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Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome and Perceptions of Friendship

Suzanne Carrington, Elizabeth Templeton, and Tracey Papinczak

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of friendship faced by teenagers diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. This research aimed to provide teachers with an insight into the social world of Asperger syndrome from a student perspective. A multiple-case study approach was used to collect data from 5 secondary school students in Australia. Data were collected through the use of semistructured interviews. An inductive approach to data analysis resulted in a number of broad themes in the data: (a) understanding of concepts or language regarding friendships, (b) description of what is a friend, (c) description of what is not a friend, (d) description of an acquaintance, and (e) using masquerading to cope with social deficits. The insights provided by the participants in this study are valuable for teachers, parents, and anyone else involved in inclusive education.

Children who have been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome have difficulties in communicating with their peers and developing appropriate relationships with others at school. In spite of this, their intellectual ability can be within or above the normal range (Barnhill, Hagiwara, Myles, & Simpson, 2000). Researchers have agreed that difficulties communicating and learning unspoken social rules contribute to major challenges for children with Asperger syndrome as they develop (Church, Alisanki, & Amanullah, 2000; Frith, 1991; Koning & Magill-Evans, 2001). More specifically, idiosyncratic social skills present an enormous handicap in school, and continuing difficulties may result in aggressive behavior (Simpson & Myles, 1998) and depression (Barnhill, 2001). This is because these students frequently do not have the skills to engage in age expected reciprocal social interactions (Simpson & Myles, 1998). Rather, these students could be described as socially awkward or self-centered with a lack of understanding of others. One reason social interactions are problematic for people with Asperger syndrome is that they experience difficulty in interpreting subtle social cues, particularly nonverbal body language (Koning & Magill-Evans, 2001). In addition, an inability to "mind read" means that these students will find it difficult to predict others' behavior, read the intentions of others, understand motives behind behavior, understand emotions, and understand how their behavior affects how others think or feel (Baron-Cohen, 1995; Baron-Cohen & Jolliffe, 1997). These social and communication difficulties create additional stress for the developing adolescent at secondary school (Carrington & Graham, 2001).

Secondary students are required to cope with changes in routine and in behavioral expectations, engage in complex social interactions with peers and adults, and meet academic learning demands. In adolescence, when fitting in with peers is vitally important, complex, and stressful, students with Asperger syndrome have an increased need for social support and understanding. During their teens, these students generally become more aware of their differences. Carrington and Graham (1999) described how adolescents with Asperger syndrome have a need to fit in but do not know how to do so.

Little research has been conducted describing the perception of friendship and social experiences of adolescents who have Asperger syndrome, and there has been even less qualitative research incorporating children's own words. Church et al.'s (2000) study described characteristics of Asperger syndrome, including social skills and feelings about friends over time and during specific developmental stages. This article contains specific examples and illustrations provided by a group of students who have Asperger syndrome to support the findings in Church et al.'s article.

With this study, we aimed to advance understanding of the social difficulties that are characteristic of individuals with Asperger syndrome while providing a voice to this group of students. We asked the following research question: What are the perceptions of friendship for a group of secondary school students who have Asperger syndrome? Our professional knowledge of Asperger syndrome and the particular social difficulties experienced by this group of secondary school students can be expanded by listening to and reflecting on the voices of the participants in this study.

Description of the Study

This research emphasizes personal reflections about friendship in order to improve our knowledge of the characteristics of teenagers with Asperger syndrome. Interpretative sociology provides a framework by which the researcher can enter the person's world and meanings to get an inside perspective. Specifically, a multiple-case study approach was employed to collect data from five secondary school students. Semistructured interviews were used to obtain information from the participants. This approach enabled the adolescents to describe their own experiences in an open way. Researchers such as Minkes, Robinson, and Weston (1994) and Morris (1998) have discussed the importance of empowering individuals with disabilities by seeking their views. The goal of this type of research is not to explain but to understand the meanings the adolescents have constructed from their own experiences (McPhail, 1995). Ethical standards for research with children, such as attention to informed consent and ethical interview procedures, were considered in planning this study (Mahon, Glendinning, Clarke, & Craig, 1996).

Method

Setting

The setting for the study was a large secondary school in Australia. The school provides support services to students with different learning needs and employs two special education teachers. Services the special education staff members provide include assisting with timetable organization, coordinating special education programs and curriculum modifications for students, supporting general education classroom teachers, advocating for students' needs, coordinating teacher assistants, and communicating with parents and outside agencies.

