



# HIDDEN TALENTS

## *The realities of parenting a child with Asperger's Syndrome*

當家中子女患有亞氏保加症時，  
父母們所要面對的現實情況

**We** all secretly hope that our child might display a special aptitude that could help them make their way in the world, or perhaps just provide us with boasting rights at the next school prize-giving. But some parents have to deal with unique abilities that come to their child via a rather distressing route. Asperger's is a syndrome that most people have heard of, but many don't understand.

Asperger's Syndrome is a Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) that is thought to be on the milder end of the autism spectrum. According to Virginia Wilson, Executive Director at The Child Development Centre at Matilda Hospital, Asperger's differs from other autism spectrum disorders in a number of ways. "Asperger's diagnostic criteria requires that there is no clinically significant delay in language, cognitive development or in the development of age appropriate self-help skills, adaptive behaviours (other than social interaction) and curiosity about the environment," she says.

### Guaranteed Genius?

"That doesn't sound so bad," you might be thinking. "And don't people with Asperger's have amazing talents in areas such as arithmetic, art and music?"

"Not so bad" is all relative, and when a parent discovers that their precious child has Asperger's it can feel very bad indeed. As for hidden talents, the 1988 movie *Rain Man* starring Dustin Hoffman as an autistic savant (the term given to those with autism who show extraordinary skills) gave many the impression that autism goes hand in hand with genius-like abilities such as memorising phone books, calculating prime numbers to infinity and playing a piano piece note-perfect after hearing it once on the radio. Such autistic individuals exist – a noteworthy example being world-renowned architectural artist Stephen Wiltshire (born 1974) who can draw a landscape after seeing it just once – but the estimated prevalence of savant abilities in autism, according to the Autism Research Institute, is just 10%.



## Day-to Day Life with Asperger's

How is Asperger's diagnosed and what is typical behaviour for a child with the syndrome? Diagnosis generally comes from recognising development problems with social interaction.

Asperger's is sometimes difficult to diagnose as different children present different difficulties at different developmental stages but there are some key warning signs to look out for. As Betty Luk, a clinical psychologist at Project Aspire explains, "In early childhood, although children with AS generally have normal speech and intellectual abilities, some subtle signs of difficulties can be noted, such as a lack of eye contact or non-verbal gestures (e.g. waving goodbye). They may not be able to join in other children's play and activities, and some may also have frequent temper tantrums since they have difficulty adapting to changes and expressing their emotions appropriately. As they enter primary school, their impairment in social and communicative domains may become more prominent and then be detected by parents and teachers. Often this is because their peers have already developed adequate social skills in reaching out to interact with their peers, while they are still struggling to understand social conventions in the playground or classroom."

## Cause and Cure

If certain symptoms can be outgrown, can Asperger's be cured? And how can it be avoided in the first place? Unfortunately, there is no cure for Asperger's, but according to Virginia, "Through educational and behavioural intervention it can be improved upon

in most cases. Multidisciplinary approaches include cognitive behavioural therapy, speech and language therapy, social skills groups and occupational therapy." When asked if a parent with an Asperger's child can hope to see their child lead a full life, supporting himself and enjoying social relationships, Virginia's answer is an emphatic, "Yes." Asperger's children can often attend normal schools and it is quite possible to encounter individuals with the syndrome and not know it.

There is also no answer as to what causes the syndrome. As Virginia explains, "Neurobiological studies indicate that in part, Asperger's is a genetic and hereditary disorder and it is possible that environmental factors may impact the brain development of 'at risk' children, however the exact etiology is currently unknown."

Considering that autism has spiked 1,500 per cent in the last 20 years, and in the US, 1 in every 110 children is considered to have an autistic syndrome disorder, it may seem like Asperger's is yet another thing on to the list of things to worry about in pregnancy and early childhood. However, there are precautions you can take and help is at hand. If you are worried about your child's social skills then talk to objective third parties who know your child and if concern is warranted, seek a professional assessment.

For those with non-Asperger's children, it is important to remember that parents dealing with Asperger's need understanding and inclusion. Asperger's is a fact of life, and like most facts, it can be dealt with best through positivity and acceptance.

For more information visit: [www.aspergersyndrome.org](http://www.aspergersyndrome.org) or [www.tonyattwood.com.au](http://www.tonyattwood.com.au)

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身為父母都會寄望自子女擁有一些特別的才能，讓他們可以在社會上闖出一片天，或者在學校的頒獎禮上獲得獎項，讓自己有一個吹噓的機會。不過，有些家長卻因為孩子擁有一些獨特的才能，相較之下而要走上一條令人沮喪的道路。相信很多人都有聽過亞氏保加這種綜合症，不過大部分人對這個病卻不是很了解。

亞氏保加症是一種廣泛性發育障礙症 (PDD)，屬於一種較輕度的自閉症。根據明德醫院兒童發展中心行政總監 Virginia Wilson 表示，亞氏保加症與其他自閉症的情況有點不同，她說，「亞氏保加症的診斷標準為在語言、認知發展或與年齡相稱的自我協助技能、適應性行為 (有關社會互動除外)、及兒童期對環境的好奇心等發展，在臨床上並無明顯遲緩。」

