

Autism Vision

Creating Classroom Connections for
Adolescents With High-Functioning Autism
and Asperger Syndrome

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Introduction

AutismVision: Creating Classroom Connections for Adolescents With High-Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome is a comprehensive resource for teachers, parents, counselors, and other concerned individuals who want to educate typically developing adolescents

A “socially inclusive” classroom fosters healthy interactions between teens with disabilities and those without disabilities. By educating teens about high-functioning autism and Asperger syndrome, you will not only increase student understanding of disabilities, but also create a positive, comfortable environment for students with these disorders.

about high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome. This guide and its accompanying videotape/DVD are designed with you in mind. This AutismVision program will provide ways for you to educate teens about HFA and Asperger syndrome and increase social acceptance and understanding of adolescents with these disorders. By using these resources, you will help create a more accepting classroom environment for teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome.

With the increase in the number of children being diagnosed with HFA and Asperger syndrome in recent years, more of these students are being incorporated into general education classrooms. Based on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2006), an education act to provide Federal funding to State and local school systems to provide special education services to eligible students with disabilities, teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome should be included in general education classrooms as much as possible and should receive the same benefits and services as their classmates. However, adolescents with HFA and Asperger syndrome have special needs, and this can create special challenges in the classroom. Many struggle to fit in and need understanding and help from their classmates. Research has found that educating students about differences—in this case, HFA and

Asperger syndrome—can impact their attitudes toward and understanding of people affected by these disorders. This AutismVision program provides a structured intervention that can help typical peers learn about autism spectrum disorders and also how to be good friends and classmates to people who have these disorders.

This *AutismVision* program is designed for use in classrooms that include teens on the autism spectrum who are high functioning. This includes those who display symptoms and behaviors that are typical for teens with diagnoses of high-functioning autism or Asperger syndrome. The information in this guide and the related videotape/DVD may not be appropriate if the teen in your classroom has moderate to severe autism. AutismVision consists of a series of four videos and facilitator's guides for different age groups and ability levels across the autism spectrum. Please see www.danya.com/autismvision.asp for information on other classroom resources.

This *AutismVision* program was developed to foster the social inclusion of adolescents with HFA and Asperger syndrome in general education classrooms. The program consists of a multimedia package designed to reach adolescents ages 12 to 15 in classrooms that include a teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome.

The goals of this *AutismVision* program are to:

- Increase typical peers' understanding of HFA and Asperger syndrome
- Foster empathy and positive attitudes toward adolescents with HFA and Asperger syndrome
- Promote positive social interactions between adolescents with HFA and Asperger syndrome and their typical peers

Program Elements

This *AutismVision* program consists of a videotape/DVD and this facilitator's guide.

The 13-minute videotape/DVD provides classmates with information about HFA and Asperger syndrome that is developmentally appropriate for adolescents ages 12 to 15. The videotape/DVD is designed to educate and promote empathy in classmates of teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome. It strives to build a stronger classroom community where students understand their similarities and differences. Specifically, the videotape/DVD features personal interviews with teens who have HFA or Asperger syndrome, along with insights from family and friends. The videotape/DVD gives a real-life look at what it is like to have HFA or Asperger syndrome. It creates a solid foundation for understanding and interacting with teens with these disorders.

This facilitator's guide is designed to support the efforts of teachers, parents, and other advocates as they conduct the videotape/DVD presentation. Step-by-step information is provided and includes:

- Suggestions for conducting the video presentation
- Pre- and postviewing activities
- Additional exercises and ideas for discussion
- Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about HFA and Asperger syndrome
- Tips for creating a supportive classroom environment
- Specific information on teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome

Additional resources on HFA and Asperger syndrome are included on page 44 for your reference and information.

Guidelines for Program Facilitators

Who can facilitate the program? While teachers may be the most likely users of the program, any supportive or concerned adult can implement it. An informed parent, school counselor, or another advocate can conduct the presentation without receiving specialized education or training. All of the necessary information and procedures are explained and highlighted in this guide. It is designed to be easy to use!

The following are general guidelines for conducting an effective classroom presentation with this *AutismVision* program.

Be prepared and know the information. Before conducting the *AutismVision* program, it is important that you have a good knowledge base on the topic of HFA and Asperger syndrome. This guide provides you with answers to Frequently Asked Questions (page 34), as well as Additional Resources (page 44) for further reading.

To prepare to facilitate this *AutismVision* program, you should

1. Skim through this guide to get an overall impression of the program and presentation components
2. Watch the *AutismVision* videotape/DVD
3. Read this guide thoroughly
4. Decide which pre- and postviewing activities you will use
5. Gather all materials needed to conduct the presentation and activities
6. Review additional resources from the list in the back of this guide

If you are not the classroom teacher, you will need to coordinate with the school administration and/or teacher in order to schedule a time to conduct the presentation in the classroom.

Promote a positive classroom environment. When conducting this presentation, it is important to promote an atmosphere of compassion, understanding, and mutual respect. Emphasize that everyone is different in some way and that we all must adjust to and respect differences. By explaining that teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome may have unique or different ways of doing things, you can also emphasize that everyone has his or her own way of relating to the world. Stress that it is important not to laugh at or make fun of teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome or any other condition and impress upon the class the importance of accepting all people—with or without HFA or Asperger syndrome.

Encourage creative thought and discussion. In order to facilitate a program that engages teens while emphasizing key learning points, ask open-ended questions that allow classmates to think about the question and answer in their own way. Simply asking “yes or no” questions will not generate lengthy discussion or give teens time to think about the issues at hand. For example, rather than ask: “Does anyone know what HFA or Asperger Syndrome is?” you might ask: “What do you already know about HFA and Asperger syndrome?” More tips for engaging teens in a classroom presentation are offered on page 31.

