred to as a "sensory diet," that can help kids with sensory issues. Simply put, some kids are under receptive to sensory information, and need to engage in activities like spinning, balancing, running, rolling on a ball and so on to get themselves going and start "feeling okay." Others are too sensitive to this information and there are activities that can help re-engineer the brain so that they can process it better. Often something that looks like play can actually be changing the way a child's brain works.

Speech therapy

Speech therapy is more than just speech therapy. Many kids with Aspergers have problems with understanding language, and using language, and understanding the intent and practical message of what someone is saying; and speech therapy can help with this. In other words, it's not physically saying the words that kids with Aspergers have problems with, it's understanding the meaning behind the words. Kids with Aspergers often have problems with understanding jokes, kidding, hidden messages, anything that is not extremely literal and explicit. Even very verbal kids can benefit from speech therapy in that they will better be able to understand the meaning of words. It is also common for Aspergers kids to have trouble with things like tone of voice and understanding nonverbal language, and speech therapy can help with that, too.

It is often said that 80% of the way we communicate is done with our
bodies and not our words - no wonder our Asperger's kids have so much trouble figuring out what we're saying! They look at our face and it seems blank to them - they can't figure out the messages that we are trying to convey to them that seems so obvious. Kids with Aspergers can be taught to recognize emotions and nonverbal cues on people's faces, though, by using pictures and explicitly taught practical experience.

- **Play therapy and social skills therapy**

Play therapy and social skills therapy kind of go together. Both are venues where kids are explicitly taught social experiences, and how to interact with others. Through working with other kids who have similar problems or one-on-one with a therapist, kids learn how to do things like share, have reciprocal conversations with others, show interest in what others are doing and feeling, and share experiences with others. Depending on age level, skills like making eye contact, greeting others, taking turns in conversations, figuring out how long to talk, and so on are practiced until mastered or improved. Role playing is used. Kids can then take the skills they learn in the group and hopefully generalize them to outside social situations. Group Therapy can also allow kids to practice by making use of role playing social interactions.

Carol Grey’s Social Stories, Social Articles and Thinking Stories are one of the best and most widely accepted social skills models (www.thegraycenter.org). Her Social stories are stories of actual social events; for example, going to the gas station to get a soda pop. The interactions and reactions will be told and verbal and non-verbal cues are explained. This way the child is able to recognize similar situations when they happen and will know how to respond.

The degree of social impact on a person with Aspergers varies. Some children learn social skills easier than others. Your Aspergers loved one also has to understand why social skills are important to them. Children with Aspergers can often be described by others as uncaring, unemotional, rude or unempathetic. Often it is not that the child does not care but rather that they have missed something. Often there is a misunderstanding about what is going on or how they are supposed to react to the situation. Things that others seem to naturally understand about the world and relationships and communication are lessons that the Aspergers child must study and learn. People with Aspergers often do not know what is important or what
is expected in social interactions. These concepts, often picked up by subtle cues, have as much meaning as words. Your Aspergers child does not instinctively know that a non-verbal gesture (such as pointing) is a method of communicating. Often they do not follow an instruction because they did not understand what was required of them or why. Learning how to respond to people and situations is imperative for them to be able to function as a part of society. Social skills treatments that teach them what to do by mapping out the situation have had great success and are highly recommended.

➤ **Psychotherapy**

Psychotherapy is not always used or useful, but can be helpful to both kids and adults in processing their feelings about being different. It can be very difficult to be young, in school, trying to make friends, fail miserably, and have no idea why. "Asperger's" can be an abstract concept for some kids to grasp, and all they really know is that they are different; but they don't want to be different. It hurts to be different. A psychotherapist can help the child, adolescent or adult try to come to terms with these feelings and try to accept himself as he is. Self esteem is important for kids to have and this can help with that.

Different kids will have different therapy needs; teenagers will be much more likely to need and benefit from this type of therapy than younger kids, as their awareness of their different way of being becomes greater the older they get. Teenagers are at risk of developing depression once this awareness sets in, and therapy can be a good way to try to prevent this from happening. Different therapists have different capabilities and personalities, though, and it is important to find one that seems to work well with your child.

**What are alternative therapies for Aspergers?**

We have just chatted about some of the most commonly used treatments and therapies for kids and adults with Asperger's. There are also a number of alternative treatments that are used.
Nutritional therapy

One is nutritional therapy. This is the theory that what a person eats makes a huge difference on how their brain works, their behavior, and how they function as a person. Many parents put their kids on a diet free of things like gluten and casein. They say that their kids are able to focus much better, interact much better, and have far fewer behavioral problems. Many parents swear by it. It does not work for everyone, though. Others use nutritional supplements and a variety of vitamins. Omega 3s are one popular supplement said to stabilize the mood and behavior of some kids. One can research this on the Internet and decide for themselves what to try. Most of these things are available at your local health food store.

Many kids react to foods with sugar, artificial ingredients or food dyes, and preservatives in them, so many parents will try to keep their kids on a diet free of these things.

