

How does a person with ASD date successfully?

For individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), dating can be a real challenge. It is a misconception that people on the spectrum don't want relationships – often they do, but they just don't know how to meet people or understand the nuances of relationships. How do we effectively teach relationship skills?

Teaching social thinking is a good place to start. Michelle Garcia Winner has done excellent work in this area. Her book *[Socially Curious, Curiously Social](#)* teaches perspective taking, facing social challenges, creating thinking flexibility and building strong friendships. Having successful friendships can set the groundwork for successful dating later on. If you can't have a friendship, how can you expect to have an intimate relationship with someone?

The hidden curriculum is another good place to start. Brenda Smith Myles wrote an excellent book on the subject called *[The Hidden Curriculum](#)*. She highlights several ways to teach those unspoken, hidden social rules through social narratives, cartooning, *[Power Cards](#)*, and video modeling. Many of the basic social rules apply to dating and relationships such as making conversation, school dance etiquette, talking on the telephone and eating in restaurants.

[The Guide to Dating for Teenagers with Asperger Syndrome](#) is another type of hidden curriculum book written in question/answer style with the opposite page listing personal discussion questions. Since every situation is different and everyone has their own personality, this type of format is great to use with people on the spectrum as the social rule is stated on one side, and the other side is how does it apply to me and what are my feelings around it.

Dan Coulter of Coulter Video is an adult with Asperger Syndrome. He sent out a list of his personal dating tips which I think are quite good. Here are 10 tips for guys to think about:

ONE: Be interesting. It's much easier to get a date with someone if they are interested in you. If you have a special talent, use it to become good at something that attracts the attention of girls you'd like to date.

TWO: Don't brag. Letting other people praise your accomplishments is much more attractive to girls and women than acting like you are your own biggest fan.

THREE: Work on your manners. Girls tend to appreciate a guy who knows not to talk with his mouth full, how to stand back and let someone else enter a door first, and how to keep his voice volume low in a crowded movie theater. It's not just using good manners with her, it's also how she observes you acting with everyone else. If she sees you using some basic manners and always trying to do the right thing, she's more likely to be forgiving if you haven't mastered other social skills.

FOUR: Get a girl mentor, or several. I made friends with girls in my high school classes who I could ask questions about what girls expected or would like. An older sister or even your mom can be a great source of information. Other guys can be helpful, if you can trust them, but girls have insights guys don't.

FIVE: Find a girl with interests similar to yours. Maybe you both excel in a class. Maybe you'll find her in astronomy club or in fencing class. Having something in common makes it easier to talk with a girl, so put yourself in situations where you're likely to meet someone who likes what you like.

SIX: Get to know a girl before you ask her out. Put yourself in the girl's place. The better she knows you, the less risk she takes in going out with you — and the less risk you take that you won't have anything to talk about. Less pressure makes for a better first date.

SEVEN: When you ask a girl on a date, make it specific. “Would you like to hang out sometime?” is really asking her to pass judgment on you as a person. A girl who is not interested may say “Yes” in order not to hurt your feelings. It’s much better to say, “Would you like to go to (insert movie, concert or other event) on Friday night?” If she says, “Yes,” you’re in. If she says she is busy and suggests another night, you’re in. If she says she’s busy and doesn’t offer an alternative, it’s best to back off.

If you wish, you can then wait a few days and ask her out again to a different event. If she doesn’t accept your second offer and doesn’t suggest an alternative, she’s probably not interested. You could wait a few more days and ask her out again, but two or three attempts without encouragement from a girl is a pretty clear indication that it’s best to move on and focus on someone else.

EIGHT: Listen, listen, listen. One of the biggest mistakes guys make is talking too much about themselves or their interests. This is a special challenge for guys with Asperger Syndrome. When you talk with a girl, make your point and then give her a chance to respond. If she changes the subject, try and talk about the new subject for a while. Assume that a girl cares as much about her interests as you do yours and her opinions are just as valid. She is not less or more, she is different — in some interesting ways.

NINE: Don’t try to solve her problems unless she asks for your input. People often talk about things to help them think them through, or just to have another person sympathize. Pointing out what you see as a simple solution to her problem is not likely to earn you admiration for being smart. It’s more likely to make her frustrated because you think you’re smart enough to solve a problem and that she couldn’t. Especially if you assume you see the whole picture when you don’t. Responses like, “That must have been hard for you,” or “That’s a difficult situation,” are often likely to be well received. If she asks for your input, it’s a good idea to suggest solutions in the form of a question: “Do you think you could...?” This leaves the door open for her to give you more information if you’ve only seen the tip of the iceberg. Girl-world has a lot of icebergs.

TEN: Be honest and don’t be afraid to ask questions. If you don’t understand some social nuance, being open about it can be disarming. You may want to disclose your Asperger Syndrome, but even if you don’t, you can always explain that you just don’t get something and ask for help figuring it out.

Consider joining a support group for teens or adults on the spectrum. These are often safe havens in which to discuss feelings, fears, and practice valuable social skills to use in the real world of dating and relationships.

Relationships are hard work for everyone; they require give and take, respect, and understanding of another person’s feelings. No one will ever be perfect at it, but practicing social skills and learning the hidden curriculum are good places to start.

Source: The Autism Awareness Centre