

# **“Mark” -- Boy with Asperger’s**



- My name is Mark. I'm eight years old. I'm in Mr. Dierck's third grade at Hillcrest School. Reading is my favorite subject.



- My least favorite subject is gym. My favorite school activity is going to the library.

- Extra activities I've been involved in include Cub Scouts, which I like a lot, and soccer. In the summer, my mom makes me take swimming lessons, even though I can't stand them.
- My favorite book series is *The Plant that Ate Dirty Socks*. My favorite movie is *Rugrats in Paris*. My favorite food is hamburgers.
- One thing that really bugs me is when my little sister bothers me while I'm reading a book.





- I live with my mom and dad and my three-year-old sister Mindy. My grandma and grandpa live in Watertown, and Nana and Papa live in Mitchell, so I get to see them all pretty often. I have three aunts and three uncles and six cousins, five girls and one boy.
- My dad works at Larson Manufacturing. He is a grump. My mom is an artist. She is a total wacko. So is Mindy.

I have a condition called Asperger's Syndrome. It is a kind of "high functioning" autism. What it means is that my brain is wired differently than most people's brains. Most people are called "neurotypical," a term designed to distinguish their ways of thinking from mine. Scientists don't yet know the cause of Asperger's, but they do know it is not a disease, so you can't catch it, even though its cause is biological, not psychological.



- Not many people have even heard of Asperger's Syndrome. It was only acknowledged as a diagnosis in 1994, so it's very new. People usually don't know what makes a person with Asperger's tick.



# **Here are some great things about me that are typical of people with Asperger's.**

- ☺ I have a great memory. This is partly because I think in pictures and can remember how things look.
- ☺ I am good with details. This has partly to do with my thinking in pictures. I love to catalog things in my brain.
- ☺ Playing games with well-defined rules is one of my specialties.

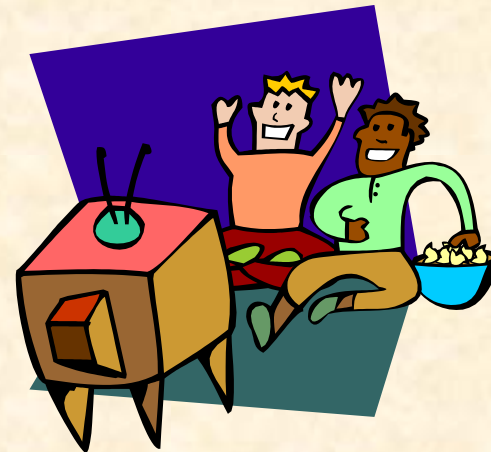


- ☺ I catch on pretty fast to math concepts and reading. I taught myself to read before I got to Kindergarten. In fact, reading is one of my very favorite things to do. I have a pretty good vocabulary, too. I also like to help classmates learn about these concepts.
- ☺ I have some special interests, like computers, trains, and Star Wars movies, that I can get pretty intense about. I'm told that this could help me be successful in the right career.



☺ I've got a jovial sense of humor when I understand the joke.

☺ Friends are very important to me. A friend who puts up with me is very high on my list of special people.



**Some things are difficult for me because I didn't get the same brain wiring as a neurotypical person.**

- ☑ I don't have the "sixth sense" that most people *automatically* develop to interpret social situations. I wasn't equipped with the ability to read people's faces, expressions, or body language in order to determine what they are thinking or feeling.
- ☑ I have trouble looking people in the eye to communicate. For some reason it's too overwhelming for me.

- ☑ Much of time I am unable to recognize or identify my own feelings. Taking the perspective of another person doesn't usually occur to me, so it's extremely difficult even to conceive of the concept of other people's feelings.
- ☑ Because I love to notice all different details, it's sometimes challenging for me to pick out the most relevant information from a picture, a story, or a situation.
- ☑ It is difficult for me to process auditory instructions.



