Approximately 1 in 100 children are diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Although some children ‘outgrow’ or advance beyond the ASD diagnosis, most do not. It is a chronic condition, although symptoms may improve over time. Perhaps the only guarantee that comes with children is that they will grow up to be adults. Given this, it is important to understand what ASD is like for affected adults and their families, how it affects long-term outcome, and what supports and services may be most beneficial. The field is a long way from answering all these questions fully, but researchers at VTAC and elsewhere are beginning to study ASD and associated concerns in older adolescents and adults. This issue of the newsletter highlights some recent research publications in this area. We also provide information about current studies being conducted at VTAC for adolescents and adults with ASD. Finally, we provide some local and national resources that you may find helpful, and some suggested

Looking Ahead and Looking Up: Adults on the Spectrum

Adult Support Group

This group is for adults of all ages on the high functioning end of the autism spectrum, including Asperger’s, who would like support for strengthening communication and relationship skills. Concurrent groups may organize by special interests for family members, parents, spouses, etc. Groups meet on the second Thursday of each month from 7-8:30 pm at the College Lutheran Church. Contact: Alan Beach, 540-387-3955/3977, email: aebeach2@yahoo.com.

Group for VT Students

Two VTAC staff members, Tyler Hassenfeldt and Brenna Maddox, are leading a weekly support group for Virginia Tech undergraduate students with ASD with the Services for Students with Disabilities Office. The name of the group, selected by the students, is G.A.M.E. (Group of Aspergians Making Experiences). The group meets at the Services for Students with Disabilities Office. Each week, the group members participate in discussion, play games, and eat snack together. Once a month, the G.A.M.E. members meet somewhere in the community, such as Ben and Jerry’s, Backstreets, or bowling. The main purpose of the group is to provide an opportunity for social interaction in a relaxed setting, while learning about appropriate social skills and helpful tips for college. If you or a VT student with ASD is interested in the group, please contact the Office for Services for Students with Disabilities at (540) 231-0858 or ssd@vt.edu.
Online Resources & Articles

Asd and Social Anxiety in College

Research in the field of autism is increasingly focusing on the needs of young adults in their late teens and early twenties. A 2011 study by Susan White (Co-Director of VTAC), Tom Ollendick (VT Child Study Center and Bethany Bray (VT Dept. of Psychology) looked at 667 undergraduate students with and without ASD. Between 0.7% and 1.9% of these students were found to meet criteria for High-Functioning Autism (HFA), depending on how strict the criteria was. Interestingly, the 5 students who met formal diagnostic criteria for HFA had not received a diagnosis in the past. The 13 students who met less stringent criteria were found, overall, to have more social anxiety than similar students in the study, who did not meet criteria for HFA. Symptoms of HFA were also found to be associated with depression and aggression. This study shows the importance of screening for ASD among undergraduate university students among undergraduate university students.

Social Anxiety & Autism Comorbidity

The White, Bray, and Ollendick article “Examining Shared and Unique Aspects of Social Anxiety Disorder and Autism Spectrum Disorder Using Factor Analysis (2011) looked at the common factors between ASDs and social anxiety disorder (SAD). Sampling college students using common questionnaires for these disorders they found that common answer patterns on questions relating to social anxiety, avoiding social situations, and preferring to be alone, suggesting that these two diagnoses have these symptoms in common. However, social anxiety and the social difficulties seen in ASD were found to be distinct from one another. ASD also has other characteristic symptoms, such as restricted interests, a preference for routines, and difficulties in taking the perspective of other people that are not seen in SAD.

One of the implications of this study is to add to the debate about the separateness of these diagnoses and the ability of these two diagnoses to co-occur. They suggest that co-occurring ASD and SAD is possible. Additionally, professionals may have to consider altering their typical treatments for individuals who have both ASD and SAD. This study also suggests that both ASD and SAD diagnoses should be considered when a person has social difficulties, and that future studies should look into co-occurring ASD and SAD.


VTAC Speaker Series

The VT Autism Clinic is launching a new speaker series as part of our Autism Study Group. The goal is to provide the students and community with information on current research in the field of autism. We have lined up a series of speakers to come share their findings and expertise. Save the dates for our series:

Oct 14, 2011
Nov 4, 2011
Dec 2, 2011
Feb 3, 2012
March 2, 2012
April 6, 2012

All talks will be from 1-2pm.