Advocate for an accurate description of the disorders. Some students may have inaccurate or erroneous beliefs about HFA or Asperger syndrome. Help them correct such misconceptions by pointing out where they are mistaken. Reinforce important points and information about HFA and Asperger syndrome, making sure they understand how HFA and Asperger syndrome truly impact their classmate.

Be prepared to address common erroneous beliefs such as:

- Teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome act weird.
- Everyone with HFA or Asperger syndrome acts the same.
- Teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome are dangerous.

AutismVision

- Teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome do not want any friends.
- Teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome did something to cause their disorder.

Other common myths or concerns about HFA and Asperger syndrome are addressed in the “Truth About HFA and Asperger Syndrome” section of this guide (page 41).

Throughout the presentation—and especially at the end—be sure to restate and emphasize the following take-home messages of this *AutismVision* program to the class:

- Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome are first and foremost teens; they are like other teens in many ways.
- Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome experience the world differently.
- Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome need and want friends.
- Understanding HFA and Asperger syndrome is the key to creating connections.
- HFA and Asperger syndrome are not contagious.
- No one should ever tease or make fun of someone with HFA or Asperger syndrome.
- We all benefit from having different kinds of friends; teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome can be great friends and enrich your life.

Should the Teen With HFA or Asperger Syndrome Be in the Classroom During the Presentation?

The primary goal of this *AutismVision* program is to educate typically developing peers about HFA and Asperger syndrome. Whether the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome should be present in the classroom during the presentation should be carefully considered. Given that every teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome is unique and has different strengths and weaknesses, each case needs to be considered individually. Some teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome may benefit from being in the classroom and hearing the presentation and student questions. If they have disclosed their disorder to classmates, these teens may even choose to answer student questions and contribute to the conversation; this process can be very empowering for them. However, being present during the presentation may cause other teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome undue stress or anxiety. For this reason, it is recommended that the determination of whether to include the teen during the presentation be made collaboratively by the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome, his or her parents, the facilitator, and relevant school personnel. Permission to disclose an individual's disability should be received from the student and the student's parents or guardians.

Conducting the Presentation

This *AutismVision* program can be used in any general education classroom that includes a student with HFA or Asperger syndrome. A typical presentation will consist of a brief introduction to the program, pre-viewing activities, viewing of the AutismVision videotape/DVD, postviewing activities, and a conclusion. Use the following information to help you structure and prepare for the classroom presentation.

Introduction. At the start of the presentation, introduce yourself and briefly describe why you are in class. Highlight the agenda for the presentation. Suggested wording could include:

“Hello! My name is _____, and I’m here today to talk to you about high-functioning autism and Asperger syndrome. We are going to talk about what high-functioning autism and Asperger syndrome are, what it’s like for teens who have these disabilities, and how to be a friend to someone who has high-functioning autism or Asperger syndrome. We’ll also do some activities together and watch a short video called ‘AutismVision.’ Then, I’m going to ask you some questions, and when I’m finished, you can ask me any questions you would like.”

Pre-Viewing Activities. Next, you will want to conduct one or more pre-viewing activities with the class. These activities are designed to get students thinking before watching the videotape/DVD. Decide in advance of the presentation which activities you would like to complete and be sure to bring any necessary materials. These activities can be found on pages 12-19.

Viewing the AutismVision Videotape/DVD. The next step is to present the AutismVision videotape/DVD to the class. You may want to introduce it by saying:

“Now we’re going to watch a video called ‘AutismVision.’ This video will show you what it’s like to have high-functioning autism or Asperger syndrome. After you watch it, we’ll talk about what you saw and do some

more activities that will help you better understand high-functioning autism and Asperger syndrome."

Postviewing Activities. Following the presentation of the videotape/DVD, you should conduct one or more postviewing activities with the class. Postviewing activities are designed to help students process information in the videotape/DVD and build on skills acquired through the pre-viewing activities. These activities are located on pages 22-28.

Wrap-Up. Conclude your presentation by allowing students the opportunity to ask questions. At this time, be sure to reemphasize the key points of the videotape/DVD; these key points can be found on page 29. Then, thank the teens for their participation and remind them to always treat a classmate with HFA or Asperger syndrome with respect and kindness.

Customizing the Presentation to Your Specific Needs

This *AutismVision* program is designed to be flexible. You can choose and tailor the pre-viewing and postviewing activities to suit your own instructional style as well as the needs of the classroom. The table on the next page provides an overview of all the activities described in this guide, organized by name, with a brief description, amount of time needed to complete, and materials needed. Use the table to help you decide how to organize your presentation. A typical presentation—including conducting activities and viewing the videotape/DVD—should take approximately 45 minutes.

Detailed Pre-Viewing and Postviewing Activities

The table below provides an overview of all the activities described in this guide, organized by name, description, amount of time they will take to complete, and materials needed. This table can help you decide how to organize your presentation and what activities will be useful during the presentation.

Overview of Pre-Viewing and Postviewing Activities

Activity Number	Activity Name	Description	Time to Complete	Necessary Materials
Pre-Viewing Activity 1	Differences Among People	Helps students think about how individuals differ from one another	10-15 minutes	Paper, pencils, markers, flipchart
Pre-Viewing Activity 2	What Would You Like to Know About High-Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome?	Students share what they know about HFA and Asperger syndrome and discuss what they would like to learn	10-15 minutes	Paper, pencils, markers, flipchart
Pre-Viewing Activity 3	Being an Advocate	Students discuss what it means to be a good advocate and how to become one	10-15 minutes	Paper, pencils, markers, flipchart
Pre-Viewing Activity 4	Slang	An interactive activity for students to understand what it is like to not understand abstract words and phrases	10-15 minutes	Flipchart, chalkboard, markers, paper, pencils
Postviewing Activity 1	Differences Among People	Students compare postviewing ideas about differences among people with their pre-viewing responses (<i>Corresponds with Pre-Viewing Activity 1</i>)	10-15 minutes	Responses from Pre-Viewing Activity 1 Pencils, pens, flipchart
Postviewing Activity 2	What Did You Learn About HFA and Asperger Syndrome?	Students discuss what they now know about HFA and Asperger syndrome (<i>Corresponds with Pre-Viewing Activity 2</i>)	10-15 minutes	Responses from Pre-Viewing Activity 2 Pencils, pens, flipchart
Postviewing Activity 3	Being an Advocate	After viewing the videotape/DVD, students discuss how to be a good advocate for someone with HFA and Asperger syndrome (<i>Corresponds to Pre-Viewing Activity 3</i>)	10-15 minutes	Responses from Pre-Viewing Activity 3 Paper and pencils
Postviewing Activity 4	Strengths, Challenges, Likes, Dislikes	Students compare their strengths and challenges and likes and dislikes with those of someone with HFA or Asperger syndrome	10-15 minutes	Paper and pencils

