

Asperger's Syndrome

Asperger's Syndrome (AS) is generally considered a milder variant of Autism. Those with AS have difficulty with non-verbal behaviors including maintaining eye contact, using and understanding gestures and facial expressions, and reciprocal social or emotional interactions. They often have a preoccupation with specific areas of interest that is excessive in intensity or focus, and leaves little room for more age appropriate topics of conversation. They are generally inflexible regarding routine and expectations, and can become extremely upset by changes. Often repetitive movements are displayed, especially when upset, including hand or finger flapping, or rocking of the entire body. They typically become preoccupied with parts of objects. Clumsiness, or motor-impairment is also a common feature.

Children who have AS have generally had many traumatic experiences before coming to The Harris School. Because of their inability to understand social norms and behaviors, and because of their eccentric interests and patterns of interaction, they are often the subject of ridicule and bullying by other children. A child with AS is easily upset by any changes that do not correspond to their expectations, and as such may have "meltdowns" when faced with changes.

The Harris School addresses the needs of children with AS in a number of ways. First, every child is respected as an individual. This culture of tolerance allows students with AS to feel comfortable and accepted, repairing the injuries often experienced at other schools. The low teacher/student ratio allows the teachers to interact closely with their students, encouraging eye contact and facilitating conversations to topics other than the obsessions of the child. The teachers also help the students to reflect on the motivations behind their own behaviors and those of others, an area where children with AS struggle. The capacity to reflect on others' emotions and motivations is called "Mentalizing", and is aided by weekly group therapy for the older children. Routine is also stressed, and all changes and transitions are prepared for via discussion and visual or auditory reminders.