

Kisses Yuck! Social Challenges for Youth with Aspergers

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Expressing affection to others is extremely uncomfortable and can be downright impossible for those with Aspergers. Imagine yourself entering a grocery store and strangers come up to you and give you a pat on the back or a hug. You would instinctively pull away, turn your head, and retreat in any way possible. This is how many children with Aspergers feel when they are put into social situations and held to the societal norm of typical children.

As a parent, we can help prepare them for these types of uncomfortable situations ahead of time, when possible. If you know you are going to a party or social event, start talking with your child about it while on the drive over. One suggestion is for the child to just say hello and give a slight wave as soon as they are approached, upon arrival and that will suffice.

One thing to consider if your child is uncomfortable and shows anxiety surrounding crowds, birthday parties, the movie theater ~ plan accordingly. If your child is anxious about crowds ~ do not insist they go to crowded events such as school fairs, Mardi Gras parades or loud crowded events. If your child enjoys the movies but does not particularly like the loud sound of the speakers, bring them a set of headphones to muffle the sound and the movie will be much more enjoyable to them. Oftentimes movies are scary for youth as they are dark upon entering. Try getting to the movie 30 minutes before it begins so you can get seated prior to the lights being dimmed.

School birthday parties ~ you may be uncertain but it's ok to say you cannot attend. Be courteous and text or call the host to let them know that the child will not be able to make it. Explain to them, if necessary, depending on the capacity of closeness, that your child is having a

bad day and that you are calling to send your regrets. If it is a school friend that your child is not particularly close with, a simple text to the host thanking them for the invite and letting them know your child will not be able to make it.

Family ~ family dynamics are sticky. Oftentimes, grandparents might not understand the social, pragmatic deficits that children with Aspergers can sometimes have. They may be offended that the child will not hug or kiss them upon request. Parents should have the discussion with the grandparents to make them aware that these anxious feelings your child is feeling are real and are not personal. Explain to them that your child is uncomfortable with touch and they might not show affection in the traditional way. They will be more understanding when they realize that your child exhibits the same socio/emotional behavior with all friends and family.

Greetings ~ Parents are urged to have discussions with your child regarding greetings in general. Greetings are confusing for children with Aspergers. They can sometime become very anxious over who to kiss hello, who to hug, when to kiss, when to hug and how long do you hug for. Your discussions will vary based on your family does in practice. Sit with your child and explain in detail what your traditions are as a family. Although these types of emotional responses come intrinsically to some, others must be guided towards social successes.