



Learning Links

The Puzzle of Nonverbal Learning Disability

Understanding Nonverbal Learning Disability

What does it all mean? Nonverbal Learning Disability, Asperger's Syndrome, High Functioning Autism – lots of labels. Nonverbal Learning Disability (NLD) is one term used to describe individuals with relatively mild traits of Autism. Autism exists on a “spectrum” ranging from very mild symptoms to more severe.

The following characteristics or “puzzle pieces” are **some** of the most common seen in people with mild Autism characteristics such as you might see in a Nonverbal Learning Disability. Keep in mind that individuals vary in the intensity or number of the characteristics described, and that the exact “label” used might also vary:

- Although interested in having friends, individuals with NLD often have difficulty in social situations, including picking up on social cues (such as eye contact, “body language”, or tone of voice). Young children might have difficulty interacting with other children during imaginary play.
- Although students with NLD often have strong language skills, they tend to have trouble communicating effectively with others.
- Other traits could include:
 - Highly developed knowledge within a relatively narrow area of interest, to the point of being an “expert”
 - Functioning best with routines and having trouble being flexible in making transitions
 - High sensitivity to bright lights, loud noises, certain fabrics, or food textures
 - Motor behaviors such as rocking, flapping of hands, or spinning of objects
 - Appearing uncoordinated or clumsy
 - Academic strengths often include sounding out words, spelling, and auditory learning, while difficulties are common in math, writing, PE, and science

How do the “puzzle pieces” fit together?

Since individuals with High Functioning Autism display many of the characteristics seen with Asperger's Syndrome and NLD, differences may seem subtle. Delay in acquiring or developing language or speech is a defining characteristic for individuals with High

Functioning Autism, while those diagnosed with Asperger's or NLD do not have a significant history of language delay.

While it may seem confusing to figure out the differences among diagnoses, in many ways it is a matter of seeing how a person's "puzzle pieces" fit together. Almost anybody could have *some* of the "puzzle pieces" or characteristics listed above. People who are diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, NLD or High Functioning Autism just have more of those pieces. A diagnosis should be made only by a professional trained to sort and understand how all the pieces fit together for a given individual. A good first step is to consult your family doctor or pediatrician.

How supportive services can fit in:

- *Occupational therapy* – help with sensory processing, coordination, and fine motor skills
- *Speech & Language services* – help with the “nonverbal” aspects of speech, such as tone of voice and other nonverbal communication (facial expression, gesture, posture) as well as the “language” of social success (manners, turn-taking)
- *Counseling* – help individuals understand their learning profiles, acquire social skills, and learn tools to help with transitions and manage emotions (such as anxiety or depression).

For More Information

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association - www.asha.org

Families for Early Autism Treatment (FEAT) - www.feat.org

Families of Adults Afflicted with Asperger's Syndrome (FAAAS) - www.faaas.org

Future Horizons Inc. - www.fhautism.com

Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) - www.ldanatl.org

Nonverbal Learning Disability Association - www.NLDA.org

Nonverbal Learning Disabilities on the Web -

www.NLDontheWEB.org

Online Asperger Syndrome Information and Support (O.A.S.I.S.)

- www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger

Tony Attwood, noted author on Asperger Syndrome -

www.tonyattwood.com.au

Local Organizations:

Idaho Asperger's Support Group - www.idahoasg.org

Comprehensive Advocacy (Co-Ad) - 208-336-5353

Idaho Parents Unlimited, Inc. (IPUL) - 208-342-5884
www.ipulidaho.org/home.html

Recommended Books:

Asperger's Syndrome: A guide for parents and professionals, by Tony Atwood.

Freaks, Geeks and Asperger Syndrome: A user guide to adolescence, by Luke Jackson and Tony Atwood.

A Parent's Guide to Asperger Syndrome & High-Functioning Autism: How to meet the challenges and help your child thrive, by Sally Ozonoff, Geraldine Dawson, and James McPartland.

Aquamarine Blue Five: Personal stories of college students with autism, by Dawn Prince-Hughes, Ed.

Asperger Syndrome in the Family: Redefining Normal, by Liane Holliday Willey.

The Autistic Spectrum: A parent's guide to understanding and helping your child, by Lorna Wing.

Books and resources are available in our Center's Resource Library.

The Center provides individual and group services for students with NLD or related needs to help students build a foundation for the future. For more information, call Lori Sirs, LCSW at 208-333-0008, ext. 106.



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