Participants

One of the special educators facilitated contact between the researchers and the students who have Asperger syndrome and their parents. Letters of information and consent were sent to eight families. Five students and their families agreed to participate in the study. The students agreed to be interviewed regarding their beliefs about and understandings and experiences of friendships. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the true identity of the participants. Characteristics of the participants in the study are summarized in Table 1. The school has a special education center that employs staff members to support students with learning problems and disabilities.

TABLE 1
Characteristics of the Participants in the Study

Characteristic	Participant ^a				
	Alice	John	Larry	Jack	Morris
School grade	8	10	10	11	12
Age at time of study (in yrs)	14	15	15	18	17
Ethnicity	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian
Diagnosis	Asperger syndrome	Asperger syndrome	Asperger syndrome	Asperger syndrome	Asperger syndrome
Additional assessment information ^b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special interest in and excels at art/portraiture • Strong spelling and vocabulary • Easily stressed and becomes very anxious in new situations • Perfectionist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particular interest in motorbikes • Poor concentration in class, struggles academically as a result • At risk of being lead astray socially in order to be seen as one of the crowd 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very advanced computer skills • Has inserviced with school staff members in areas of information technology • Perfectionist, becomes highly anxious when he does not achieve what he thinks he should 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special interest in war history and politics • Difficulty with processing and analyzing problems • Poor social skills, few friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced skills in the food and hospitality area • Highly developed computer skills • Difficulties in the area of communication and social skills
Support from special education center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits special education center on an 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits special education center on an 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receives 4 hours of support from special 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receives 4 hours of support from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receives 4 hours of support for

as-needed basis to relieve stress	as-needed basis to relieve stress	education staff members in the general education classrooms	special education staff members in the general education classrooms	English in the special education class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receives 10 hours of support from special education staff members in the general education classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receives 10 hours of support from special education staff members in the general education classrooms Receives 4 hours of support in the special education class 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receives 3 hours of support from special education staff members in the general education classrooms

^aAll names are pseudonyms. ^bFor example, particular strengths, weaknesses, or obsessions.

Data Collection

Semistructured interviews were used to collect data regarding students' understanding of friendships. Specifically, in-depth interviewing was used to gather data in this study (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995). In-depth interviewing is described by Minichiello et al. as a conversation with a specific purpose "focusing on the informant's perception of self, life and experience, and expressed in his or her own words" (p. 61).

The interviews followed a semistructured format, were approximately 20 to 40 minutes in duration and were audio taped for later transcription. The interview questions were developed in consultation with the special needs support teacher from the participating school and two adults with Asperger syndrome from a local Asperger syndrome support network. The final list of questions (see the Appendix) were provided to students the week before their interviews were conducted. The aim of this process was to enable discussion of the issues at home or private perusal of the subject by the interviewees. The researchers were aware that these students had not discussed their views on friendship in this manner before and that they therefore needed time to familiarize themselves with the issues in the interview. The special education teacher facilitated planning of interview times and arranged a private space to conduct the interviews at the secondary school. The first and second authors interviewed students over a period of 3 weeks. The researchers had no direct contact with the parents of the participants in the study.

Data Analysis

This research aims to describe and explain a pattern of relationships, which can only be done with a set of conceptually specified categories (Mishler, 1990). The method of constant comparison advocated in seminal work by Glaser and Strauss (1967) influenced the analysis of the interviews. As phenomena were coded and classified, comparison occurred across the categories and previous research findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). In this way, relationships were discovered and conceptualizations were refined through classification and analysis.

Interviews were transcribed and imported into QSR NUD*IST (Nonnumerical, Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing; Richards & Richards, 1994) for coding. This software package is designed for qualitative analysis of unstructured data and assists with the storage, coding, retrieval and analysis of the text of the interviews. Using a computer-based analysis tool such as NUD*IST allows for a more systematic and complete analysis of interview transcripts than is possible using mechanical means (Le Compte & Preissle, 1993). Interviews were coded using a line of text as the test-coding unit. Text units are the smallest units of text recognized by NUD*IST. Defined by the researchers, text units may be lines, paragraphs, or words and are automatically numbered for identification and retrieval. NUD*IST is able to organize an index system that has nodes. These can be organized into hierarchies or trees to represent the organization of concepts into categories. The system allows the researchers to store and explore emerging ideas. Students' understandings of friendship in this study were coded in five broad categories:

1. understanding of concepts or language regarding friendships,
2. description of what is not a friend,
3. description of what is a friend,
4. description of an acquaintance, and

5. using masquerading to cope with social deficits.

