



REAL services to assist students who have Asperger Syndrome

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REAL



- reliable
- empathic
- anticipatory
- logical

'I need a laptop, a PDA, someone with me between classes, a quiet and consistent place to work, a meal plan, a mentor to go between all my different support people and tutors and not too much group work' (ASPECT)

background



- Beardon L ,Edmonds G (2007) The Aspect report. A national report on the needs of adults with Asperger syndrome. www.shu.ac.uk/theautismcentre
- Madriaga M, Goodley D, Hodge, N, Martin N (2008) 'Enabling transition into higher education for students with Asperger syndrome' HEA www.heacademy.ac.uk
- Martin N.(2008)'REAL services to assist university students who have Asperger syndrome' NADP
www.shu.ac.uk/theautismcentre
www.nadp-uk.org

success



- many students with AS are highly successful, particularly in science, engineering, ICT and maths, and progress to higher degrees, often exceeding the expectations of their parents and teachers
- universities have the resources to provide appropriate backup and The Disability Equality (2006) demands further improvements
- numbers are increasing. In 2003, 80 disclosed. In 2005, 475 (HESA data). These figures do not count the students who did not make themselves known
- some people with AS are raising the profile of AS in a positive way, as a difference, and creating a supportive community, via the internet

students say...



'I found university no problem. I got no additional support but in a huge institution no one cares if you are a bit strange'(ASPECT)

'You arrive somewhere and sometimes you feel comfortable. I sort of like it here. I like the people who I have spoken to through emails, like my friends who complain about being homesick, and I am like...I am not feeling remotely homesick. What's wrong with me?'(Madriaga)

challenges



- dealing with a new social environment, often from a position of being socially inexperienced, and having been bullied /left out in the past
- depression often arising from social isolation
- communicating with peers and staff who may be unclear, unreliable or confusing
- imagination /flexibility required to problem solve, cope with change /work out what to do in new situations



- issues with empathy towards and from other
 - difficulty with understanding expectations
 - getting lost in detail
 - managing practicalities
 - anxiety, stress, often arising as a result of confusion
 - sensory sensitivities
- (central coherence, executive function, ToM)*



- some individuals embrace the A.S. Label, others hate it and consequently avoid any services associated with A.S. or with disability (Capturing the views of people who don't want to acknowledge AS may be impossible).
- a diagnosis is necessary in order to access the Disabled Student Allowance and adult diagnosis can be hard to obtain
- post diagnosis support is often lacking

be reliable



- over promising and under delivering is not an option
- services based on a single member of staff have built in conditions for under reliability
- developing a timetable punctuated with regular academic, social, domestic and support activity can be valuable
- not assuming competence with money, public transport etc is helpful and reliable backup to learn these skills may be required

reliable strategies



- the culture of the institution needs to promote reliability as a core value which applies to everyone- all staff and all students
- this awareness needs to be developed through staff training, which includes people in all roles (eg residential services, student union)
- team work could be part of the marking criteria in group work

students say...



- *'It all went chaotic last term. The notetaker missed out on at least two of my seminars...she went to the wrong room' (Madriaga)*
- *'Routines changes suddenly, too many people talking, crowds moving'. (ASPECT)*
- *'A diagnosis would have helped so I didn't feel my lack of social skills was a deficit of mine' (ASPECT)*
- *'having a diagnosis of AS in school means, as an adult, you feel like you can never actually participate normally in everything with everyone else' (student)*

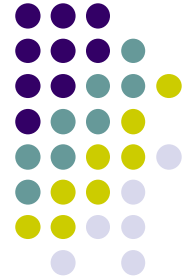
empathise



empathy is a two way street

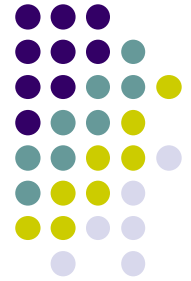
- imagine being left out
- would you like to be the student who looked like they had brought their mother with them?
- what has Fresher's week got to offer to students who don't like booze and nightclubs?
- would 'I know about AS, I have read 'The curious incident...' make you feel good?
- How about a bit of genius pressure?

empathic strategies



- foster a culture which celebrates diversity and individuality
- provide diverse social opportunities and easy ways to access them
- employ high status peer mentors and emphasise reliability in training

anticipate...



- unfamiliar situations can cause anxiety
- unexpected changes in routine can cause distress
- the sensory environment may be disturbing
- social experience outside the family may be limited
- making choices when faced with a blank sheet can be hard
- getting onto the next stage can present challenges-this includes securing a job
- some students will come nowhere near disability services
- phases of depression and anxiety are likely

anticipatory strategies



- develop and communicate robust joined up pre entry support. (start early)
- ensure access to general support and wellbeing services, and timetabled fun
- think about every stage ,induct students into each year
- establish a way of communicating to advise of changes in routine (eg a post it note on the door to advise of a room change, texting, email,intranet)
- help with dealing with placement and securing a job

be logical



- interact ' with the affect turned off'
- ambiguity, lack of clarity, unclear expectations, can perpetuate confusion which causes anxiety
- difficulty with understanding what is in another persons head can make it hard for the student to work out what the lecturer means
- spelling out how (a) relates to (b) can help students to see the links

logical strategies



- communicate in an unambiguous way
- write straightforward assignment briefs
- spell out the relative weightings of pieces of work and how much effort is expected
- explain the potential consequences of choices
- put achievement and failure in context
- say what you mean and mean what you say

the last word



'People need to get over the idea that the 'neuro typical way is the right way and any other way is wrong. The AS way is just as valid, in fact better in some respects. We should be accepted in our own right, and the emphasis should be on educating NT's not to be so discriminatory, and to get over the absurd and offensive idea that they are better than anyone else. People with AS don't need to be cured, or trained how to be 'normal'. It's the 'normal' people who need to learn that, contrary to what they think, they are not the pinnacle of God's creation and there is, in fact, a lot they could learn from Aspies. They need to be taught not to be prejudiced and discriminatory, and to accept and accommodate us for who we are'. (ASPECT)