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# Homeschooling a Child with Asperger's (Part 1)

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## Homeschooling a struggling learner

In the United States, it is estimated that one family out of 150 has a child who is struggling with Asperger's syndrome, or autism. (CDC report as seen on [www.medicalnews.today.com](http://www.medicalnews.today.com)) This represents a 500% increase in the past 10 years. Homeschooling families are not immune to this phenomenon.

Many experts on Asperger's syndrome encourage three approaches to help these children overcome many of the challenges they face: biological interventions, educational interventions, and social interventions.

In this newsletter we will focus on the biological interventions that parents have found to be helpful with their children. In the next newsletter we will deal with educational and social interventions. Before we get to interventions, let's focus on the characteristics and why homeschooling is best in helping a child with Asperger's be successful.

### CHARACTERISTICS

What does the homeschooling day look like for a family who has a child with Asperger's-like symptoms? Let's follow a day in the life of Steve.

1. Mom finds that she cannot change the "routine" for the day or Steve tends to become very upset. The need to have things the same is a very strong drive for him. New settings and noises in particular bother him.
2. Helping him learn a "balanced" curriculum also takes much effort from mom because Steve t

ends to have very narrowed interests, wanting only to learn about World War II planes, or studying only spiders in the animal kingdom. He is very fact-oriented, memorizing an amazing array of information about a subject that he is interested in. In fact, he often only talks about one subject to others, even if they are not interested in it.

3. While the other siblings enjoy youth group at church, or the social interactions with other homeschoolers, Steve very often is aloof, not participating in the interactions, appearing to be a loner. When he does interact, his behavior frequently is inappropriate, because he has difficulty reading social cues, and nonverbal signs that people give to one another. Sometimes his behavior can be loud and aggressive. At times it looks like he is detached from the feelings of others. He seems to exhibit little ability to form friendships.
4. When teaching him, mom finds that he easily seems to go into his own world, being fascinated by thoughts that have nothing to do with the task at hand. In fact, he can entertain himself for a long time with nothing more than a simple piece of string.

If these characteristics resonate with you regarding one of your children, please don't despair. Homeschooling is a wonderful tool for helping such children be successful.

### WHY HOMESCHOOLING IS BEST

Many parents have found that the very best educational setting for these wonderful children is at home. Since these children

are often very curious, even gifted learners, at home they are free to explore the topics of interest to them, without needing to do the mundane chores that are needed in the more formal school setting. Also, since peer relationships aren't their strength, they are not distracted from their learning by the constant need to interact with their peers. Their siblings and parents can be their friends. They learn appropriate social interaction in the home setting. And since many of these children suffer with "SI" symptoms (Sensory Integration Dysfunction), it is better for them to be educated in a setting free from the unsettling atmosphere of a crowded school room, with its accompanying noises, movement, and demands.

The one thing that all of these children have in common is that they easily experience sensory overload. Whether the label is Sensory Integration Dysfunction or Sensory Processing Problems, these children would be what Lendon B. Smith, MD describes as "goosey, touchy kids", meaning that everything bothers them. Their sensory system shouts "red alert" when something as insignificant as a label on a shirt, a lump in the yogurt, a loud noise, a sock with a seam, stiffer jeans, foods touching on the plate, a change in routine, or an unexpected touch occurs. They are not comfortable in their own skin. Anxiety rules much of their day. (Asperger's Syndrome, Tony Attwood)

At home, you can give your child a set schedule for the day, so he knows what to expect, which will give him a good level of comfort. It is also the best setting in which to pinpoint dietary issues that may be contributing to the child's behavior. Several parents have homeschooled their children with Asperger's syndrome and written books about the methods that they found to work well with these wonderful children. Homeschooling the Child with Asperger Syndrome: Real Help for Parents Anywhere and on Any Budget (paperback), by Lise Pyles, and Choosing Home: Deciding to Homeschool with Asperger's Syndrome by Martha Kennedy Hartnett. These books provide step-by-step instructions and advice on creating a curriculum for a child with Asperger's syndrome. We will be talking a great deal more about ways to teach your child at home, in the next newsletter.