Tips for Engaging Adolescents

The following pages provide detailed instructions on conducting pre-viewing activities, presenting the videotape/DVD, and conducting postviewing activities. In addition, you may want to keep the following tips in mind for creating an engaging presentation for students ages 12 to 15.

- Create a relaxed, yet professional environment. Make your presentation conversational, direct, and positive.
- Be open and honest. Personal experience and insights make the presentation more interesting and help engage teens.
- Involve the students as much as possible. Ask questions and get everyone to participate and think about the topic.
- Include students in the presentation. Get volunteers to write responses on the board and divide the class into groups to conduct the activities.
- Use handouts and other visual material to aid in your presentation. The “Frequently Asked Questions” section on page 34 could be copied on colored paper, or you may want to put together a short PowerPoint presentation with important presentation points.
- Maintain your enthusiasm and energy throughout the presentation. Keep the presentation positive, yet informative.
- Encourage small-group work when doing the activities. Be sure students stay on task and understand important points from the presentation.
- Positively reinforce participation and discussion. Get students involved right at the beginning.

Pre-Viewing Activity 1: Differences Among People

Materials Needed

-  Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk
-  Paper and pencils

Preparation

Write each of the following questions on a sheet of the flipchart or on the chalkboard:

- What are some differences between you and others?
- How does being different make **YOU** feel?
- How can having friends who are different from you be a good thing?

Before asking participants to answer these questions, take a few moments to answer them for yourself. Think about your answers and the feelings they evoke. Cite an example. This will help you empathize with the student participants' feelings.

Procedure

1. Instruct students to write down their answers to the questions, individually or in small groups. Encourage them not to “think too much” about their responses; instead, they should write ideas freely as they come up. For students who have difficulty beginning this activity, you can offer the following sentence starters:

- “I am _____ , but others are _____ ”
- “Being different makes me feel _____ ”
- “Having a friend who is different has helped me to _____ ”

2. Allow students 5 minutes to respond to the questions. Then, facilitate a brief discussion on their answers. Write their responses on the flipchart/chalkboard.
3. Tell students to put their responses away in a safe place. Explain that they will need them for further discussion after they watch the videotape/DVD. Be sure to save the flipchart on which you wrote their answers to use for the postviewing activity.

Pre-Viewing Activity 2: What Would You Like to Know About HFA and Asperger Syndrome?

Materials Needed

-  Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk
-  Paper and pencils
-  Strips of paper

Preparation

To help spur conversation, prepare a list of questions about autism in advance of the presentation. Sample questions include:

- Can people with HFA or Asperger syndrome have friends?
- Will people with HFA or Asperger syndrome get better?
- Do all people with HFA or Asperger syndrome have specific interests?
- Do all people with HFA or Asperger syndrome like to be by themselves?
- Can we do anything to help [*insert name of child with HFA or Asperger syndrome in your class*] feel better?

Questions could be written on strips of paper and placed in a bag or box for students to draw from during the activity. You might want to use the questions in the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of this guide to start the activity.

Procedure

1. Begin the lesson by asking students what they already know about HFA and Asperger syndrome. Write down their ideas on the flipchart/chalkboard. Depending on the experience level of your group, you may not get a lot of information at this point. If no one offers anything, try providing this definition of HFA and Asperger syndrome: *High-functioning autism and Asperger syndrome are disorders that some people are born with and that change*

the way they experience the world. People who have high-functioning autism or Asperger syndrome may communicate differently; may have restricted, intense interest in a topic or activity; and may have challenges in the classroom.

Make sure you write down students' questions. You will need them for other activities.

2. Now ask students what they would like to learn about HFA and Asperger syndrome. If they are having trouble thinking of questions, they can draw from the box that holds the questions you prepared in advance. Alternatively, you could have your students write down their questions and put them in a box that you can draw from.
3. Conclude the activity by asking students whether they have any final thoughts about HFA and Asperger syndrome before they see the videotape/DVD. Tell students they will revisit these questions after they watch the videotape/DVD

Pre-Viewing Activity 3: Being an Advocate

-  Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk
-  Paper and pencils

Preparation

The goal of this activity is for students to learn the qualities of an advocate and how to become a good advocate for students with differences.

Before conducting the activity, brainstorm a list of traits you have that make you a good advocate. Characteristics may include:

- Knowledge about a particular disorder or issue
- Caring about people
- Ability to talk to others about a disorder or difference and correct others' misconceptions

Procedure

1. Divide students into small groups. Ask each group to answer the following questions. (You may want to write the questions on the board or flipchart.):
 - What is an advocate?
 - What makes someone a good advocate?

Give the groups 5 minutes to answer the questions.

2. Bring the class back together and lead a group discussion based on the questions. Be sure to highlight the following:

An advocate is someone who is:

- **Familiar with the topic.** It is important to understand the basic information about a topic or issue in order to explain it to others.
- **Able to communicate clearly.** An advocate can explain information in easy-to-understand

language. He or she also presents the information in a supportive, positive way that explains it without insulting the receiver. Advocates merely want to inform others and understand any lack of knowledge they may have about an issue.

