

History of Autism/Asperger's Syndrome

- **1908** The word “autism” is used by Eugen Bleuler, a Swiss psychiatrist, to describe a subset of schizophrenic patients who were especially withdrawn and self-absorbed.
- **1943** American child psychiatrist Leo Kanner conducts research on children who were highly intelligent but displayed “a powerful desire for aloneness” and “an obsessive insistence on persistent sameness.”
- **1944** Hans Asperger, a German scientist, described a milder form of autism, in which the boys in the case studies were highly intelligent but had trouble with social interactions and had specific obsessive interests.

Autism v. Asperger's

- **1991** The federal government makes **autism a special education category**. Public schools begin to identify children on the spectrum and offer special services.
- **2013** The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5 (DSM-5)* puts all subcategories of the condition into one umbrella diagnosis of **autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**. Asperger's Syndrome is no longer considered to be a separate condition. ASD is defined by two categories: **impaired social communication and restricted and/or repetitive behaviors**. This change only affects people with a diagnosis **after May of 2013**.

Characteristics of Asperger's/ASD

- Have an IQ within the normal or superior range
- Have no language delay
- Display a lack of empathy
- Have little ability to form friendships
- Conversations are one sided
- Intense absorption in a special interest (Have a compulsion to learn everything about a topic that interests them and tell everyone about it)
- Clumsy, awkward movements
- Lack of routine or lack of structure causes frustration

Why are many undiagnosed?

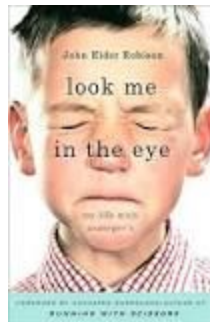
- The child does not have a language delay.
- The lack of social skills may not be apparent until after the child begins formal schooling.
- The child appears to be very intelligent because of the intense absorption in a special interest and the ability to converse better with adults than peers.

Misconceptions

- Appears to be uncooperative
- Appears to be rude
- Appears to not get along with peers
- Does not possess ability to see the value in certain activities or assignments
- Does not possess ability to understand social graces and social cues
- Does not possess the ability to work with others or social skills to interact with peers

Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's

By John Elder Robison



John Elder Robison

- Had trouble making friends in the neighborhood
- Knew he was different and didn't fit in at school, although he tried very hard to fit in
- Began to shut down in school because no matter what he did the teachers thought he was being uncooperative and rude.
- Didn't understand "small talk" and why you could only say certain things and not others

More Misconceptions

- Students with ASD want to work alone
- Students with ASD have no emotions
- Students with ASD do not want friends
- They work alone because they have failed so many times at trying to work with others.
- They don't show emotion outwardly but may be crying inside.
- They desire to fit in and have friends but do not possess the skills to make that happen

Modifications

- Keep to a structured routine as much as possible. Inform student in advance if it changes.
- Explain rules in detail.
- Give written and oral directions with clear guidelines, especially for group work.
- Establish a “home base” where they can go if they become frustrated.
- Because of fine motor challenges, long written assignments can actually be painful. Adaptations may be necessary.