## **BIOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS**

Some physicians, who have children of their own with Asperger's syndrome, have developed a "metabolic" theory of Asperger's. They have seen their own children overcome many of these unsettling symptoms by balancing their child's body chemistry.

### **The "Gut" Connection**

It has been found that there is a strong connection between gut health and symptoms of Sensory Processing Problems and Asperger's syndrome. Early, or prolonged antibiotic use, or intero exposure to antibiotics or steroids appears to be the dominant factor in this approach. The early or prolonged antibiotic use often creates the overgrowth of yeast and fungus in the child's system. These yeast/fungus toxins cause many behavioral upsets, including spaciness, mood swings, aggression, hyperactivity, inappropriate behavior, depression, anxiety and in general an upset nervous system. This upset also tends to be the catalyst for food allergies. Thousands of parents report very positive changes in their child's behavior and learning when they take natural steps to rebalance their child's gut ecology.

Resources: The Gut and Psychology Syndrome, Natasha-Campbell McBride, Help for Your Hyperactive Child, William Crook, MD, Superimmunity for Kids, Leo Galland, MD, The Biology of Behavior CD set, Dianne Craft, MA, CNHP.

### **The "Food Allergy" Connection**

In his book, Cerebral Allergies, Dr. Philpott describes the many behavioral manifestations of an allergy. Dr. Doris Rapp, in her book, Is This Your Child? describes videos that she made of the dramatic change in a child's behavior after the child was exposed to a food allergen. It has been well established that children with ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, SI, autism and Asperger's syndrome tend to have a compromised immune system, resulting in many hidden allergies. These children often have food allergies and, as a result, many parents have seen dramatic changes when they not only reduce sugar and simple carbohydrates, but also when they begin an allergy elimination diet. To read instructions on how to start an elimination diet to determine the effect of a food on your child's behavior, and for parent testimonials, go to [www.gfcfdiet.com](http://www.gfcfdiet.com), [www.scdiet.com](http://www.scdiet.com), [www.pecanbread.com](http://www.pecanbread.com) and [www.blockcenter.com](http://www.blockcenter.com). Many parents find that by adding a targeted enzyme to each of the child's meals, that the child can tolerate a much wider range of foods without behavioral reactions. You can read about the enzymes that parents have found to be most effective, at the [parent website](#).

## **THE BOTTOM LINE**

The exciting news is that parents are finding ways to greatly reduce the symptoms of Asperger's syndrome in their child by following the paths that other parents have created. To find some of these paths, go to the websites: [www.recoveryvideos.com](http://www.recoveryvideos.com), and [www.tacanow.com](http://www.tacanow.com). To find an "integrative" physician in your area, you can go to [www.acamnet.com](http://www.acamnet.com) or [www.autism.about.com](http://www.autism.about.com). The Carl Pfeiffer Treatment Center ([www.hriptc.org](http://www.hriptc.org)) located in the Chicago area is a clinic run by physicians who look for the metabolic "cause" of Asperger's symptoms and create a very thorough nutritional intervention plan for parents to follow, to reduce the symptoms that the child is experiencing.

God has shown us many ways to help our children who have Asperger's-like behaviors to feel more comfortable. The implementation of these changes is not as difficult as it seems. If you choose to make a change to diet or supplementation, first check with your health care professional. Make only one change at a time, so you will know what is helping. As you do your own research, you will find there are many ways to make your child more comfortable in his own skin, resulting in behaviors that are so much improved.

There are many aspects in the process of working with children with Asperger's syndrome, and it can easily seem beyond your grasp to deal with it. But please be encouraged; you can make progress, as will your child, one step at a time! And be sure to watch for our upcoming Struggling Learner newsletter in which we will explore the educational and social aspects of working with these children.

Blessings to you and your family,  
HSDLA's Struggling Learners Coordinators



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