

Disability Awareness: Asperger's Syndrome

Asperger's Secret To Pro Surfer's Success

By Shaun Heasley, Disability Scoop

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Clay Marzo is one of America's best surfers and Asperger's syndrome may be the reason why.

Marzo, 20, began surfing as a child and by age 14 won the sport's top amateur title. But everyone always knew there was something a little different about him. As a boy he struggled in school and in interacting with others and always felt most comfortable in the water.

Many people found him rude, stuck up, lazy, dumb or shy, his mom says, simply because they didn't understand him.

A diagnosis proved elusive, however, until 2007 when doctors confirmed that Marzo has Asperger's syndrome. The diagnosis brought relief and also helped explain why Marzo is so talented at surfing, but struggles with simple things like shaking hands.

"All I can do is surf and say hello and good-bye," Marzo tells ESPN. "I don't really talk. I don't have much to say."

<http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2009/08/07/surfer/4506/>

Asperger's Syndrome: Definition & Symptoms

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Asperger's syndrome is a developmental disorder that affects a child's ability to socialize and communicate effectively with others.

Children with Asperger's syndrome typically exhibit social awkwardness and an all-absorbing interest in specific topics.

Doctors group Asperger's syndrome with other conditions that are called autistic spectrum disorders or pervasive developmental disorders. These disorders all involve problems with social skills and communication. Asperger's syndrome is generally thought to be at the milder end of this spectrum.

While there's no cure for Asperger's syndrome, if your child has the condition treatment can help him or her learn how to interact more successfully in social situations.

Signs and symptoms of Asperger's syndrome include:

- Engaging in one-sided, long-winded conversations, without noticing if the listener is listening or trying to change the subject;
- Displaying unusual nonverbal communication, such as lack of eye contact, few facial expressions, or awkward body postures and gestures;
- Showing an intense obsession with one or two specific, narrow subjects, such as baseball statistics, train schedules, weather or snakes;
- Appearing not to understand, empathize with or be sensitive to others' feelings;
- Having a hard time "reading" other people or understanding humor;
- Speaking in a voice that is monotonous, rigid or unusually fast;
- Moving clumsily, with poor coordination;
- Having an odd posture or a rigid gait.

When to see a doctor:

All kids have their quirks, and many toddlers show a sign or symptom of Asperger's syndrome at some point.

It's natural for small children to be egocentric, and many little ones show a strong interest in a particular topic, such as dinosaurs or a favorite fictional character. These aren't reasons to be alarmed.

However, if your elementary school child has frequent problems in school or seems unable to make friends, it's time to consult your pediatrician.

These difficulties have many possible causes, but developmental disorders such as Asperger's syndrome need to be considered. Children whose eccentricities interfere with learning and social development should have a comprehensive evaluation.

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/aspergers-syndrome/DS00551>