

# Asperger Syndrome

The following information has been written by those with a great deal of experience in this area. The information is provided as **guidance** only, allowing you to be more informed in your approach to being a more **inclusive** coach. No two people are the same; as such, please ensure your first step is always to speak to the person - understand their **abilities** and goals, and never assume.

### What is Asperger Syndrome?

Asperger syndrome affects people in three specific areas:

- social interaction
- social communication
- social imagination.

There are similarities with autism, but, on the whole, people with Asperger syndrome have fewer problems speaking and average, or above average, intelligence

### In General, People with Asperger Syndrome:

- have difficulty understanding gestures, facial expressions or tone of voice
- have difficulty knowing when to start or end a conversation, and choosing topics to talk about
- use complex words and phrases, but may not fully understand what they mean
- are very literal in what they say and can have difficulty understanding jokes, metaphors and sarcasm; for example, a person with Asperger syndrome may be confused by the phrase 'that's cool'
- struggle to make and maintain friendships
- do not understand the unwritten 'social rules' that most of us pick up without thinking; for example, they may stand too close to another person, or start an inappropriate topic of conversation
- find other people unpredictable and confusing
- become withdrawn and seem uninterested in other people, appearing almost aloof
- behave in what may seem an inappropriate/antisocial manner
- may imagine alternative outcomes to situations and find it hard to predict what will happen next
- may misunderstand or interpret other people's thoughts, feelings or actions; the subtle messages put across by facial expression and body language are often missed
- may have a limited range of imaginative activities, which can be pursued rigidly and repetitively; for example, lining up toys or collecting and organising things related to their interest
- may have rules and rituals that must be followed
- have a love of routine
- possess special interests
- may have sensory difficulties.

## Including People with Asperger Syndrome in Your Coaching Sessions

- Be very literal in your explanations. Try not to use slang phrases, sarcasm or metaphors.
- Keep your explanations simple and concise.
- Use their name at the beginning of an instruction or question.
- Tell the participant what to do rather than what not to do.
- Use face-to-face interaction when possible.
- Use visual communication when possible.
- Help your participant to anticipate what will happen next (eg 'When the ball is passed to Bill, who will Bill pass to?').
- Give warning of any changes that are about to happen (eg 'John, in a few minutes, we will be moving on to a game').
- Control the environment and don't overstimulate (eg face them away from any distractions).
- Teach them the rules and use prompts/reminders to reinforce them.
- Provide a definite beginning and end to activities.
- Reduce anxiety by adopting a confident and positive approach. The participant will feel safer knowing that if they lose control, you won't.
- Provide a safe place and/or person the participant can go to when a situation becomes too much for them to cope with.
- Manage situations with other people you are coaching. Ensure they understand that this participant is not being rude if they don't respond to conversation.

- Allow the participant 'time out' as and when they need it.
- Try to accommodate the need for structure and routine. Show the person your session plan and try to keep the structure the same for each session.
- Support their interest in the sport. Provide useful website addresses and books that might be interesting. Your encouragement may help develop the interest and skill of that person.

**Adapted from *What is Asperger Syndrome?* by The National Autistic Society, 2012.**

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**For further information and support, visit:**

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

Email: [nas@nas.org.uk](mailto:nas@nas.org.uk)

Tel: 020-7833 2299

For a two-hour workshop aimed at increasing awareness and confidence of coaching disabled people in sport, visit [www.sportscoachuk.org/coach-disabled-sport](http://www.sportscoachuk.org/coach-disabled-sport)

Also, visit [www.sportscoachuk.org/inclusion-coaches](http://www.sportscoachuk.org/inclusion-coaches) for further useful information.