- **Supportive of people.** A good advocate lends encouragement and assistance to those with differences.
 - **Able to educate others.** By having knowledge about an issue or difference and sharing it with others, an advocate increases awareness of the topic while promoting knowledge and acceptance.
3. Tell students that they are now going to watch a videotape/DVD about teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome. Although these teens are just like them in many ways, they have some differences, and teens like these need good advocates at school and other places. Ask the students to think about being good advocates for teens with these disorders as they view the videotape/DVD, paying attention to the main messages and descriptions the video provides.

Pre-Viewing Activity 4: Slang

Materials Needed

-  Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk
-  Paper and pencils

Preparation

The purpose of this activity is to show students what it would be like to not understand slang phrases or figures of speech. Many people with HFA and Asperger syndrome do not understand slang because they interpret it literally. Prepare for this activity by either writing slang terms on the board or flipchart or creating a one-page handout for students. (See several examples below that you can use.)

Procedure

1. Begin the activity by explaining to the students that many students with HFA and Asperger syndrome have a difficult time understanding common slang words and phrases. Because they interpret the meanings literally, they do not understand the ultimate meaning of these terms. For example, it is common when wishing someone good luck on a performance or some kind of activity to say, “Break a leg.” Some people with HFA and Asperger syndrome may think you are telling them to actually break their leg.
2. Explain that the purpose of this activity is to allow students to begin to understand what it might be like to not understand the meaning of many such forms of speech.
3. After writing the slang terms on the board or distributing a handout, ask each student to spend about 10 minutes trying to define the word or phrase and then using it in a sentence.

Here are some slang terms/phrases from the 1950s and 1960s that you can use. Although the definitions are included below, don't let the students know them yet!

- *Cat*: A guy
- *Decked out*: All dressed up
- *Dig?*: Do you understand?
- *Don't flip your wig*: Don't make a big deal out of it.
- *Fink*: Tattletale
- *Flake off*: Get out of here.
- *Gimme some skin*: Shake hands.
- *Put the kibosh on*: To stop something
- *Square*: Not cool
- *Scarf*: To eat really fast
- *Agitate the gravel*: To leave
- *Cast an eyeball on*: To look at something
- *Get dibs on*: To put a claim on
- *Kick*: Something that's fun
- *Made in the shade*: Easy, guaranteed success
- *Rattle your cage*: Upset

4. After all the students have had the opportunity to define and use the terms on their own, bring the class back together and go through the list. Ask for volunteers to give definitions and use the words in a sentence.
5. Next, give the real definitions of the phrases. Did any of the students get them right? It is more than likely they did not.
6. Ask the students to provide some slang terms or phrases they currently use that might be difficult for someone with HFA and Asperger syndrome to understand. Examples may include: *piece of cake*, *go with the flow*, *you're pulling my leg*, and *under the weather*.
7. End the activity with a brief discussion about what it is like to not understand peers in a conversation. How would it feel to not understand jokes or what others were saying? Would it make it difficult to interact with classmates? How can students make it easier for people with HFA and Asperger syndrome to communicate?

Viewing the *AutismVision* Videotape/DVD

After conducting the pre-viewing activities, show the *AutismVision* videotape/DVD to the class. As an introduction to the videotape/DVD, you might say:

“Now we’re going to watch a video called ‘AutismVision.’ This video will demonstrate what it’s like to have high-functioning autism or Asperger Syndrome. After you watch it, we’ll have a discussion and complete some more activities that will help us better understand these disorders.”

This *AutismVision* program videotape/DVD runs for 13 minutes and contains the following elements:

- Interviews with teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome
- Interviews with family and friends of teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome
- Real-life situations and examples highlighting the strengths of and challenges faced by teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome

Encourage your students to write down questions or comments that come to mind as they view the video.

We recommend that you reinforce learning immediately after the videotape/DVD by emphasizing its key points:

- Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome are first and foremost teens; they are like other teens in many ways.
- Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome experience the world differently.
- Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome need and want friends.
- Understanding HFA and Asperger syndrome is the key to creating connections.
- HFA and Asperger syndrome are not contagious.
- No one should ever bully, tease, or make fun of someone with HFA or Asperger syndrome.

- We all benefit from having different kinds of friends. Teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome can be great friends and enrich your life.

Then ask whether the students have any specific questions about the videotape/DVD and begin the postviewing activities.

Postviewing Activity 1: Differences Among People

Materials Needed

-  Responses from Pre-Viewing Activity 1
-  Paper and pencils
-  Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk

Procedure

1. Ask students to take out their responses from the “Differences Among People” Pre-Viewing Activity. Also, post the flipchart with the answers you wrote on the board.
2. Tell students something like the following: *“As you saw in the video, teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome do some things differently than you or I do. However, HFA or Asperger syndrome is just one way one person might be different from another. There are many differences among people. Can you give some examples of how people are different? (If necessary, give examples of differences, such as skin or eye color, athleticism, math abilities, etc.)”*
3. Break the class into smaller groups for the next discussion. Ask each group to think of at least three ways people can be different. Give the groups 5 to 10 minutes to complete their lists. They can use their ideas from the Pre-Viewing Activity. Suggest that they also discuss the following questions:
 - Have you ever felt different from others?
 - How did being different make you feel?
4. Bring the entire class back together. Ask the groups to share the results of their small-group discussions. On a page of the flipchart or on the chalkboard, list all the responses. Ask the students whether this activity helped them feel more empathy toward people with HFA and Asperger syndrome.

- 5.** Conclude the activity by making a group list of recommendations on how to treat a classmate with HFA or Asperger syndrome. Suggestions might include:
- Treat the student with HFA or Asperger syndrome the same way you treat everyone else.
 - Don't exclude the classmate with HFA or Asperger syndrome from any school activities.
 - Be polite and respectful. Don't tease or make fun of the student with HFA or Asperger syndrome.

