

Asperger's Syndrome and High Functioning Autism (AS/HFA)

ADED – The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists

Individuals with AS/HFA typically have a normal to gifted IQ and tend to be perfectionists. The tendency towards perfection can be anxiety-provoking. Autism is considered a spectrum condition and therefore the degree of severity varies. Individuals on the spectrum should consider a driving evaluation before learning to drive.

Warning signs:

- **Information processing** – These difficulties can cause the individual to have impaired reactions to changes in the driving environment. This becomes more challenging as the individual advances into more complex traffic.
 - Individuals with AS/HFA tend to take in too much information.
 - They consider all information to be of equal importance and therefore have difficulty prioritizing the information that they see.
 - Individuals with AS/HFA can have difficulty shifting attention quickly around the driving environment.
- **Motor skills** – This can make it initially difficult to learn to operate the steering, acceleration, and braking to effectively control the vehicle through turns, hills, and curves. As the individual advances in driving, it can impact the ability to carry out the visual and physical steps to make a lane change.
 - Individuals with AS/HFA have eye–hand coordination difficulties.
- **Executive function** – These issues can lead to difficulty managing a roadside emergency, a routine police stop, a detour, or a significant change in weather.
 - They have difficulty planning, organizing, and sequencing the steps to solve a problem.
 - They have difficulty with flexibility of thought.
- **Social skills** – Drivers don't tend to follow the rules all of the time. Therefore drivers need to rely on their ability to anticipate actions of other drivers. Individuals with AS/HFA often have difficulty anticipating actions of other drivers.
 - Individuals with AS/HFA have difficulty interpreting verbal and nonverbal information.
 - Individuals with AS/HFA tend to be extremely literal.

continued

To locate a driver rehabilitation specialist in your area contact:

ADED – The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists
 200 First Avenue NW, Suite 505 ■ Hickory, NC 28601
 (866) 672-9466 Toll Free in the US & Canada ■ E-mail: info@aded.net ■ Web: www.aded.net

A driver rehabilitation evaluation will examine these skills as they relate to driving. The goal is to be independent, safe drivers. Many of these challenges can be addressed through driver rehabilitation intervention if the individual has the skills necessary to begin learning to drive.

This assessment should include:

- A review of medical history and medication
- Functional ability
- Vision
- Perception
- Assessment of life skills
- Activities that assess visual and cognitive processing skills for driving
- Behind-the-wheel evaluation



If you or someone you know has Asperger's Syndrome or high functioning autism and is having difficulty driving or obtaining a driver's license, a driver evaluation may be indicated. A driver rehabilitation specialist can provide a comprehensive evaluation and create a customized training program to address issues with driving.

References:

National Autistic Society. (1999). High-functioning autism and Asperger's Syndrome: What's the difference? Retrieved December 16, 2008, from www.nas.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=1049&a=3337

Kowalski, T. (2007). Asperger's Syndrome: Assessment and intervention strategies from preschool to adulthood. Eau Claire, WI: Medical Educational Services.

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