Results

Understanding of Concepts or Language Regarding Friendships

Overall, there was a lack of in-depth discussion from a11 participants about the issues related to friendship. This meant that the interviewers had to use prompts frequently to solicit students' thoughts about friendship. One participant (Alice), had particular difficulty answering the questions, so the interviewer posed them as sentences for her to complete, rather than as questions. This was preferable to Alice sitting in silence.

Researcher: So when I'm with my friends, the sort of things that don't work are...?

Alice: Having arguments like talking about, like worrying about something that isn't-that's nothing. Arguments over nothing.

Researcher: So there's not really an issue there, it's an argument over nothing? And when I'm with my friends, some other things that don't work are . . . ?

Alice: (long pause with no answer)

At other times this difficulty seemed to be due to a student's not understanding the words used in the question. For example, in this part of the interview, John did not know the meaning of the word *acquaintance*:

Researcher: Tell me about what you understand about people who are acquaintances.

John: Acquaintances - do you know what that means?

Participants frequently said things such as "It's really hard to explain" and "stuff like that." This supports Myles and Simpson's (1998) findings that individuals with Asperger syndrome may have difficulties with information presented orally. The following two extracts provide further examples of the difficulty these participants had with understanding the language:

Researcher: And what about those people who are not your friends? What are they like?

Larry: They're . . . well ... define "not friends."

Researcher: That's what I want you to do for me. Describe what you think "not friends" means.

Researcher: If you could look into the future, what would your friends be like?

Jack: I don't know. They would be nice, friendly and nice.

Researcher: What do you mean by "friendly"?

Jack: I don't know.

Researcher: What things would you like to keep the same with friends?

Jack: All the aspects of friendship.

In general, all five participants struggled to describe their own understandings of friendship. Most interviews lasted less than half an hour and required much prompting and rewording of the questions from the interviewers. The interviewers allowed for extra processing time, as suggested by Myles and Simpson (1998); however, it was clear that the students had much difficulty speaking about these issues.

Description of What Is Not a Friend

The students were better able to describe a number of characteristics of peers who would not be friends, for instance, "students who are sent to the office" (Alice); students who are "rude, inconsiderate, and thieves" (John); and "the type you wouldn't talk to, never communicate with" (Jack). When asked what people who are not friends would be doing that would make him not want to be around, Jack replied, "Annoying kind of stuff . . . hang around you for too long." In addition, Jack described the mean and unfriendly behavior of some students who were not his friends. He stated, "They'll put me in a situation-like I say something and then they'll say, 'Ha! Just joking!'"

Larry described people who are not friends as "people I don't know and people I don't like." When asked to elaborate, he said that some students were "sort of stuck up," explaining, "They usually for some reason don't like me straight away, pick on me and stuff. But that hasn't happened for about a year and a half" He also suggested that people who were not friends did not share his interests. Similarly, Morris also described people who are not friends as being "different" and said they "like other things."

When asked questions about what happens with peers to make things not go well (i.e., to make that person not a friend), the students reported some of their own experiences. Alice said that one thing that sometimes goes wrong is that friends "break promises." This reflects her rigidity in thinking, which is a characteristic of Asperger syndrome (Szatmari, 1991). John said that it was hard to explain but that things did not go well if students were annoying and behaving in a "stupid" way: "If they're not being nice to me anymore and they're getting really annoying and stuff like that."

Morris described fights and arguments with peers and said that other students sometimes were violent and got drunk. He stated that he did not feel comfortable around these people and therefore they were not his friends. Morris described some situations at school in which students influence what happens in the peer group.

Interviewer: Are there other things that happen at school that make it difficult for you to get on with other people?

Morris: No. I don't know. I suppose it's the other friends that I hang out with that aren't that popular.... They just don't like me hanging out with some of them or stuff like that.

Interviewer: So, what do they say?

Morris: I don't know. Just tell them to leave and that I don't really want them to leave.... They just tell them to leave and all that. They're friends and all -I don't know.

Description of What Is a Friend

The students had various descriptions of what friends are, but once again they generally found it hard to explain. Alice revealed her inability to fully comprehend the nature of friendship when she described friends as "the ones that could help you and keep in touch" and said, "You grow up with them." Despite the fact that she sought to discuss skating with some of her peers and expressed an interest in going skating with her friends, she failed to reduce her social isolation: "I don't think I have friends ... not really." In comparison, John stated that a person's friends should be people he or she respects, and Jack said that friends are people one has known for a long time. Jack also described some characteristics of friendship: "Trusting them, not turning their back on you sort of stuff and not fighting with me and my friends ... sticking up for each other ... keeping each other's secrets and promises." He said his friendships go well when he and his friends "do the same things."

