8. We are hypersensitive.

Apsy students react very strongly to sounds, sights, smells, and physical contact. Accommodate us when possible. If it isn’t practical to make changes in the classroom to keep noise, movement, and other sensory “attacks” to a minimum, at least understand that the Aspy student is not overreacting when she gets upset by them.

7. We need everything spelled out.

Aspies tend to take things literally. Some of us have no concept of metaphor or irony. Deadpan jokes just confuse us, and we don’t know how to handle tongue-in-cheek insults. Aspies do not pick up implications or other non-verbal communication. Also, bear in mind that we have to be told things personally. An announcement to the whole class may well go over the head of an Aspy student, so talk to the student after class to make sure she has all the information she needs.

6. We don’t know the social rules that other kids know intuitively.

Don’t assume that a child with Asperger Syndrome “should know better.” The first time an Aspy student breaks a social rule, just inform her of the rule, because she probably doesn’t know it. Even subsequent times, she may genuinely be having trouble following that rule, so be patient. Also, we don’t easily generalize the rules, so when a situation changes slightly, we may not understand that the same rules still apply. Conversation can be very hard for us, because we don’t know how to share the floor, and get very angry when the conversation doesn’t go just the way we want it to.

5. We are often happy to play alone.

Some Aspies want friends and should be helped to make some, but being alone is fine, too. Children may feel obligated to socialize because the world suggests that they’re “supposed” to. They should learn that it’s fine to be who they are; if they don’t want to interact, they don’t have to. Remember: what they want is different from what you would have wanted at their age, and if you think about it, it usually doesn’t hurt if they’re all alone and happy that way.

4. Don’t be afraid to gently point out our mistakes.

If you tell us we’re fine, we’ll believe we’re fine and not try to change. It may be your instinct to tell special students only good things about themselves, but they best thing for young Aspies is honesty. Especially if a child shows that she already knows something to be a bad habit, telling her otherwise will just confuse her.
3. Our problems are real.

An Aspy student is likely to voice complaints that make no sense to you. You should ask questions until you understand his request. (You also may insist that he phrase it more politely.) Please don’t brush off a complaint or request from an Aspy student simply because it’s not one you expect to hear, and please don’t make the student feel foolish for voicing it. If you don’t want to do what the student asks, explain why in a way that shows respect for his viewpoint. Avoid declaring something “not a big deal” when it’s clearly a big deal to the child.

2. Bullying may be a major problem.

Aspies usually do well in the classroom, so we don’t seem vulnerable until recess. Bullying for Aspies can be very subtle. Other students can prey on the difficulty we have distinguishing good from bad intentions. They can create situations that confuse us socially, making us uncomfortable, even frightened. They can take advantage of an Aspy who is the only one in a situation who doesn’t know what to do. Besides bullying, classmates of Aspies should be told not to talk down to us or ignore us. Under no circumstances have students pick their teams or groups one member at a time. It will become a pageant in honor of the Aspy’s social isolation.

AND THE NUMBER ONE THING TO REMEMBER ABOUT ASPY STUDENTS IS:

1. Asperger Syndrome is a positive thing.

It’s good to have people in the world who think differently. Not everything neurotypicals pick up from each other is good. Aspies feel very little peer pressure and do not get caught up in the bad parts of society, such as prejudice. We are usually good at our special interests in a special way. A student who is proud of having AS will get a lot less frustrated with herself than one who is ashamed of it. You should remind a frustrated student of the blessings she gets – and gives -- in return for her hardships.

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