Postviewing Activity 2: What Did You Learn About HFA and Asperger Syndrome?

Materials Needed

- ✔ Student questions from Pre-Viewing Activity 2
- ✔ Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk
- ✔ Paper and pencils

Procedure

1. After showing the *AutismVision* videotape/DVD, ask students what they learned from it. Their ideas may include:
 - People with HFA and Asperger syndrome experience the world differently from most other people.
 - Each person with HFA and Asperger syndrome is unique. Although they share certain characteristics, people with HFA and Asperger syndrome can be very different from each other.
 - People with HFA and Asperger syndrome have difficulty communicating or understanding how to act in certain circumstances.
 - People with HFA and Asperger syndrome like routines and do not like things to change from one day to the next.
2. Ask students if they still have questions about HFA and Asperger syndrome and list them.
3. Answer students' questions if you can, and allow other students an opportunity to answer them. This guide's "Frequently Asked Questions" and "Additional Resources" sections may be helpful to you. If you do not know the answer to a question, it is all right to tell the students that you will have to look up the answer and get back to them.

Postviewing Activity 3: Advocacy

Materials Needed

-  Responses to Pre-Viewing Activity 3
-  Paper and pencils

Procedure

1. Refer students back to their answers to Pre-Viewing Activity 3. After viewing the videotape/DVD, how can they be good advocates for someone with HFA or Asperger syndrome?
2. Ask students to spend 5 minutes writing down ideas for how they can be good advocates for someone with HFA or Asperger syndrome.
3. Lead a group discussion based on students' answers. Generate a list of important advocacy qualities students can practice; write it on the board. This list may include:
 - Tell others about HFA and Asperger syndrome.
 - Explain the different characteristics of someone with HFA and Asperger syndrome.
 - Be a buddy to someone with HFA or Asperger syndrome. Sit with him or her at lunch or do something together after school.
 - Help a classmate who has HFA or Asperger syndrome. If he or she appears confused in class, ask whether he or she needs help.
 - If others tease a classmate with HFA or Asperger syndrome, let them know that it's not okay. Stick up for your classmate with HFA or Asperger syndrome.
4. Conclude the activity by asking students what else they need in order to become better advocates or friends. For example, they may need more detailed information. Provide ideas for where to go to find more information on HFA and Asperger syndrome, such as those listed in

the “Additional Resources” section of this guide. You or the teacher may also want to give a small assignment to the class to learn more about HFA and Asperger syndrome

Postviewing Activity 4: Strengths and Challenges, Likes and Dislikes

Materials Needed

-  Paper and pencils
-  Answers to questions from the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome

Preparation

Prior to conducting this activity, it would be helpful to have the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome (or his or her parents) complete the activity questions so that, after the students have completed the first part of this activity, their responses can be compared with those of the student with HFA or Asperger syndrome. The goal of this activity is to show classmates that everyone has strengths and challenges, and anyone may need help and support along the way, including the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome.

This activity should be used only in classrooms in which the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome has disclosed the disorder to the class. Before conducting this activity, please consult with the teen's parents.

Procedure

1. Put the following questions on the board or distribute copies to students. Give the students 5 to 10 minutes to answer on a piece of paper.
 - What subject in school do you like best (or do best in)?
 - What is your favorite activity or hobby?
 - What is your favorite food?
 - What accomplishment are you the most proud of?
 - What things (at school, home) are difficult for you?
 - What would you like to do when you are an adult?

2. After the class has completed the questions, go through each and ask them to state their answers. As you go through each question, tell them the answers the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome gave.
3. After you have reviewed all the questions and answers, ask the following questions:
 - Were any of your answers similar to those given by _____ (name of the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome)?
 - If yes, what can you learn from this fact?
 - If no, would you expect to have everything in common with any classmate?
 - How can you use these strengths, challenges, likes, and dislikes to get to know _____ (name of classmate with HFA or Asperger syndrome) better?
4. Conclude this activity by emphasizing that all students have strengths and challenges; everyone has something he or she is good at and something that is more difficult. Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome are the same way. Everyone needs support and encouragement along the way.

Wrap-Up

After you have completed the postviewing activities with the class, conclude your presentation by summarizing the main points of the presentation and videotape/DVD. These include:

- Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome are first and foremost teens; they are like other teens in many ways.
- Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome experience the world differently.
- Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome need and want friends.
- Understanding HFA and Asperger syndrome is the key to creating connections.
- HFA and Asperger syndrome are not contagious.
- No one should ever tease or make fun of someone with HFA or Asperger syndrome.
- We all benefit from having different kinds of friends; teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome can be great friends and enrich your life.

Also, you may want to conclude the presentation by asking students to generate a list of recommendations on how to treat a classmate with HFA or Asperger syndrome. Write responses on the board or flipchart. Suggestions may include:

- Treat the student with HFA or Asperger syndrome the same way you treat everyone else.
- Include the student with HFA or Asperger syndrome in all school activities.
- Be polite and respectful. Never bully, tease, or make fun of anyone, especially a student with HFA or Asperger syndrome.

End your presentation by asking students whether they have any final questions about HFA and Asperger syndrome or what it is like for teens with these disorders. Then, thank the students for their participation in the group discussions.

Finally, remind students that while teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome may at times act differently, they are students—just like them in many ways!

If you are the parent of the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome in this classroom, you may choose to lead a short discussion specifically about your teen. Determine in advance what information you will be sharing about your child, and focus on information that will promote social acceptance of your teen by his or her peers. Such topics may include:

- The teen's interests and hobbies
- His or her personal strengths
- His or her favorite foods or clothes
- How to be a good friend to the teen
- What bothers the teen or what he or she does when upset or annoyed

You and your child may wish to create a small poster or visual display with pictures of your child's interests, strengths, etc.