Hyperbaric oxygen chamber therapy

Other alternative therapies include things like hyperbaric oxygen chamber therapy, where a child is put in a room with a very pure, high percentage of oxygen. The theory is this increases oxygen tissue concentration and increases brain and body function. Some people have seen results from chiropractic treatments. Some chiropractors are trained in ways to do adjustments on autistic patients that increase brain and body alignment and function.

Finally, the local school system is required by law to help any child with a disability, including Asperger's, receive a free and appropriate education. This means that they will likely provide aides, certain accommodations, and special ways of teaching for your child so they can better navigate the social, sensory, and academic problems they will likely encounter when they get to school. This will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

Parental Involvement

Of course, all the therapies in the world probably won't do much good if the parent is not invested in helping their child with Asperger's learn to cope with the world. There are certain things parents can do to help their child's behaviors, anxieties, and functioning.
What are some things a parent can do to help?

The most important thing is to be consistent. Kids with Asperger's thrive on routine. Everything needs to be done at the same time, in the same way, every day, as much as possible, to give the child a sense of safety and security. When you talk to your child with Aspergers, you should use a calm and even tone of voice, and use explicit language that says exactly what you mean. Do not make requests too complicated or ask a child to do things with too many steps at once. Try to keep your language as literal as possible. Try to be very verbal. If your child does something right, praise them for it. If they do something you do not like, calmly tell them why their behavior is not appropriate, and explain what you would like them to do instead. Try not to get too emotional while doing this. Often, if a parent gets angry, their anger will be so overwhelming that the child will not hear a single thing you are saying while you are angry, and therefore will not learn from the experience! They will just learn that something they did was bad, they don't know what, they're too scared to ask, and stay away from Daddy when he's like that!

What can I do when my child has a meltdown?

Kids with Aspergers are very prone to meltdowns, something that can be very frustrating to parents. These are emotional outbursts or tantrums that happen when a child is overwhelmed. They can take the form of crying and screaming, or even violence like kicking something or lashing out at someone.

The most important thing to remember when dealing with these situations is to try to figure out what caused them. Your child is not doing this to intentionally annoy you; he is doing it because he has reached his limit of tolerance in whatever he is dealing with. Maybe the music is too loud, there are too many people trying to talk to him at once, he had a bad day at school, he's worried about something, his clothes are bothering him, so on, and so forth. Once you figure out what the problem is, you can try to remove it (if it's a sensory stimulus) or otherwise try to figure out how to improve it. Maybe something has changed about his usual routine; reassure him of the routine for the rest of the day and that the routine will not change the next day, if that is the case.

If it's something simple like loud music, simply remove the child from the
situation to somewhere quiet where they can calm down.

Try to empathize with your child. Say something like, "Boy, that music sure was loud, wasn't it?" In this way, you are voicing the feelings that they are not able to, and this can be a relief to them. The more overwhelmed you are, the harder it is to communicate, and the harder it is to communicate, the more isolated you feel, thus increasing the cycle of bad feelings. Tell them you love them. Hug them, if they are okay with hugs. Just give them time and space to calm down.

If you cannot figure out what is causing the meltdown, remove them from the situation if it is outside the house to a calm and quiet place. If in the house, try to engage them in some kind of calming activity, or try to redirect their attention to something else.

Most importantly, though, if you are able to, just wait it out and let them express their emotions if they are doing so safely. It is a stressful world that our Aspergers children live in, and sometimes they just need a release valve.

**Should I try to stop the excessive behaviors?**

Many parents wonder if they should try to stop obsessive behaviors in their kids. Sometimes, for example, a child will talk about dinosaurs endlessly, or play with a toy truck over and over again, or play with objects in an obsessive way. The answer is yes and no. Generally, as I said, kids need a release valve and a way to release stress, and these kind of stimulatory activities are how they do it. If they are interested in dinosaurs or World War II or any other subject, and talk about it endlessly, be glad they are interested in something and hope it translates into a career some day.

On the other hand, you do want to try to make sure the child can engage in some appropriate conversation not related to dinosaurs, and that your child is engaged in the world beyond endlessly playing with a toy truck, so use your judgment. Let your child engage in these activities sometimes, even a lot of the time, but not all of the time. Or let your kids engage in their special interests or obsessional activities after they have completed chores they need to do or homework, to make sure they are able to do these activities. Basically, once a child has had a full day of school, and are
using all of their mental faculties to survive there, when they come home they should be allowed to relax a little, and if these things are the way they relax, then so be it.

MEDICATION

There is no one medication that can cure or even uniformly help Asperger's. There is no one medication that works for everyone. What you can do is treat the symptoms one by one. This is very much a hit and miss process, unfortunately. Different medications will work for different people. Sometimes you might have to try a dozen different medications before you find one that will help the symptom you are trying to alleviate without too many side effects. It can be a frustrating process. Not everyone with Aspergers takes medications. It helps some, but does not help others at all.

What are some of the common medications prescribed?

