

The Road of Discovery

1. HFA (incl Aspergers) children are often no different from other children when little. The only differences we noticed were:
2.
 - A complete lack of sense of danger: when he was 18 months old, I felt that if I could keep him alive until he was three I would have achieved something major e.g. walking into pool
 - Continued to throw tantrums past the two year old stage.
 - Extremely high intelligence:
 - he taught himself to read at 4;
 - discovered deductive reasoning at 4 and inductive reasoning at 5;
 - could read the clock at 4;
 - could count to 100 and do sums in kindy;
 - could subtract (on paper) 7 digit numbers to get a negative number when 7;
 - A bit odd
3. In retrospect he also showed:
 - Very strong likes and dislikes
 - An unusually acute sense of smell
 - Obsessive playing - almost exclusively played with one type of toy.
 - An excessive fear of loud noises
 - An excessive reaction to yelling
 - A lack of 'normal' social skills
 - An expectation that he should be treated the same as an adult.
4. Finding out why he is different has been interesting, leading to:
 - Self-diagnosis as HFA/Aspergers (same for husband and other siblings!)
 - Complete reassessment of my own childhood/abilities/inabilities, which was reasonably traumatic!
 - All the normal grief phases
5. BUT a later realisation that
 - their intelligence covers the full range of intelligences, however from personal experience the normal curve seems to be flatter with more at the low end and high end
 - it is NOT a disability but a different set of abilities
 - that it is 'well known' that many if not all geniuses are autistic
 - they are focussed, obsessive, root-seeking problem solvers
 - that 95% of our problems and stress come, not from Robert, but from the school and its inability to cater for somebody so different

- that schools really are only interested in perfectly normal, average intelligence, quiet, undemanding children!
- that such children do progressively better as they go through school because it becomes more interesting and intelligence becomes valued over social skills
- that in the right job autistic people can be perfectly happy
- that the diagnosticians are all crazy

6. If you suspect your child may have autism...

- read about it - Tony Attwood's books and website (<http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/>) are a good start and Frank White's Autism Advocacy website (<http://home.att.net/~ascaris1/index.html>) is a must as is Wendy Lawson's (<http://www.mugsy.org/wendy/>).
- an interesting article on the importance of differentiating autism and retardation can be found at http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/9.12/aspergers_pr.html.
- there is an interesting self-diagnosis test at <http://wired-vig.wired.com/wired/archive/9.12/aqtest.html>
- if you want school help and centrelink allowance it has to be diagnosed by 'qualified' psychologist, speech path and paediatrician - phone disability services to get a list of names of those who are allowed to diagnose! (It costs around \$1700, but you get some back from medicare and private health insurance.) The public system has a waiting list of 8-18 months.
- get the centrelink carers allowance, it will offset other costs!
- make sure the school knows the child's requirements.

7. Finally, what does the autistic child need?

- to know they are *different* not disabled
- an upbringing based on self-regulation rather than control - read my parent's book: "The Free Family" by Paul and Jean Ritter
- a computer
- continual validation of their abilities and how they think
- calm, quiet, reason - the more agitated they are the quieter you need to be
- precision in speech - they are very literal (lift story and kicked the lamp story)
- advocacy against the school system (listening story)
- help to understand how the social world works; if you cannot do it yourself, get a clinical psych who is experienced helping HFA/Aspergers.
- love: unconditional as for all children!