Similar Interests. A number of students described friends who had similar interests. This meant they could talk about the same things and be comfortable with each other. For example, Larry described a friend as "someone who I usually get along with quite well and who shares similar interests with me, and we generally have fun together." Larry also talked about the importance of interest to a friendship when he said, "They are my friends, their interest, their individuality I suppose, everything is important really." This focus on similar interests was reflected in Jack's understanding of friendship as well: "Friends are all really just good because at a POW [prisoner of war] camp, if they didn't have a mate back then, they wouldn't survive. Excuse me. I have an interest in POW camps and the Japanese. I read a lot of war history books." Morris extended the idea of common interests to include feelings of being comfortable. He believed that friends are people "to have a good time with."

When asked why he felt comfortable with these people, Morris stated, "You don't get nervous like they're going to criticize what you're going to say." He also preferred that they share his interests.

Larry also brought up the importance of friends' having not only similar interests but similar personalities: "They're really nice people who have got the same interests as me.... They're usually weirdos as my parents call them. Yes, so my friends are a bunch of freaks, as they say, and so am I."

Activities with Friends. When asked what they do with their friends, the students discussed a variety of activities, including asking people to a birthday party and joining in with others on weekend activities. Alice had difficulty describing other types of activities she engaged in with her friends, although after quite a lot of prompting from the interviewer, she did mention skating and swimming but then could not discuss when this had last happened. Alice also described working on school projects with friends (although the assumption could be made that if they were working on school group work, the students may not be considered "friends" by most standards). John, Larry, and Morris described a number of activities involving friends outside of school. For example, John said, "I'm a rider. I ride trail bikes. And I've got a friend that comes out riding with me. And, yeah, that's what we do 'cause it has a partner. Like a friend that comes out and does stuff with me." John's words indicate that he considers a friend someone to accompany him on his weekend activity, similar to a partner.

Jack seemed to take delight in describing "inappropriate" activities he and a friend took part in.

Jack: We played kick the football. We played other outdoor games as well like T-square, or there's another game like handball. This is what you shouldn't do-kill insects.

Researcher: Did you?

Jack: Yeah. Me and my friends did that, used to do naughty things.

Researcher: So, you were doing things together?

Jack: Yeah, we killed them. One of my friends and I had a magnifying glass and the sun was reflecting from it, pssst! Smoke coming from the ant. Yeah, barbequed ant.

The students' focus of activities on interests reflects the need of some students to engage in a restricted range of activities. Larry described activities that enabled him to continue his intense interest in computers: "We talk about stuff like computers, *Dungeons and Dragons*. We play it at school and after school." Larry also ran *Dungeons and Dragons* meetings at school. Such an intense focus on one activity or interest is one of the defining characteristics of Asperger syndrome (Williams, 1995).

Description of an Acquaintance

We asked the participants to describe their perceptions of the term *acquaintance*. Alice made an attempt to describe her understanding of this word after quite a lot of thinking: "I don't really know what's different, but I think there may be, like they don't match your personality, like I'm quiet and some of them are loud, like they don't match." Alice thought that differences in personality would affect her friendships with her peers. In contrast, John suggested that an acquaintance would know less about him, and Jack explained that he would not mix with people who are just acquaintances. He said, "You don't speak to them as much as you do with your real friends. You don't catch up as much. . . . The ones you speak to at school are acquaintances-I just say, 'Hi.'" Larry agreed with this when he explained that "they're the people who I just meet with a few times, just people I know basically." Similarly, Morris provided a description of his understanding of the term:

You sort of know them, you talk to them sometimes, but you don't really do stuff. You just see them at school and that. And you talk to them. Things like if you see them through the day, you'd probably say hello or something, but that's it. You don't do nothing else out of school or anything

The participants' descriptions of an acquaintance indicate an understanding that can be described in unemotional terms. This is contrasted with the lack of qualitative or emotive language in the participants' descriptions of a friend. It seemed much easier for the participants to describe an acquaintance.

Using Masquerading to Cope with Social Deficits

The last theme that emerged from the study data was how these students cope with their social deficits. One way this occurred is through *masquerading*, a characteristic that was also described in Carrington and Graham's (2001) study. High school students with Asperger syndrome may be aware that they do not fit in and try to mask their deficits. John believed that he had many friends and showed evidence of masquerading in the following quote:

I've got the most friends. I'd say I'm probably the one that has the most friends. I don't think I really need to go up there [special education unit] because I think I'm more or less capable of doing things by myself.

