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Home and Family Strategies: Asperger Syndrome

This Quick Fact Sheet contains strategies designed to address potential symptoms of Asperger Syndrome and should be used in consultation with a licensed mental health professional as part of a larger intervention approach. These pages contain a portion of many strategies available to address symptoms of Asperger Syndrome. Strategies should always be individualized and implemented with consideration of the differences of each child and the context of their individual circumstances. Additionally, this information should never be used to formulate a diagnosis. Mental health diagnoses should be made only by a trained mental health professional after a thorough evaluation.

If you notice a significant change in mood in your child that lasts for more than a week, share your observations with your child's pediatrician and school's mental health support

General Comments About Asperger Syndrome Intervention

Effective parenting of children with AS requires a comprehensive multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary approach. One key to success for children with AS is a partnership between families, physicians, mental health professionals, and schools.

Through providing safe and supportive home and school environments, effective and responsive academic instruction, behavioral intervention, and appropriate accommodations, caregivers and school teams can increase the opportunity for children with AS to achieve academic success and overall, life-long well-being. Families and schools should maintain high expectations for children with AS and must also be patient, creative, flexible, and willing to try new or alternative approaches. Below are some possible strategies to support children with AS.

Home and Family Strategies for Language/Communication

- Teach conversational skills with peers/siblings, including initiation, the ability to expand and elaborate on a range of different topics, shifting and ending topics appropriately, and turn-taking
- Teach the child to monitor his or her own speech styles including volume, rhythm, naturalness, and when/how to adjust his or her speech
- Teach nonverbal communication skills, including how to read facial expressions, body language, and other social cues
- Develop the child's ability to follow multi-step directives
- Teach the child to seek assistance/ask for help
- Model responses and practice skills with role plays; practice individually and with other family members
- Teach complex language, including metaphors and words with double meaning
- Teach the child to ask for an instruction to be repeated, simplified, or written down when it is not understood
- Support communication with visual supports whenever possible
- Limit using socially challenging language (i.e. figures of speech, irony, sarcasm, etc)
- Develop understanding of black and white thinking and accommodate for this concrete thinking pattern

Home and Family Strategies for Off Task Behavior/Disorganization

- Establish clear expectations for behaviors in and out of the house
- Use frameworks for note taking, organizing, and categorizing
- Teach the child to use a planner, to prioritize, to use "to do" lists and checklists, and break down complex tasks into manageable chunks
- Provide frequent feedback, redirection, and check-ins
- Show examples of desired behaviors
- Ask the child direct questions to have the child attend and contribute to family conversations and activities
- Work out a nonverbal signal with your child to provide cues during social situations
- Keep a family calendar posted in an easy to see place; refer to the family schedule often; when activities are completed, cross them off the schedule

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Home and Family Strategies for Developing Social Skills

- Teach social skills in an explicit and rote fashion with direct modeling, role playing, practicing, and lots of repetition
- Teach perspective taking skills
- Educate your child about the difference between peer joking and bullying
- Develop an awareness of emotions; help teach the link between specific frustrating experiences and negative feelings in a concrete, cause-effect fashion
- Teach awareness of the impact of the child's actions on other people's feelings
- Teach leisure skills for unstructured times; model involvement in positive leisure activities
- Teach the child how to interpret other people's social behavior including the meaning of eye contact, gaze, tone of voice, facial and hand gestures, non-literal communications
- If applicable, ensure that vocational training in high school includes interviewing skills, social requirements, what to do during work breaks/lunch, and how to interact with co-workers
- Social Stories can be used to share accurate information about a particular social event or situation and should include descriptive, perspective, and directive sentences

Home and Family Strategies for School Support

- Ask your child's teachers to individualize their teaching strategies to your child, assess your child's current level, and use strengths/interests to plan instruction
- Use repetition and practice to teach skills
- Use visual supports, including pictorial/written schedules (e.g. a family calendar), written instructions for assignments, check-lists, charts, etc.
- Use contingent reinforcement to reward work completion, appropriate behaviors, etc.; figure out what motivates your child; use behavior-specific praise (i.e. "nice job keeping your hands to yourself")
- Be sure your child is in a location in the house with the least extraneous stimuli when completing homework
- Break down complex assignments into individual parts so that the child can learn the steps to complete the assignment
- Use concrete situations to teach skills; offer added explanation and try to simplify when concepts are abstract
- Accommodate for fine motor difficulties/writing speed by providing ample time to complete projects and/or assignments
- Ask your child's teachers to consider limiting homework assignments and scheduling a time for homework completion at school
- Auditory processing may be limited — your child may need support around processing auditory and visual information simultaneously
- Make sure you have your child's attention before helping him or her with homework or other tasks
- When helping your child with a project and/or homework, provide clear, concise instructions

Home and Family Strategies for Managing Behaviors

- Consistency is vital across all family members, situations, and settings; develop a list of problematic behaviors and specific guidelines for consistent responses to behaviors
- Teach the child how to cope with stress; create a list of concrete steps that can be followed when your child becomes upset; make a visual support of the steps
- Teach the child how to identify challenging situations and provide and practice pre-planned, rehearsed steps that the child can take
- Conduct schedules/routines in a way that you can introduce and handle unexpected changes; with large transitions, expose child to new environments, people, etc. beforehand
- Supervise unstructured time; provide information about what the child should do during unstructured time
- Remain calm during interactions; speak clearly with concise directives; limit verbalizations, especially during escalation
- Phrase statements in the positive (use "Do" statements instead of "Don't")
- Use positive reinforcement to shape a desired behavior; provide praise and tell your child what s/he did correctly or well
- Avoid answering the same thing over again or pointing out that the question is being repeated if child engages in perseveration; instead try to redirect the child's attention, ignore the questions, or have the child write down the question/thought so s/he can refer to it later
- Identify times when children are permitted to explore their special interests; children could earn these times for reinforcement