

Overview - Asperger Syndrome (AS)

Asperger Syndrome (AS) is part of the autism spectrum and may be present with SpLDs such as dyslexia and dyspraxia. The three common problem areas for people with AS are as follows:

Social interaction

- Seeming aloof or odd to other people.
- Finding it hard to understand another person's feelings and thoughts.

Communication

- Being very literal with language.
- Lacking awareness of body language and subtleties of conversation.

Flexibility

- Needing routine and sameness.
- Sensitivity to noise, lights and being touched.

A student with Asperger Syndrome may have remarkable strengths, such as having a good eye for detail and an excellent memory, particularly for facts and figures. They are also often single minded in pursuing their goals.

Students with Asperger Syndrome may have difficulties with the following:

- Learning information which is not explicitly taught.
- Transferring skills and knowledge from one situation to another.
- Studying subjects requiring empathy, evaluation and judgement, e.g., English or History.
- The social skills necessary for group work, such as turn taking and negotiation.
- Picking up on inferences, jokes, puns and vague language.
- Last minute changes to schedules or plans.
- Social anxiety.



Top tips for teaching students with AS:

- Include a clear induction to your course or module at the beginning of each term or semester.
- Give explicit guidance on using the Learning Space/ELE, including where to find deadlines, briefs, lecture slides and other resources.
- Make sure systems for informing students are reliable e.g., Learning Space or Falmouth/Exeter apps are up to date.
- Use clear, precise language. For example, rather than saying 'Pop in and see me some time Friday afternoon with your work,' say 'Come to my office at 3pm on Friday afternoon with the first draft of Chapter 2'.
- Give advance notice of any changes to lecture times, dates and venues and clearly signpost these to students.
- Be prepared to intervene directly in group work, e.g. by allocating roles, asking direct questions or bringing students back on task.
- Sensitively provide guidelines on acceptable behaviour, if needed.
- Help students minimise sensory overload by monitoring distractions such as noise, fluorescent lights, smells and movement.
- Be sensitive to difficulties with practical life skills and know how to refer students to Student Services.
- Write briefs and assignments in clear, unambiguous language.
- Make explicit links between topics or areas of knowledge.
- Encourage all students to be inclusive and accepting of individuals.

Useful links

- <http://www.autism-uni.org/bestpractice/>
- <http://brainhe.com/staff/types/Aspergerssyndrometext.html>
- <http://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/asperger.aspx>
- <http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/disabilities/autism.html/>