These are the most common medications that people with Asperger's will take.

- Anti-anxiety medications: like lorazapam, Valium, etc. These can reduce the often disabling anxiety that is seen in many people with Aspergers.

- Antidepressants. Many people with Aspergers suffer from depression and from obsessive thoughts and behavior. Some antidepressants, like Prozac and Zoloft, can help with this.

- For hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity, stimulant type medications are often prescribed; for attention deficit disorder, drugs such as Ritalin are sometimes used.

- For aggression and violent behavior, as well as frequent tantrums and rages, very small doses of antipsychotics like Risperdal can be used.

All of these medications have side effects, some of which can be quite serious. They differ so widely by the medication that it would be impossible to list them all. Some will make your child sleepy, hyper,
manic, lethargic, make their heart race, give them anxiety, cause weight gain, make them unable to focus and out of it, give them physical side effects, the list goes on and on. But not all kids will have all side effects. The best thing to do is to work closely with your child's doctor to make sure you are choosing the best drug for your child, if that is the route you decide on, and to closely monitor any side effects that may occur. Again, it is NOT always necessary to medicate kids with Aspergers; many do just fine without any medications. Occasionally, long term use of some drugs can give permanent side effects, and this is another thing to watch out for and monitor when considering use of a psychotropic drug for your child. This happens relatively rarely, though.

There are no surgical interventions for Asperger's. As stated before, parents can and often do try natural remedies for their children. Homeopathic remedies are popular. These are highly diluted substances that are said to help with many health problems. There are natural vitamins, herbs, and homeopathic remedies that can help a child relax, focus more, fall asleep, and so on. Some parents use melatonin to help their kids sleep. As mentioned before, many parents will use diet to help a child's behavior and functioning.

There is no one answer to the medication question. It is highly individualized, and only you and your doctor can figure out what might work best for your child, and if medication is a risk you want to take. Again, not all children with Aspergers need to be on medications - many will even do better without them - but for some, it can help!

**Are therapies for Aspergers and autism similar?**

Therapies for Asperger's and autism, as discussed more thoroughly in an earlier chapter, often overlap. However, therapies for classical autism tend to be far more intense, time consuming and involve intense behavioral training, whereas therapies for Aspergers involve more social skills therapy. Asperger's is part of the autistic spectrum, which means it is a kind of autism, but is generally considered to be a higher functioning kind with different strengths and weaknesses than those with classical autism have. (There are exceptions to this rule.)

Asperger's was only recognized as a formal disorder in the United States in 1994 - only fourteen years ago. Since then, a lot of progress has been
made in understanding how people with Aspergers think, feel, and act, and how to help them. Many therapies have been developed, many support services have been started, and the world is getting more understanding of and accommodating of individuals with Asperger's all the time!

People with Aspergers are finding it increasingly easy to get accommodations at work and school, for example, as more and more people realize what Asperger's is, and how to help people with it. But there is still a long way to go.

What support systems are available?

There are many support groups for both parents of kids with Aspergers, and for people with Aspergers, that can help a great deal in coping with this disorder. Local doctors and autism organizations, as well as the Internet, can provide information on how to locate these in your area. Your local school district can provide a lot of support, including early intervention for kids with autism and Aspergers. Early intervention is in many cases crucial for how the child will do later on, and most schools provide intensive services for children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder up to a certain age. Support systems will be discussed in much greater detail in a later chapter.

Do take heart, though, because with the proper help and treatment, most kids with Aspergers can become productive adults with Aspergers. They will often find jobs related to their interests, i.e., a kid really into computers will work in the tech industry, a kid into airplanes might become a pilot, and a child obsessed with the radio will become a DJ. Other people with Aspergers will find jobs that don't require them to interact with people too much, or don't have too much sensory stimulation that could be overloading, or otherwise work around their difficulties. Most adults with Aspergers are very dedicated, loyal, and intelligent; they know what they do well, are good at it, and are prized by employers for these qualities. They don't spend a lot of time with small talk and trying to cut corners; they get the job done. So the very qualities that can seem so problematic in Aspergers kids can turn out to be assets in adults. There is hope for children and adults with Asperger's. With a little help and understanding, they can find their place in the world.
How can we help the people to lead a full and successful life?

People with Aspergers have a better chance of leading a normal life than children with other Pervasive Developmental Disorders. They will usually be able to acquire the skills to be independent although they will always be struggling and learning from social situations. Early intervention is really the key. The earlier a child is diagnosed and treatments are put into place, the better the outcome. If children can be taught early the basics of interaction and the meaning of non-verbal communication, they will be better prepared to learn from social experiences. They must be taught that something is important in order to learn about it. Each new phase and milestone in their life will bring about more complex interactions. If the foundation for social interaction is not laid down early, than teaching social skills will become more of a troubleshooting exercise. This is not to say that people detected later are without hope. Things will just be harder.
To purchase this book or to get information on Craig Kendall's other books go to:

www.AspergersSociety.org