



# Asperger group is forming

## The disease is considered a mild form of autism

By Ann Efimetz

In November 2000 Michael John Carley received a diagnosis that shed light on something he had been struggling with all his life.

Carley had a successful career and was the father of a 4-year-old son at the time. But one week after his boy was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, Carley received the same diagnosis.

"When a child is diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, because of heredity they look at the father," Carley said in an interview from his home in New York City.

Carley, who is the executive director of the Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership, will be in Williamsburg next weekend to help organize a local support group to help those affected by the condition.

Asperger syndrome is largely unknown to the general population, but it is more common as people may think. About a million Americans are estimated to have the condition, which is considered to be a form of autism.

Asperger syndrome was included as a legitimate diagnosis in 1994. Since, the number of those diagnosed has skyrocketed.

"Before that time, often people with AS were thought to be as quirky, weird or eccentric," Carley said. "They would die, and no one would know better. Now there is a name for what has made them different."

The condition is primarily characterized by varying degrees of deficits in social interactions and nonverbal commu-

nications.

Simply, people with AS have difficulties, which sometimes are severe, in perceiving the world from the perspective of another person. They have a hard time picking up on social cues, including facial expressions, bodily gestures and tones of voice.

As a result, people with AS may have great abilities or talents in certain areas, but may not be able to live independently or hold down a job.

Characteristics of the disorder include the following:

- Very intense interests in highly specialized and often unusual areas, which can range from train routes and schedules to sports statistics to geographic or national facts to astronomy or even astrophysics.

- Inflexible routines in personal habits. Insistence on always doing things the same way. Great resistance to change.

- Repetitive bodily motions: flapping of the hands or feet and rocking back and forth.

- Awkward physical coordination, clumsiness and difficulty with sports.

- Unconventional body language, inappropriate facial expressions, and poor eye contact.

- Unusual speech patterns. A noticeably peculiar tone or modulation of voice.

- Atypical conversation, inappropriate remarks or irrelevant statements, and a formal, "professorial" style of speaking that is more a lecture than a reciprocal conversation.

- Strong tendencies to be very literal in understanding of spoken or written language, which can make them very susceptible to

being fooled or tricked.

- Lack of awareness of their social environment or of the feelings of others.

- Remarkable memory for facts or details.

- Exceptional abilities with numbers or patterns.

- Reversal of pronouns - using "you" instead of "I," and vice-versa.

- Incessant repetition of favorite topics, expression, or words.

- Lining-up toys or other objects in a row.

- Very strong attachment to specific objects or items.

- Intense fascination with spinning objects.

In addition, a few more speciAs in other forms of autism, people who have AS sometimes have very acute sensory sensitivities. In particular, they can react strongly to sounds or visual stimuli that are not even perceptible to most people, such as the high-frequency sound emitted from the back of a television or the flickering of a fluorescent light.

Carley said that growing up he always felt he was somehow "different" from his peers and family members. He would sometimes think things were humorous that no one else did, or vice versa. Without knowing what he had, he kept pressing on and successfully met his challenges.

"The more you educate peo-

ple, the more they may say, "That sounds like my Uncle Ralph," he said.

Carley has worked to further the GRASP Network. There are currently eight support groups in the Northeast. The one here is the first south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

The help people can get at the support group is invaluable.

"The sense of shared experience is where we find strength and also the feeling that we are not alone," Carley said. "That makes you feel less like a victim."

**More - Contact Carley at info@grasp.org or call 646-242-4003.**

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