Extensions for Creating Socially Inclusive Classrooms

These extensions are designed to build on lessons learned during this *AutismVision* program presentation. While they are not specifically connected to the videotape/DVD, they will help students apply the main points and lessons from the video in classroom or schoolwide activities. These extensions are not a requirement of the AutismVision program but are meant simply to supplement it. They can be completed as a follow-up to the presentation or as an additional activity. Some teachers may decide to use these activities as class assignments or opportunities for students to earn extra credit.

Extension 1: Conduct an Awareness Campaign

Building on what students have learned about HFA and Asperger syndrome during the presentation, ask them to create a schoolwide awareness campaign about the disorders. (They may be interested in creating an awareness campaign about autism spectrum disorders in general; this is acceptable.) The purpose of an awareness campaign is to educate others about particular disorders—in this case, HFA and Asperger syndrome—and increase understanding and acceptance of people with those disorders.

Ask students to create a campaign that will educate their peers about the nature of HFA and Asperger syndrome and teach them how they can be good friends to peers with those disorders. The campaign may include posters, flyers, speakers, or special presentations. A week, such as Disability Awareness Week, or a specific day could be designated to focus on the campaign, and at the end, students could organize a concluding period where a speaker is brought in to talk more about the disorders. The ultimate goal of the campaign is to increase others' awareness of HFA and Asperger syndrome in school.

Extension 2: Be a Buddy

A buddy system can give typically developing teens the opportunity to get to know classmates with HFA and Asperger syndrome, as well as allow the teen with the disorder the chance to make a new friend and get support in the classroom. This could be a schoolwide or an individual classroom activity. Be sure to discuss this activity with the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome (and his or her parents) before implementing it.

After matching a typically developing teen with a teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome, ask each of them to do one activity together each week for 4 weeks. Each teen will get to choose two activities. At the end of the month, meet with each teen individually to see what he or she learned from the experience. The goal of the exercise is for teens to get to know their classmate with HFA or Asperger syndrome, as well as to discover that while everyone may have different interests, they can all get along.

Extension 3: Educate Others

As a way for students to learn more about HFA and Asperger syndrome, as well as to educate others, give students an assignment to write a magazine article about HFA and Asperger syndrome. Ask them to include specific information in the article, such as what the disorders are, how they are diagnosed, how they affect a person with HFA or Asperger syndrome in the classroom, and how others can treat people with HFA and Asperger syndrome. To keep the assignment fun, add a creative component, such as requiring that they interview someone with HFA or Asperger syndrome and/or include photographs or drawings.

This could be presented as a writing competition with prizes awarded for the best articles. You may also want to copy the winning articles and distribute them to other classes in order to educate others about the disorders. Finally, the school newspaper could be asked to print the best article.

Extension 4: Get Involved

This extension could be part of a community service project. Ask students to research different autism organizations in the community. For example, the nationally run Autism Society of America has many local chapters in all 50 States, but many States also have local agencies that provide direct services to those with autism spectrum disorders.

As part of this extension activity, ask students to volunteer or become involved with the community organization in some way. They may want to have a bake sale or car wash to raise money, or they could donate clothes to a residential facility that serves teens with developmental disabilities. The goal of this activity is to get students involved in the community in ways that will benefit people with HFA and Asperger syndrome as well as others across the autism spectrum.

Frequently Asked Questions

This section of the guide is designed to provide the facilitator with basic information about HFA and Asperger syndrome in a question-and-answer format. It has been divided into two sections: “HFA and Asperger Syndrome Versus Autism” and “HFA and Asperger Syndrome.” These pages can easily be photocopied and shared with colleagues and other interested individuals.

HFA and Asperger Syndrome Versus Autism: How Are They different?

What is autism?

Autism is a developmental disorder that affects a person’s ability to communicate and interact with other people. This disorder affects different people in different ways. Some individuals can function well on their own, while others need more assistance. Some people with autism have good verbal skills; others do not speak at all. Autism is characterized by difficulties with social relationships, communication, and an unusual attachment to objects or routines.

What are high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome?

High functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome are developmental disorders that affect a person’s ability to communicate and interact with other people. People with HFA or Asperger syndrome may have trouble understanding social cues, cling to routines, move repetitively, have difficulty with fine motor skills and sensory integration, and become preoccupied with specific areas of interest.

How are high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome different from autism?

Asperger syndrome is one of five developmental disorders

(Pervasive Developmental Disorders) that represent the autism spectrum. HFA falls at the “high” end of the autism spectrum, where people with this diagnosis may be able to communicate better socially, have more language skills, and exhibit fewer behavior problems than people at the lower end of the spectrum. The main difference between Asperger syndrome and autism is in the language and cognitive areas. Typically, people with Asperger syndrome do not experience delayed language development and may have average to above-average intelligence.

HFA and Asperger Syndrome

What are symptoms of high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome?

While everyone with high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome is different, symptoms of people with HFA and Asperger syndrome involve problems in socialization, communication, cognition, and sensation. Each individual’s characteristics may vary and may differ in severity. Examples of symptoms and characteristics include repetitive behaviors or interests, difficulty with fine motor skills (such as writing), difficulty communicating or connecting with others, inability to understand social cues and rules, poor organizational skills, literal (not abstract) thinking, specific focus on a particular interest, and strict adherence to routines and rules.

When do symptoms appear?

Although the range can vary widely, parents of children with autism often begin to notice signs of the disorder when their children are 2 to 3 years old. Children with Asperger syndrome may be diagnosed later because they do not have the same language or communication problems children with autism exhibit early on.

How many people have high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome?

While diagnoses of Asperger syndrome are increasing, the exact number of children with the disorder is not known. Some sources indicate that 48 of every 10,000 children may have Asperger syndrome. In a recent survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 5.6 children per 1,000 were reported to have an autism diagnosis. Boys were four times more likely to have a diagnosis of autism than girls.