## 一定會是天才嗎？

您可能會覺得這聽起來好像沒有太差，並會想問「亞氏保加症患者不是在算術、美術和音樂等方面都會有驚人的才能嗎？」

「不是太差」這只是相對，當父母發現自己的孩子患上亞氏保加症時，相信會感到非常沮喪。有關亞氏保加症孩童的天賦才能，在1988年由德斯汀荷夫主演的電影《手足情未了》中便有所提及。電影中德斯汀荷夫飾演一名自閉症專家 (這個用語是指在某些方面具有過人之處的病患)，讓大眾以為許多自閉症兒童都擁有非一般的天賦才能，例如背誦電話簿、計算質數，或在收音機中聽過一次的樂曲便可以在一音不漏的彈出來。也許的確是有真實的個案存在，例如世界著名的建築藝術家 Stephen Wiltshire (生於1974年) 只須看過一次便可以憑記憶畫出整個城市的景觀。但根據自閉症研究院 (Autism Research Institute) 估計，擁有特殊才能的兒童僅佔所有病患的百分之10。

## 亞氏保加症的日常生活

如何確定是否患上亞氏保加症，以及患者通常會有什麼典型病徵？診斷亞氏保加症時一般會涉及認知發展及與社會互動的能力。

由於孩子於不同的成長階段或會有不同的表現和問題，要判斷他們是否患有亞氏保加症也相對比較困難。不過，若我們多加留意，或可在孩子的表現和發展中察覺到一些值得我們關注的地方。根據香港教育學院蕊展計劃的臨床心理學家陸婷芝小姐解釋，「雖然患有亞氏保加症的兒童在幼兒期間通常擁有正常的語言及智能發展，但我們亦可以發現一些細微的困難或行為特徵。例如，他們可能會有較弱的眼神接觸，或較少利用非語言方式表達自己 (如以揮手動作表示再見)。他們可能會無法融入小朋友之間的遊戲及活動，有些還會因為無法適應環境的改變，或未能適當地表達自己的情感而經常發脾氣。當這些孩子入讀小學時，他們在社交和溝通上所遇到的困難可能會更加明顯，繼而被老師或家長發現，這是因為其他同齡的小朋友在社交技巧上已經得到充足的發展，而他們卻仍努力地去理解操場或課室中的社交常規。」

## 病因及防治方法

如果某些症狀會隨著長大而消失，那亞氏保加症是否可以治癒？有什麼首要的預防方法？不幸的是，亞氏保加症並沒有任何根治的方法，不過根據 Virginia 所說，「通過教育和行為上的



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“Project Aspire offers a comprehensive model of care that focuses not only on the needs of children with Asperger Syndrome, but also that of the family and the school.”

「蕊展計劃不僅為患有亞氏保加症的兒童提供全面照顧，並會為有需要的家庭及學校提供支援。」

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協助，情況是可以得到改善的。醫生會運用各種不同的訓練方法，包括行為認知治療、說話和語言治療、團體社交技巧和職業技能治療，去作出適當的介入和協助。」當被問到患童的父母會有機會看到孩子可以充實地過生活、支持自己、擁有美滿的社交生活時，Virginia很堅決的回答：「有。」亞氏保加症兒童通常都可以入讀正常的學校，而且別人很有可能察覺不到他的症狀。

迄今仍未能確定這綜合症的成因。根據Virginia解釋，「神經生物學研究指出，遺傳是亞氏保加症的其中一種成因，環境因素並有可能會影響『處於高風險狀態』的兒童的大腦發展，但確實的病因目前還不清楚。」

在過去20年間，自閉症的患病個案已經大幅增加了百分之1,500。而在美國，每110名兒童中就有一名患童是被診斷患上自閉症，這樣聽起來，亞氏保加症有可能將會成為另一件讓父母在懷孕期間及早期童年發展時感到憂心的事。不過，這是可以採取預防措施及尋求協助的。如果您對孩子的社交技巧有所顧慮，可以找一位熟悉孩子的第三者，從客觀態度進行商討，如果情況是值得關注的話，可再尋求專業評估。

如果您的子女並沒有患上亞氏保加症，請記得當一些家長要面對患有亞氏保加症的子女時，是很需要別人的理解和包容的。面對亞氏保加症就如同其他的事情一樣，只要抱持樂觀的精神，以積極接受的態度去面對，是可以幫助病童克服這個病症所帶來的障礙的。

欲了解更多有關詳情，可瀏覽：[www.aspergersyndrome.org](http://www.aspergersyndrome.org) 及 [www.tonvattwood.com.au](http://www.tonvattwood.com.au)



## Here to Help 支援服務



Project Aspire of the Hong Kong Institute of Education offers a comprehensive model of care that focuses not only on the needs of the children with Asperger's Syndrome (AS), but also that of the family and the school. Through long-term group training, children with AS learn the skills that enable them to cope better with the social world, and integrate more fully in their school environment. The Project also provides professional support to parents and teachers, and promotes a public awareness of Aspergers' Syndrome in the community. With the Project's support, families and schools are helped to gain better understanding about these children's characteristics, and are more equipped to provide guidance and assistance when confronted with difficulties and challenges.

香港教育學院蕊展計劃不僅為患有亞氏保加症的兒童提供全面照顧，並會為有需要的家庭及學校提供支援。透過長期的小組訓練，亞氏保加症兒童可學習適應社會和融入學校生活的社交技巧。計劃亦為家長及教師提供專業的諮詢和支援，並致力提昇社會人士對亞氏保加症的認識和關懷。蕊展計劃幫助家長及教師了解此類兒童的特性，使他們更有效地面對教養和輔導方面的困難和挑戰。

**For more information visit 詳情可瀏覽**  
[www.ied.edu.hk/aspire](http://www.ied.edu.hk/aspire)