

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- become withdrawn and seem uninterested in other people, appearing almost aloof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

Email: 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

Also, visit www.sportscoachuk.org/inclusion-coaches for further useful information.