Larry also described the vast number of friends he had at school. He said he could talk to anyone, and when the interviewer made the comment that the interview had not taken long, he replied, "That's because we didn't count how many friends I actually have." When asked how many, he said, "Nine ... at least fifteen. That's why it's hard to keep contact with them all." This "masquerade" is also demonstrated through the following dialogue with Larry:

Researcher: If you could just have perfect friendships, what would those friendships be like?

Larry: The ones I've got now.

Researcher: Just like now. That's lovely, isn't it?

Larry: And no more....

Researcher: And no more. You have enough friends?

Larry: Yes, my phone's already going "ring, ring" and then I pick up, "Hello," and it's like, "Gosh, not you again!" And then, "ring, ring" . . . "ring, ring" . . . Gosh! ... And my phone bill's already far too high.

Larry's stories about the numbers of friends and his interactions with them is a way of masking his communication and interaction difficulties with his peers. This need for interaction with friends is masked by his fictional account of an extensive list of friends.

Discussion

Social dysfunction is perhaps the single most defining and handicapping feature of Asperger syndrome (Rogers, 2000). Friendships may be desired, but the concept of reciprocity and sharing of interests and ideas inherent in friendship is not often understood (Filipek et al., 1999). The adolescents' words in this study indicate a lack of insight into what constitutes friendship and a general difficulty in using and understanding the language to describe friendship issues.

Individuals with Asperger syndrome have difficulty grasping the subtleties of how people relate to each other (Myles & Simpson, 1998) and understanding the perceptions of others (Myles & Southwick, 1999). As is highlighted in this study, they do not seem to comprehend the nature and reciprocity of friendship. Despite the fact that the participants named friends and discussed activities with friends, we are speculative about the true nature of these friendships. This point is similar to one made by Church et al. (2000), who revealed that although half of all the middle school-age students with Asperger syndrome in their study identified a best friend, this friend may change from time to time and the relationship could be viewed by others as superficial. For example, in this study, John revealed some problems with friendships, despite his insistence that he had "the most friends." John's apparent lack of insight into his social difficulties is typical of adolescents with Asperger syndrome. A study of social problems and adaptive behavior among children and adolescents with Asperger syndrome indicated that although parents generally revealed significant concerns about their children's behavior and social skills, students did not rate themselves as having significant problems in these areas (Barnhill, Hagiwara, Myles, & Simpson, 2000). These results are consistent with the basic features of Asperger syndrome, including an inability to fully consider the perspectives of others and understand one's own feelings and behaviors (Myles & Simpson, 1998).

Some of the behavioral eccentricities associated with Asperger syndrome were also revealed in the study. The restricted range of interests found in persons with Asperger syndrome can take unusual or eccentric forms (Barnhill, 2001). An obsession with computers is particularly prevalent because socializing can be severely limited (Barnhill, 2001). Three of the five adolescents who participated in

the study had "best" friendships that seemed to specifically revolve around computers and computer games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*. Church et al. (2000) also found that best friendships among teenagers with Asperger syndrome tend to revolve around very specific interests such as computers and video games.

Another of the core characteristics of Asperger syndrome, cognitive inflexibility, was made apparent by the comments of Alice, John, and Jack in descriptions of who is and who is not a friend. In fact, Alice refused to befriend students who broke school rules. Individuals with Asperger syndrome cannot appreciate that in certain situations, rules may be bent or broken (Szatmari, 1991). Similar information regarding friendships was obtained in a study of experiences of children with Asperger syndrome (Church et al., 2000) in which it was noted that friendships among adolescents could dissolve if rules were broken.

The increasing levels of stress brought about by the characteristics of Asperger syndrome throughout the years of adolescence have been discussed by several authors. Church et al. (2000) noted in particular the anxiety of struggling with social expectations in the late middle school and high school years, and Gilchrist et al. (2001) hypothesized that this increasing difficulty during adolescence may result from the increasing pressure of social expectations on students at this time of development. This helps explain why adolescents with Asperger syndrome masquerade. It is evident that the high school years can represent a huge challenge for students with Asperger syndrome because they must cope with a larger, more diverse student population in which conformity and social competence are emphasised (Adreon & Stella, 2001), along with more rigorous academic work and more copious homework assignments. Students who lack the skills necessary to cope with these demands may experience significant problems and may experience to hide inadequacies in skills or understanding.

Conclusions

We conducted this descriptive study with no intent of generalizing the results to all adolescents who have Asperger syndrome. Nonetheless, the words and perspectives shared by these teenagers indicate perspectives of friendship that others with Asperger syndrome may well share. The study specifically provides examples of understandings and perceptions of what is a friend, what is not a friend, and what is an acquaintance; the language difficulties associated with these issues; and data illustrating the concept of masquerading to fit in with peers.

Professionals need to be particularly aware of the possible difficulties experienced by young people who have Asperger syndrome in understanding the language used in discussions about friendships. Sometimes it is easy to presume a level of understanding of terms and concepts associated with friendships. Furthermore, a professional's concept of friendship and what is important in a friendship may be very different from those of young people who have Asperger syndrome. For example, it is evident from the interviews with these students that issues related to society arid school rules are important considerations in who is a friend. Although professionals have the goal of helping young people with Asperger syndrome participate in socially acceptable ways, they also have an obligation to recognize and value different people's perspectives about friendship. There is a _need for more qualitative research to develop a better understanding of the perceptions and interactions of children and adults who have Asperger syndrome. This type of research will add to the more clinical studies evident in most journals that focus on Asperger syndrome.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Suzanne Carrington, PhD, is a lecturer in inclusive education in the School of Learning and Professional Studies at Queensland University of Technology. She is the Coordinator of post-graduate studies in the areas of learning support, inclusive education, and autism spectrum disorders. She currently assists the Education Department of Queensland, in Australia, in the area of teacher development for inclusive education. **Elizabeth Templeton, PhD**, is a lecturer in the School of Learning and Professional Studies at Queensland University of Technology. She is the coordinator of the master's degree in education, behavior management, and lectures in behavior management, autism spectrum disorders, and counseling. Dr Templeton conducts consultancy and private practice for schools, parents, and children in the areas of behavior management and counseling, with particular interest in emotional release counseling, sand play, and symbol work. **Tracey Papinczak, MA**, currently works in the area of evidence-based medicine at the University of Queensland's School of Population Health. She has a continuing interest in the health of adolescents and children, including children with Asperger syndrome. Address: Suzanne Carrington, School of Learning and

AUTHORS' NOTE

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APPENDIX Interview Questions

Introduction

Introduce yourself. Welcome the student and thank him or her for coming.

Explain what the session is about: "We will be talking about friendships and how you get along with others. I will be asking you to tell me about your friendships and the things that are involved."

Explain that the identity of the students will be kept confidential and that the answers to the questions will be included in the results of the study, which will be used to help teachers and others understand how young people with Asperger syndrome get along with other people. Tell the student to ask if he or she does not understand anything. Let the student know that he or she does not have to answer every question and that he or she can stop the session at any time.

Questions

Those questions underlined should be asked of each student. Those questions in italics may be asked if more information and understanding is needed by the interviewer or the student.

- If someone could go out and organize friends for you tell me what those friends would be like.
- *Tell me what you understand about people who are friends.*
- *Tell me what you understand about people who are acquaintances.*
- *Tell me what you understand about people who are not friends.*
- Tell me about your friends
- *Who are your friends? Not just the people at school, but others at home, or somewhere else.*
- *Do you have friends who are younger or older than you? Tell me about these people. How are they different, and how are they the same?*
- *What sort of things do you like to do with your friends?*
- Tell me about the sort of things that work in your friendships.
- Tell me about the things that don't work in your friendships.
- *What sort of things happen when you are with other people your age?*
- *Sometimes things with friends go well. Tell me about these things.*
- *Sometimes things with friends do not go so well. Tell me about these things.*
- *Tell me about things that didn't work with people who are no longer your friends.*
- *What sorts of things are difficult about your friendships and getting along with other kids?*
- What things are enjoyable and work well about your friendships?
- *What things are pleasant about your friendships?*
- *What things are enjoyable about your friendships?*
- *What things are important about your friendships?*
- *What things do you like doing with your friends?*
- If you could look into the future how would you like your friendships to be?
- *What things would you like to keep the same with your friendships, those at school, those not at school?*

- *What things would you like to change about your friendships, those at school, those not at school?*
- What would you want your friends to know about you?
- What things do they need to know about you?
- What things should not be told to your friends about you?
- Tell me about how you would need help to change things with your friendships.
- *What help would you need from your teachers?*
- *What other help would you need?*

Thank the student for participating and tell him or her that if he or she has any questions to please contact the special needs teacher for the school.