Are high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome contagious?

Autism, HFA, and Asperger syndrome are not contagious. You cannot “catch” HFA or Asperger syndrome from someone who has it. Researchers believe that these conditions are the result of a person’s genetic makeup and other, unknown factors that may trigger the onset of symptoms.

Is there a cure?

At this time, no cure has been found for autism, HFA, or Asperger syndrome. Many researchers and educators are currently studying these disorders and looking for ways to cure or treat people who have them. While there is no cure yet, we do know that the earlier the disorders are diagnosed and treated, the better the result for the person.

Many adults with HFA or Asperger syndrome see their disorder as a strength and view the idea of a “cure” as offensive. Individuals with HFA and Asperger syndrome and their peers should understand that disability is a natural part of the human condition. “Aspies”—as self-advocates with HFA and Asperger syndrome often refer to themselves—are proud of

who they are, a trait that should be encouraged in all youth, with and without autism spectrum disorders.

How should teens with high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome be treated?

Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome should be treated the same as other teens. While they may have different ways of relating to and communicating with people, they also have many strengths and interesting qualities.

Challenges and Teens With HFA and Asperger Syndrome

As a teacher, parent, or other advocate, you likely know that children face difficult developmental challenges as they advance from elementary-school age into adolescence. Adolescence typically brings increased desire for independence from parents and increased importance and value placed on peer relationships, as well as the onset of many physical changes associated with puberty. These developmental changes are difficult for any teen to manage; they are even more challenging for teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome.

Below are some reasons the onset of adolescence brings added challenges to teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome.

Peers

- Adolescents with HFA and Asperger syndrome may have trouble connecting with peers and understanding social rules that govern peer interactions, or they may just not fit in with their peers.
- While peer relationships may be difficult for teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome to develop, this does not mean that they do not need or want friends. Many teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome report that they do in fact want friends and often feel lonely or left out.
- Some teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome may be excluded from peer interactions because their classmates do not know how to relate to them or include them in activities. Others may be excluded simply because they seem “odd” or don’t fit in.
- Romantic relationships may also be of interest to teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome, yet connecting with a member of the opposite sex can be extremely difficult.
- Bullying and teasing by peers is a problem for some teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome. These teens

need to understand how to interact and combat this negative behavior from peers.

Body

- Puberty is often a time of bodily changes. Sudden bodily changes can be confusing or even scary for some teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome. Some may not understand what is going on with their bodies or how to deal with new facial hair or menstruation.
- For teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome who dislike change, their maturing bodies can create discomfort and confusion.
- Good hygiene is also an important lesson to learn in relation to their changing bodies. Because fitting in as a teenager usually involves looking good and dressing nicely, these are important lessons for teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome to learn.

Behavior

- Most adolescents are taking this time in their lives to become more independent and test the waters of what is acceptable and learn how they can get what they want. Adolescents with HFA and Asperger syndrome are no different; however, their methods of obtaining what they want may be. Some want and need more independence, but because they are unsure how to obtain it, they may resort to tantrums or aggression.
- Some teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome may have angry outbursts because they are overwhelmed by the sensory challenges in a fast-paced middle school environment or because they do not know how to handle the stress and anxiety that accompany a frequently changing and challenging environment.
- Other teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome may have trouble communicating or expressing what they need or want, and this may result in misbehavior or emotional outbursts

How to help

Understanding the problems and challenges teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome face is the first step in being able to help them. All teens need extra support and encouragement at this time—especially the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome. You can learn more about HFA and Asperger syndrome by reviewing the resources listed in the “Additional Resources” section at the end of this guide. Also, the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome and his or her parents are excellent sources of information on how to help and support that teen in the classroom.

The Truth About HFA and Asperger Syndrome

Some people may have misperceptions of students with high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome. Some of the common myths, as well as the truth about HFA and Asperger syndrome, are provided below. This page can be photocopied and shared with students and other interested individuals.

What are some common myths?

- *Myth: People with HFA or Asperger syndrome do not want friends.*
 - Truth: People with HFA and Asperger syndrome do want and can have friends. While they may have trouble communicating with or relating to people in certain circumstances, this does not mean that they want to or would prefer to be alone.
- *Myth: People with HFA or Asperger syndrome are rude.*
 - Truth: Some people with HFA or Asperger syndrome may speak bluntly or express their thoughts openly and honestly without thinking about how their words may be interpreted. This communication style is typical of people with HFA or Asperger syndrome and does not indicate that they are mean-spirited or rude. They simply may not understand the socially appropriate rules of behavior. These types of behaviors should just be ignored if it is a small indiscretion, or the person with HFA or Asperger syndrome should be told that what was said or done is not appropriate and be given an appropriate alternative behavior.
- *Myth: People with HFA or Asperger syndrome just have a behavior problem that can be corrected with good parenting.*
 - Truth: HFA and Asperger syndrome are neurologically based disorders; a person with HFA or Asperger syndrome is not simply expressing bad behaviors or being noncompliant. HFA and Asperger syndrome are not caused by bad or ineffective parenting.

Tips for Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment

It is important to create a supportive environment for all students in the classroom. The following tips provide strategies that will help support a student with HFA or Asperger syndrome in a general classroom environment. Be sure to work with the teen's parents and Individual Education Plan (IEP) team to target the areas where the teen needs the most support in the classroom.

