

Book Review: *Asperger's and Girls*
By Dana Lasek, Ph.D., HSPP

I am thrilled to review the book, *Asperger's and Girls* (Future Horizons, Inc., 2006). This paperback features chapters written by Tony Attwood, Temple Grandin and seven additional experts in the area of Asperger's Syndrome (AS). The book is a welcome resource for girls and women diagnosed with Asperger's as well as parents, teachers, psychologists, and anyone interested in how to diagnose and treat females who struggle with Asperger's.

The book is divided into chapters on diagnosis; meeting the challenges faced by girls with Asperger's; educating girls with Asperger's; how to help the female student with Asperger's navigate the social pressures of high school; and helping women with Asperger's understand puberty, sexuality, marriage and motherhood.

Tony Attwood is a clinical psychologist living in Australia who has over 30 years of experience with individuals diagnosed with Autism and Asperger's. Dr. Attwood answers the questions surrounding why girls are less likely to be diagnosed with AS than boys. The ratio of males to females across the Autism Spectrum Disorders is 4:1, yet when looking at Asperger's Syndrome, the ratio is 10:1. Dr. Attwood suggests that girls are under-diagnosed with AS for a number of reasons. Boys are typically referred to physicians or school psychologists due to inappropriate aggression, difficulty in social situations, and an intense focus in one area such as science or electronics. Girls with AS may demonstrate a more subtle expression of the characteristics observed in boys with AS. Typically, girls are able to use their words to express emotion and react less aggressively when frustrated. Studies have shown that girls are more motivated to learn and quicker to understand social skills training than the boys in the study. If a female with Asperger's is having difficulty making friends, it is more acceptable for her to engage in imaginary play. Like boys, girls with AS are likely to show an intense interest in one area, yet instead of science or electronics, the area of interest may be animals or literature. There is little objective research to support these claims; Dr. Attwood recommends additional studies in order to confirm these differences.

Catherine Faherty is a teacher and trainer in the area of autism. In her chapter, Catherine talks about starting a support group for women with Asperger's Syndrome and the crucial information that was gleaned from the group. The participants shared that they feel they are doubly challenged in society by issues that they face, not only due to their AS diagnosis but also the challenges they face as women with AS. Many of these women felt that society expects them to dress or look a certain way, act in a sensitive or empathic way, correctly ready body language, and to take care of others and themselves. All of these competencies can be difficult challenges for women with AS. The women in the group also explained that, due to their struggles inherent in having Asperger's, they felt mothered or treated like children by others. They were able to express their need to be respected as individuals and women.

The next chapter was written by Sheila Wagner, an educator and author with over 20 years of experience in the area of Autism. She explored ways in which schools educate girls with Asperger's Syndrome or Autism. Wagner reported that while males are most often diagnosed with Asperger's in elementary school, girls are often diagnosed at a much older age if at all. Wagner outlines how school psychologists and teachers can identify and help treat females who may be struggling with AS. Wagner discusses how peer support in the schools can be beneficial in teaching appropriate social skills and inclusion for the female with Asperger's. Wagner presents important academic modifications for the female student with AS, including pre-teaching of content, reduced homework, assistance with writing, and additional time for testing. Finally, Wagner explores the unique challenges inherent in teaching females with Asperger's about puberty and sex education.

Lisa Iland grew up with a brother with Autism. She helped him navigate the social skills necessary to make it through high school. She went on to write a book and presents workshops on the teen social code. Her chapter outlines four areas teens need to master to fit in. These include: Creating Appeal and Image; Understanding Where to Fit In; Meeting Social Expectations; and Overcoming Bullying and Mean Girls. Each area is well defined and provides scenarios for role playing and discussion.

Mary Wrobel is a teacher and speech pathologist who explores the challenges inherent in teaching females with Asperger's Syndrome about physical growth and development, puberty, and personal hygiene. Puberty is a difficult time for all girls, yet a young girl with Asperger's may find this time especially confusing and frustrating. Wrobel explores the difficulties the teen with Asperger's and her parents may face as she becomes a woman.

Teresa Bolick is clinical psychologist, speaker, and author who examines how the young woman with Asperger's enters the world of college and work. Bolick offers scenarios to help the young adult and her family navigate independence, allowing for mistakes, and maintaining a healthy relationship.

Two authors provide powerful first-person narratives that offer rich insights to readers. Jennifer McIlwee Myers is a woman with Asperger's who talks about dating and marriage. She provides honest information about the do's and don'ts of dating for women with Asperger's. Ruth Snyder is a mom with Autism who talks about her struggles with Autism and raising two boys with the disorder.

This book offered a nice range of information about girls with Asperger's from diagnosis to challenges in the schools to becoming an adult. I would welcome comments and reviews from our readers. You can write to me at crg@childrensresourcegroup.com.