

A Quick Guide for Supporting Students with Asperger's Syndrome: Personal Tutors

What is Asperger's Syndrome?

- ❖ Asperger's Syndrome (AS) is a condition on the autistic spectrum characterised by difficulties with **flexibility of thought**, **social interaction** and **communication**.
- ❖ People with AS are usually of average or above average intelligence with good verbal skills and are often capable of leading full and independent lives.
- ❖ People with AS may become very focused on an activity that they enjoy. This can lead to significant productivity if the activity is related to their work.
- ❖ People with AS may find it difficult to empathise or to know what others are thinking, finding other people unpredictable and confusing. They are likely to experience difficulties functioning in 'our world', which relies heavily on non-verbal communication and the unwritten rules which guide our behaviour.
- ❖ Life can be hard for people with AS; it affects every aspect of their lives. Anxiety and depression are common experiences.
- ❖ Finally, it is important to remember that **every person with AS is a unique individual** with their own strengths and weaknesses. This card provides useful insight into some of the issues that you may face, but **be prepared to learn more** each and every time you meet someone with AS.

What it might mean for you:

- ❖ **Has an AS student missed your tutorial after it was rescheduled?** People with AS can find it hard to cope with change and unexpected events.
- ❖ **Has an AS student's answer to your assignment been off-topic?** AS students may misinterpret your questions or instructions.
- ❖ **Are AS students finding working in your tutorial group difficult?** You may notice that your AS students behave 'differently'. They may come across as abrupt or even rude and have difficulties with conversations.
- ❖ **Does an AS student appear distracted in your tutorial?** Some people with AS are hypersensitive to sensory stimuli. For example, a flickering strip light may be so distracting that the student cannot concentrate.



What you can do to support AS students in your tutorials:

- ❖ If your School/Department has one, **contact the AS Academic Contact or mentor as soon as you observe an issue arising** concerning an AS student. Problems in tutorials? Absenteeism? Assignment or exam issues? A short email sent early to the right person can dramatically improve the chances of the issue being resolved before it is too late, and is likely to reduce your workload in the long term.
- ❖ If you provide **pastoral support** for the student, make sure lecturing/admin/technical staff know of your role and how they can contact you. Let them know they need only send a short email to inform you of any issues. Encourage them to contact you as early as possible when a problem arises.
- ❖ Try to give **clear and early notification of any changes** to your tutorials or assignments e.g. hand-in dates, room changes, etc. If your department has an *AS Academic Contact*, then send that person a short email to inform them of the change.
- ❖ Wherever possible give clear, **step by step instructions** and prompt and constructive **feedback**. If you find an AS student has misinterpreted one of your assignments inform your department's *AS Academic Contact* (if you have one). AS students often have low self esteem – offer as much realistic encouragement as possible.
- ❖ Be **reliable, consistent** and offer help at a level that you can maintain
- ❖ Try, where possible, to be **flexible** and adapt to their style of thinking and working, and to their patterns of behaviour.
- ❖ Try to maintain a **thick skin** as a defence against the directness of people with AS. You may also need to suppress your own social etiquette and be direct with them. People with AS do not learn manners indirectly and would generally prefer to be told (in private) if they are coming over as ill mannered or odd.
- ❖ Group work – **facilitate**, if necessary, a group in which an AS student is involved.
- ❖ It is important to **avoid stereotyping** AS students. They will be very different from each other.

For more information about supporting students with Asperger's Syndrome see the booklet and DVD that accompany these Quick Guides!

Your AS Academic Contact is:

Email:

Tel: