

## A Guide for Support Workers and Personal Assistants Working with people with Asperger Syndrome

To make it easier to write this document, I will refer to a person without Asperger Syndrome as NT's (Neurological Typical) and a person with Asperger Syndrome as an Aspie.

Asperger Syndrome is a communication and developmental disorder. An Aspie misinterprets communication because they are very literal and they cannot read body language.

### Difficulties

This causes difficulties. The difficulties tend to occur when an Aspie expresses their negative feelings to an NT. The NT responds by saying what they know they mean, but the Aspie will misinterpret this, as they are literal. They think the NT is being insensitive and they misread the NT's intentions. This causes confusion and fear which leads to the Aspie not wanting to express their negative feelings or ask for help.

### Human Rights

There are 3 different parts of the 1998 Human Rights Act, which are relevant to the Aspie's Rights to communication. I have just mentioned 2 parts.

#### **Article 10 – Freedom of Expression**

An Aspie needs to be able to confidently express their negative emotions. The only way they can do that is if they know that the person who they are talking to will say what they really do mean.

#### **Article 11 – Freedom of Assembly and Association**

The communication needs of an Aspie needs to be met.

### How to Communicate with Aspies

There is a certain way of communicating with an Aspie in a way that they will understand. This then takes away the difficulties I have mentioned. As a Support Worker, you need to be able to communicate in a way that the Aspie understands, making sure that your message is received accurately. **SAY WHAT YOU REALLY DO MEAN.** It will mean that you will have to think about what you will say to the Aspie, but it will make all the difference and both of you will benefit. Don't assume that you are coming across to the Aspie as you intend.

The Aspie must have their requirements properly understood and met, otherwise they cannot be full citizens.

Communication is at the heart of being human. This makes your job very important.

Do not worry if you don't understand what an Aspie is saying. Try and relax, and if you do try and understand, the Aspie will be encouraged. Some use speech, which is hard to understand if you are not, tuned to them. They can still all communicate though.

## Tips to help you Communicate with Aspies

- Ask how an Aspie prefers to communicate and what they need you to do.
- Listen carefully and sympathetically and talk to an Aspie in simple language.
- Don't use idioms and metaphors.
- Slow down and listen
- An Aspie doesn't read body language, and they don't know how to give the right body language either. Don't take this personally.
- Don't get it into your head that you won't understand an Aspie. This will affect your confidence and make it harder for you.
- Don't be embarrassed if you don't understand at first. Accept that you will make mistakes but don't stop communicating.
- Treat an Aspie with respect.
- Respect an Aspie's Privacy .
- Be honest about what you find difficult.
- Quite often, nonverbal communication is used alongside verbal communication to express the meaning of what one is saying. Be aware though, that the Aspie will not pick up the non-verbal communication, but they will pick up the tone of voice
- Be aware of the impact of an Aspie's impairment on them. It is easy to misinterpret their ability to understand or co-operate if you do not do this.
- Aspies find it easier to communicate their negative feelings by writing them down. Please accept this.
- Don't over react if they do express a negative feeling towards the way you are handling them. They will feel unable to tell you their negative feelings at all.
- As a Support Worker you will need to put the feelings of an Aspie first before your own. You have to adapt to the Aspie. The Aspie is not able to adapt to you.

This article can also be used as a guide for families.

By Debbie Hudson

### Bibliography

The Good Practice Guide for Support Workers and Personal Assistants working with disabled people with communication impairments

Pegasus NLP's Mind – Body Health Site ([www.nlp-now.co.uk](http://www.nlp-now.co.uk))

My own experiences