



“ALMOST AUTISTIC”
People with Mild Pervasive Developmental/Autistic Disorders (PDD)
By Drina Madden M.A., C.A.S.

People who have mild symptoms of autism can be very difficult for the rest of the world to understand.

- They look like everyone else.
- They have the same human needs as everyone else.
- Their brains are created uniquely - just like everyone else's.
- The confusions arise when their behavior appears different than everyone else's.

The reasons that they act differently is because many people with autism have perception and processing difficulties.

- “Scanning” a situation or area to focus on the important elements.
- Bringing various sensory experiences together - (hearing, touch, sight, smell and/or taste).
- Organizing and/or analyzing:
 - ideas
 - relationships
 - plans
- Very literal/concrete interpretation of their world.
- Time confusion:
 - Awareness time passage is often impaired
 - Sequences out of order
- Information that is heard is often not processed well.
- Non-verbal cues are often missed (gestures, expressions of feeling, etc.)

The people that we know who have an Atypical Pervasive Developmental Disorder are “almost autistic” because they share many of the characteristics of people with more severe forms of Autism. We may notice that they have trouble:

- **Comprehending their world:**
 - Incomplete information that is difficult for them to pull together in an orderly fashion causes “world reading” problems
- **Dealing with:**
 - Everyday social situations - Trouble processing what they are hearing adds to the confusion they have reading people's faces and gestures. Pictures help.
 - Listening comprehension

- Attending difficulties and a “leaky auditory memory” combine with processing and sequencing problems. They often miss directions or the “gist” of abstract presentation. Visual assistance usually helps.
 - Reading comprehension - Although they may have fine word attack skills, their processing and concrete thinking problems often interfere with an understanding of what they have read. Showing them pictures of having them draw simple pictures of the characters, plot, etc., often helps.
- **Managing/organizing themselves:**
 - Time
 - Time is a dickens for many “almost autistic” people. They often appear impatient because they can’t judge the amount of time that has passed. They may also appear to use faulty judgment when planning their time. They may have difficulty keeping track of appointments and arriving on time.
 - Assignments
 - They need assistance in planning long term assignments because of their time difficulty. Their problem of bringing experiences together often makes report or essay writing exceedingly difficult.
 - *Beware of assignments that are too abstract.*
- **Saying or doing “socially acceptable” things:**
 - Social amenities
 - Because of their excellent memory and love of routines, they may well be taught socially appropriate responses. They may not always know what is an “acceptable” or “unacceptable” comment to make, however, during social interaction.
 - Answering questions well - especially those which require abstract thought
 - Conversations and abstractions - The give and take of conversations may be difficult for them to follow. The more that “ideas” or “feelings” are dealt with, the greater the difficulty.
 - Not adept at social cues - may appear naive.
- **Fearing that they will do or say something inappropriate and be isolated because of it.**
 - “Almost autistic” people have very real strengths and emotions. Because of their great difficulties in comprehending so many aspects of their world – especially the world of other people - they often say or do things which are not accepted well by others. Since

they don't fully understand cause/effect, they may avoid situations for fear of rejection.

- Fear of being disorganized may cause them to over-organize themselves.
- Fear of lying may cause them to be ultra-honest.
- Confusion about cause/effect and event misreading may lead to "lying" as the consequences are made apparent. Patience is essential in helping them sort through their world.

The *positives* often displayed by these "*almost autistic*" people include:

- Able to take in "chunks" of visual information quickly
- Learn long routines and the motivation to repeat familiar routines are often perfectionists
- Concentrate on topics of specific interest
- Academically able to handle most school related material

As you work with people who have these characteristics, please try to get a glimpse of the world from their perspective as they struggle to control the effects of the often confusing world of people - fast movement, faces filled with