- **Create a classroom environment that is open, honest, and positive.** This will benefit all students in your classroom and create an environment for acceptance and understanding of a person with HFA or Asperger syndrome.
- **Try not to draw too much attention to the student with HFA or Asperger syndrome.** Have discussions with the student in private for specific problems or solutions or to point out mistakes in a positive way.
- **Discuss with the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome appropriate classroom accommodations that may help.** These may also be built into the student's IEP.
- **Arrange for a place for the teen to go if he or she needs a break.** This may benefit all students in the classroom and can provide them with some necessary quiet time during a busy school day.
- **Break tasks down into smaller steps.** Students with HFA or Asperger syndrome may have a difficult time understanding or following a complex set of directions and may become overwhelmed. By breaking assignments into smaller steps, you can enable the student to accomplish each task, receive feedback, and progress to the next step.
- **Allow lessons to be recorded.** Some teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome may benefit from being able to listen to lectures at home. Sometimes it is difficult

for them to keep up in class while taking notes and attempting to process all of the information at once.

- **Implement a positive-reinforcement reward system.** A reward system based on good performance or behavior in the classroom will give students immediate feedback. Make certain any reinforcement plan for the student with HFA or Asperger syndrome is consistent with the current IEP. Reward typically developing students for kind and helpful behaviors toward the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome.
- **Develop a routine or schedule of activities for the classroom.** Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome like routines, and they like to have time to prepare for lessons and events. Having a posted schedule or calendar will help. If there is a change in your normal classroom activities, prepare the student with HFA or Asperger syndrome in advance and help him or her understand the change and his or her role.
- **Help teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome understand “bidden” social rules.** This is a difficult area for the teen with HFA or Asperger syndrome and may apply to interactions with peers or specific behaviors in the classroom. Help the teen understand a particular situation or activity if you see that he or she is having difficulty, explaining the appropriate behavior and methods to handle the situation.
- **Use clear language and instruction.** Teens with HFA and Asperger syndrome have trouble with abstract language. Be as specific and to the point as possible and make sure they understand your message or instructions.
- **Provide immediate feedback to the teen with HFA and Asperger syndrome.** This may apply to assignments or classroom activities. It will help teens with HFA or Asperger syndrome know whether they are on the right (or wrong) track.

Additional Resources

Resources for Facilitators

Books

Attwood, T. (1998). *Asperger's Syndrome: A guide for parents and professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Bolick, T. (2004). *Asperger syndrome and adolescence: Helping preteens and teens get ready for the real world*. Gloucester, MA: Fair Winds Press.

Myles, B. S. (2005). *Children and youth with Asperger Syndrome: Strategies for success in inclusive settings*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Myles, B. S., & Simpson, R. L. (2003). *Asperger Syndrome: A guide for educators and parents* (2nd ed.). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Myles, B. S. (2001). *Asperger Syndrome and adolescence: Practical solutions for school success*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

Ozonoff, S., Dawson, G., & McPartland, J. (2002). *A parent's guide to Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism: How to meet the challenges and help your child thrive*. New York: Guilford.

Sicile-Kira, C. (2006). *Adolescents on the autism spectrum*. New York: Penguin Group.

Web Sites

ASA: Autism Society of America

www.autism-society.org

ASA provides detailed information on a wide range of autism-related topics for families and educators. It also provides a list of ASA chapters throughout the country for support and additional resources.

MAAP: More Advanced Individuals With Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder

www.maapservices.org

This organization provides resources on high-functioning autism and Asperger syndrome, including a tip sheet on teaching individuals with high-functioning autism.

OASIS: Online Asperger Syndrome Information & Support

www.aspergersyndrome.org/

A helpful Web site created by parents of children with Asperger syndrome that offers information related to legal resources and links to diagnosis information, classroom management, and research.

OAR: Organization for Autism Research

www.researchautism.org

OAR provides detailed information on applied research to the autism community. Its Web site contains monthly newsletters, a comprehensive list of resources, and an overview of practical research underway in autism spectrum disorders.

NICHCY: National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities

www.nichcy.org

NICHCY is a national source of information on disabilities in children of all ages. It includes research-based information, law and policy information, and resources for autism spectrum disorders.

NIMH: National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov

NIMH offers detailed information regarding autism spectrum disorders, including a printable booklet. Information can also be found about clinical trials, as well as research activities such as those of the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee.

CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.htm>

CDC offers a wealth of educational information about autism spectrum disorders and includes an Autism Information Center on its Web site. In addition to this, information on other research activities and resources is provided.

Resources for Teens

Books

Bolick, T. (2004). *Asperger syndrome and adolescence: Helping preteens and teens get ready for the real world*. Gloucester, MA: Fair Winds Press.

While this book is written for adults, it presents information in an easy-to-understand fashion and informs the reader exactly what it is like to experience Asperger syndrome as an adolescent.

Jackson, L., & Attwood, T. (2002). *Freaks, geeks and Asperger syndrome: A user guide to adolescence*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Luke Jackson, one of the authors, writes about his experience with Asperger syndrome and being an adolescent. The book provides a first-person account of living with Asperger syndrome and information for those who interact with people with the disorder.

Prince-Hughes, D. (2002). *Aquamarine blue 5: Personal stories of college students with autism*. Athens, OH: Swallow Press.

This collection of essays by people with Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism offers an in-depth look at living with the disorders, experiencing life and college. It provides insights to promote understanding of and interaction with people facing these disorders.

Haddon, M. (2004). *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. London: Jonathan Cape.

This novel features a 15-year-old math whiz with Asperger syndrome who tries to discover who killed a dog with a garden fork.

Web Sites

KidsHealth: TeensHealth: Autism

http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/autism.html

Written for teens, this Web site provides detailed information about what autism spectrum disorders are, how they are treated, and what it is like to live with these disorders.

OASIS: Online Asperger Syndrome Information & Support

www.aspergersyndrome.org/

This Web site has information about Asperger syndrome as well as a post from a teenager describing his life with the disorder.

Aspergernauts

<http://gareth25.supanet.com/aspergers.htm>

A Web site maintained and developed by a teen with Asperger syndrome, this site provides information to professionals, parents, and teens without Asperger syndrome as well as those with the disorder. It includes personal experiences and detailed information from the teen about living with Asperger syndrome.