Our first speaker on Oct 14, 2011 will be Matt Lerner from the University of Virginia who will speak on “Mechanisms of Social Functioning and Intervention in Youth with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders”. Please RSVP by Oct 7, 2011 to Caitlin Conner at cconner4@vt.edu or 540-231-2053. Since the talk will be on campus, please let us know if you will need parking.

Peer Acceptance & Autism in College

A new concern in ASD research is that of high functioning young adults transitioning to college. Will they be accepted? Who will be their friends? Will others understand them? In their article, College Students’ Openness Toward Autism Spectrum Disorders: Improving Peer Acceptance (2011), Nevill and White found that students who had a first-degree relative with ASD were much more understanding and empathetic than those who did not have a relative. The researchers also found that students in engineering and certain sciences were less understanding overall. The researchers would like universities to make more of an effort to educate students about ASD.

This would make the transition for students with ASD easier.

The Virginia Tech Autism Clinic in the Psychology Department of Virginia Tech, opened in the Fall of 2005 to provide clinical services to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and their families in the surrounding New River Valley. Our vision for this facility began in the Fall of 2004, as the Virginia Tech Autism Research Group met to discuss the available services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in the New River Valley, a largely rural area. Through an extensive survey assessing existing services throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia, it was brought to the attention of the group that many parents were concerned about both the availability and quality of services they were receiving.

“Improving quality of life for people with Autism Spectrum Disorders through intervention, education, and research.”

**Book List**

**General**
- Aspies on Mental Health: Speaking for Ourselves (Adults Speak Out About Asperger Syndrome) by Luke Beardon & Dean Worton
- A Self-determined Future with Asperger Syndrome: Solution Focused Approaches by E. Veronica Bliss & Genevieve Edmonds
- The Asperger Personal Guide: Raising Self-Esteem and Making the Most of Yourself as a Adult with Asperger’s Syndrome by Genevieve Edmonds & Dean Worton
- Survival Strategies for People on the Autism Spectrum by Marc Fleisher
- Adults on the Autism Spectrum Leave the Nest: Achieving Supported Independence by Nancy Perry
- Solutions for Adults with Asperger’s Syndrome: Maximizing the Benefits, Minimizing the Drawbacks to Achieve Success by Juanita Lovett
- Asperger Syndrome An Owner’s Manual For Older Adolescents and Adults: What You, Your Parents and Friends, and Your Employer Need to Know by Ellen S. Heller Korin

**Social Skills**
- The Asperger Social Guide: How to Relate to Anyone in any Social Situation as an Adult with Asperger’s Syndrome by Genevieve Edmonds & Dean Worton
- Social Skills for Teenagers and Adults with Asperger Syndrome: A Practical Guide to Day-to-day Life by N. J. Patrick
- Social Skills Picture Book for High School and Beyond by Jed Baker

**Relationships, Dating, Sexuality**
- The Asperger Couple’s Workbook: Practical Advice and Activities for Couples and Counsellorsby Maxine Aston
- The Asperger Love Guide: A Practical Guide for Adults with Asperger’s Syndrome to Seeking, Establishing and Maintaining Successful Relationships by Genevieve Edmonds & Dean Worton
- Asperger’s Syndrome and Sexuality: From Adolescence Through Adulthood by Isabelle Henault
- Life and Love: Positive Strategies for Autistic Adults by Zosia Zaks
- Asperger Syndrome and Long-Term Relationships by Ashley Stanford
- Aspergers in Love: Couple Relationships and Family Affairs by Maxine C. Aston

**Employment**
- Business for Aspies: 42 Best Practices for Using Asperger Syndrome Traits at Work Successfully by Ashley Stanford
- Asperger Syndrome and Employment: Adults Speak Out About Asperger Syndrome (Adults Speak Out About Asperger Syndrome) by Genevieve Edmonds
- Asperger Syndrome Employment Workbook: An Employment Work book for Adults with Asperger Syndrome by Roger N. Meyer
- Developing Talents: Careers for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism by Temple Grandin
- Asperger’s on the Job by Rudy Simone and Temple Grandin

**Women with ASD**
- Safety Skills for Asperger Women by Liane Holliday Willey
- Aspergirls by Rudy Simone

**College Success**
- Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome: A Student Guide by John Harpur, Maria Lawlor, & Michael Fitzgerald