

When working with an Asperger's kid, remember that they have a hard time "hearing" emotion changing. Try to keep your voice and actions calm, but clear. If your scout is having a melt-down, let it happen, but be clear the group will continue. that he is free to rejoin when he wants and that, while he can, say, hide under a table, he must otherwise obey the basic safety rules ("you can stay under the table as long as I can see you").

In a very real sense, a kid with Asperger's has to be taught "common sense" just like you might teach another kid math or firebuilding. You would never ask a brand new scout to build a bonfire - you would slowly work him up to it. You don't teach math by starting with complex calculus. You can't teach common sense to anyone - especially an Asperger's kid - by getting angry.

From this it follows that you cannot "snap him" out of it. The difference between an Asperger's 3 year old and a normal three year old is this: when a cookie breaks, the normal 3 year old sees two cookies, the Asperger's kid sees a ruined inedible mass. If you "get in his face" and tell him to "snap out of it" an Asperger's kid is more likely to "melt down" than "shape up."

What will work are clear rules which you can calmly enforce and which you can state easily or write in short clear statements. The best one is the "scout sign" ... "sign is up, mouth is shut." Little rules like these help Asperger's kids because they can remember them and enforce them on themselves.

Asperger's kids also like routine. Very often once Asperger's kids do something it becomes a habit and expected. If you can develop a routine in your meeting or course, the scout with Asperger's will respond well because he knows what to expect next.

Physical activity can also help. In fact, you can sometimes use an Asperger's kid as a good indicator that your whole group needs a break - an "early

warning" system. Some Asperger's kids "stim" or engage in repetitive motions - like flapping their arms. Stimming is a sign that they are overstimulated and are trying to release the tension that builds from overstimulation (think: "I'm so angry I could scream" as an example). If your Asperger's scout starts stimming, it could mean the rest of your audience needs a break - so let them run for 5 minutes and see if that helps. Physical activity helps the Asperger's kid regain some control and focus.

Food for thought

As you get to know Scouts with Aspergers, you might want to know some others who had/have Asperger's:

Dan Akroyd - comedian (he even tells about it in interviews!)

Albert Einstein - physicist

Bill Gates - Microsoft founder

Jim Henson - inventor of the Muppet

Charles Schultz - drew Peanuts cartoon strip

Robin Williams - comedian

Additional Resources

If you think you have an Asperger's kid and need additional thinking on how to help them, try looking up the following resources:

- BSA's new book: Working With Scouts with Disabilities - order it on-line!

- University of Delaware's Online Asperger Syndrome Information and Support (OASIS) at <http://www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger>

- A Scouting Manual - an Eagle project video by Asperger's Eagle Nick Irwin at <http://www.aspergerinfo.org/>

[AspergersSyndromeAnEaglesEyeView.pdf](#)

- Scouts with (dis)Abilities

<http://www.viscouts.asn.au/Disabilities>

- McAfee, Navigating the Social World

and don't forget to just run an internet search and use your parent resources wisely!



Scouting With Challenges Asperger's Syndrome



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

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What is going on with this kid?

You are at the start of your meeting. You are deep in your notes, making sure you have everything you need. Scouts have been checking in with you as they walk in, providing constant interruptions. Two scouts, Tony and Tim, come up to you:

“Hey, did you hear about the latest dinosaur find?” Tony says.

“Sure” you say, focusing on your notes, hoping they will go away like the others did once you turn back to your papers.

“They found this HUGE meat-eater” yells Tim.

“Great” you say sourly, thinking <<can’t they see I need to focus?>>

“The find was late Cretaceous by Paul Serino” continues Tony.

“Un-uh” you say, thinking <<I can’t believe these kids are this rude>>

“We went to the track races on Saturday, they were AWESOME” shouts Tim.

“That’s nice” you growl.

“Serino’s going to the desert in Africa where he will continue his prior excavation” Tony says.

“Yes, Tony” you say in that clipped voice you use before you explode at your own kid.

“I’m learning how to throw a split finger fast ball - wanna watch me?” says Tim.

Fade out. You are about to explode, right? These kids don’t seem to understand you are trying to get ready for a meeting. They can’t even see they are both competing for your attention at the same time. At this point, you are thinking there must be something really going wrong at home since their parents haven’t been able to teach them the basic minimum of manners.

Step back for a minute. Yes, there may be some problem at home, but it may also be you are dealing with a different kind of kid: one with ADHD (something you’ve heard about) or Asperger’s Syndrome (something not as widely discussed).

What is going on with this kid.

Tony is showing some of the classic signs of Asperger’s Syndrome. Asperger’s is a neurological disorder on the autism spectrum. Asperger’s kids often have normal intelligence - they can master information easily - but they have a hard time learning social skills, how to communicate effectively with others and, sometimes, have a hard time with physical coordination. You may initially see this scout as “lacking common sense” or “gawky.” In a very real sense, you are right: they can master the badge work, but they really do not understand why people get aggravated when they start talking dinosaurs every minute of the day.

Asperger’s kids often lack moderation - if they are interested in something, they are really interested. In fact, they have a problem blocking out stimulation as well. If something upsets them, they are really upset. For an Asperger’s kid, trying to regulate themselves can be like trying to drive a car from the backseat - you can reach over the front seat and steer, but it’s not easy and it’s really hard to hit the brakes - you can’t do it without a lot of practice and a lot of help. Add to that the fact that Asperger’s kids have difficulty interpreting what they see - “social cues” other people take for granted do not come naturally with Asperger’s.

Similarly, Asperger’s kids have a lot of trouble hearing things like tone of voice. An Asperger’s kid hears you are either angry or calm - but little in between. While you will think you have clearly “ratcheted up” your response, an Asperger’s kid will think you went from being perfectly fine to raging anger in no time flat. Asperger’s kids can also have real problems when there’s a lot going on because they cannot discriminate among all the things - a loud Pinewood Derby or mess hall can be challenging!

Advantages of going on with this kid

While Asperger's kids can be a handful, they bring some advantages as well. They can be enormously focused and can learn subjects at an incredible depth: an Asperger's kid focused on dinosaurs at 10 can be fully capable of doing an entire presentation at a level far above their usual age level. Indeed, they often look at topics from a completely different perspective - and come up with inventive new ways of describing situations or problems. Asperger's kids also can develop wonderfully infectious enthusiasm. Once you realize you are working with a scout with Asperger's symptoms, you can use their focus to help the rest of the group.

Strategies for going on with this kid

As with any kid who is challenging, always start with talking to the parents. Realize that the parents may not yet have a diagnosis and, for any one of several reasons, may not want to discuss any formal diagnosis with you. So, don't ask "does your son have a mental condition?" Rather, ask "I sometimes have problems coordinating with Tony, can you suggest some strategies to me?"

If you suspect Aspergers, understand that one of the issues is the amount of input they receive. Remember that car analogy? It could get really tiring trying to drive from the backseat, right? Sometimes an Asperger's kid just can't control themselves any more ... so when they "melt down" just let them go off to a safe spot in sight and invite them back in a few minutes - let them come back at their own pace. If you have a scout who knows they have Asperger's, they may even ask you to tell them where they can go to have a "safe spot."