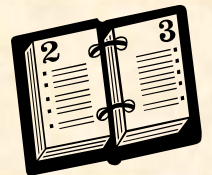
- ☑ I have an unconscious habit of holding my folded hands up to my mouth and tensing my upper body when I'm anxious or excited. My parents claim that I sometimes make a strange noise with it! This is an example an action that the experts call self-regulatory behavior, or "stimming." It's not something I mean to do – I usually don't even realize I'm doing it.
- ☑ I take Adderall, a medicine for ADHD symptoms, to help me sit still.
- ☑ My body is harder to control and not as strong as some kids'.



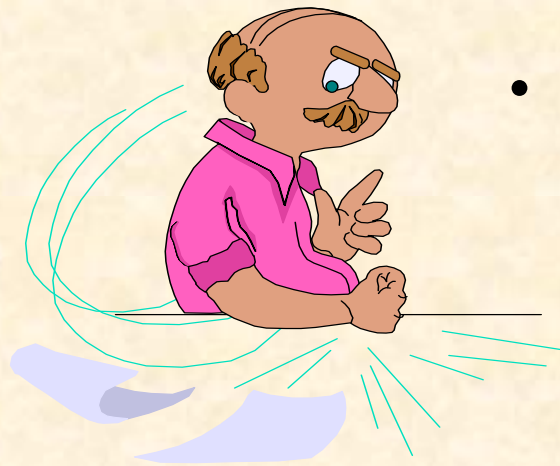
- ☑ I am a very literal thinker. If you use a figurative expression, an idiom, a metaphor, or sarcasm, there's a good chance the meaning will go "over my head."
- ☑ Also related to thinking literally, I can get upset when rules vary. That can make any situation, especially a social one, very bewildering. When you do something one way one time, and adjust your methods the next, it can really throw me off.
- ☑ Dealing with change in my routine and transition between activities is an extreme challenge for me. I have a huge need for predictability in my day. Because it's such a struggle, I can definitely lose my cool. If I have an outburst, sudden change is often the cause.

# Here are some ways you can help me get along.

- Accentuate and cheer for my strengths.
- Keep my challenges in mind. Try to take my perspective and imagine my difficulties.
- Present instructions in written or other visual form.
- Make your expectations of me as clear as possible. Visual instructions and a written schedule are invaluable to my sense of control.







- If you must change the routine, I need adequate advance notice. And if the variation in plans is unfamiliar, please give me as many details as possible about what to expect.
- Understand that if I blow my top or behave in a peculiar or unpleasant way, it's more likely because my senses are overwhelmed or my sense of control has been threatened, not because I'm being manipulative. (Ed. note: To be manipulative, you need perspective-taking ability.)
- If I get too riled up about something, it helps a lot if I can get special permission to go to a quiet place for a break.

- When you want to say something to me, first make sure you have my attention. Then give me some time to process each item before you say the next one.
- Try to say *exactly* what you mean without using figures of speech, metaphors, idioms, or sarcasm.
- Don't be offended if I don't look you in the eye or respond the way you expect when you're saying something. It doesn't mean that I don't like you.
- Help me recognize important points or main ideas if I get bogged down by details.



- Help me with social situations by describing what someone else might be feeling and then suggesting an appropriate way to respond.
- If I get too involved in talking about my special interest, you can nicely let me know that it's time to change the subject.
- Quietly and patiently let me know when I am stimming so I can try to stop it.
- Help me recognize when someone's intentions are not friendly and defend me if they try to tease or bully.
- **Most of all, be my friend.**





- My dream is to become an inventor. I already have some invention ideas, like toys that revolutionize the way babies develop and new transportation options. I could even teach a college class about how to invent things.
- I also hope to have a wife and kids someday. I have a lot to offer to my family and to the world.

# Editor's note

- Among neurotypical students, 15 percent are targets of putdowns or bullying attempts. Of students on the Autism Spectrum, **96 to 100 percent are targets.**
- Where students with Asperger's and autism are concerned, schools and other programs must take an absolute Zero-Tolerance stand against teasing, bullying, and every kind of putdown.
- In addition, implementing awareness programs for all students about this "hidden" disability can be an invaluable expansion of everyone's education.