



Information for You from Your Health Care Team

Asperger Syndrome

Bobby looks normal and is quite smart. At eight years old he is an “expert” on old cars. Yet, he doesn’t act like most boys his age. He is clumsy, and he talks too loud and laughs a lot, often at the wrong time. Although he seems to want to make friends, he doesn’t have any. Other children often tease or bully him. Bobby has Asperger Syndrome, a developmental disorder that was first described by Hans Asperger, a Viennese physician, in 1944.

It is estimated that in the US 1 in 500 children have Asperger Syndrome, which affects social development. These children are often labeled as a behavior problem or “cold.” Because they do not read nonverbal social cues, their behavior often seems inappropriate. They avoid eye contact and don’t use facial expressions to help convey their meaning. Their speech may be formal yet awkward because it lacks inflection and is repetitious. They miss the give and take cues that others provide, including signs that the other person wants them to stop talking.

This disorder is also diagnosed by the child’s unusual pattern of narrow interests and unique, stereotyped behaviors. Children with this disorder often focus intently on one thing to the exclusion of other things. They can play alone for exceptionally long periods of time. In addition, their behavior seems eccentric. When they feel stressed, they may respond by flapping their hands, humming, pacing, or talking to themselves. These behaviors tend to disappear as the child gets older but can reappear at times of high anxiety and frustration. Children with the disorder also are easily overstimulated by sounds, colors and odors. This overstimulation can quickly lead to anxiety and then a prolonged outburst that is difficult to control.

Although there is no cure yet for Asperger Syndrome, when it is identified, there are ways to improve many of its symptoms. Parents and teachers can use behavioral modification, create a more structured environment and use visual as well as verbal communication methods. If you are concerned about your child’s behavior and social development, contact your pediatric care provider.

The Asperger Syndrome Coalition of the United States has a web site, www.asperger.org, that provides information about the disorder, a list of resources and links to other relevant sites.

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