ASPERGER'S TEENS

Understanding High School for Students on the Autism Spectrum

by
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WHO ARE YOU? CREATING A PERSONAL PROFILE

Strengths are like tools you can bring out of a tool box to use to help yourself in everyday life. Each person has different strengths. For example, some kids are talented musicians, while others love doing math problems. In this chapter, you will think about what your strengths are and how well you recognize them and can use them. In the process, you will create a personal profile, or a list of your strengths and what you need to work on. The process of creating this profile will help you understand yourself better and enable you to take the next steps towards achieving your goals.

QUIZ YOURSELF! HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND AND EXPLAIN YOURSELF?

Answer the following questions (don't worry—this is a fun quiz all about you) and then read on to figure out how well you understand what you can offer and how well you explain yourself to

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other people. For each question, choose the answer choice that best describes you:

1. When people ask me what my strengths are, I:
   a. Don't understand what they are talking about.
   b. Basically know what I am *not* good at, but don't know what I'm good at.
   c. I can explain what I'm good at and what I need to work on.
2. When my parents tell me that I need to work on developing my academic and social goals, I:
   a. Don't really understand what that means.
   b. Understand that when I was smaller, I had to work on social skills, but now that I'm older and in high school, I'm not really sure which goals I should have.
   c. Understand that I have certain strengths that I can use in school and elsewhere and that I can ask for help in areas that I'm not as strong in.
3. Each year in school, I:
   a. Don't think too much about what I'm achieving.
   b. Face the same obstacles again and again, though I am thinking about how to get help.
   c. Decide to set a goal about what I want to accomplish and work with my teachers to achieve it.
4. When I am struggling in an activity, I:
   a. Decide to stop doing it.
   b. Think about asking for help, though I don't always know where to turn to get help.
   c. Ask a teacher, parent, or friend for help or another way to approach the problem.

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5. When I am asked to describe my interests, or what I like to do, I:
   a. Really don't know how to answer.
   b. Answer the same way each time, even though I'm not sure I'm describing myself fully.
   c. Am able to describe some of my real interests and explain why I'm interested in them.

How to score yourself:

If you answered mostly "a": You have real strengths, but you may not always understand what they are. In addition, you may at times need to learn how to explain how your mind works to teachers, parents, and friends and learn how to ask for help in areas in which you are not as strong. Understanding yourself will help you navigate the world of high school while feeling more comfortable and secure.

If you answered mostly "b": You understand some of your strengths and are starting to think about asking for some help from parents, teachers, and friends. You may not realize that people around you can provide more extensive or complete help than you are now getting, such as helping you think about different ways to approach a situation or problem. Learning how to ask for this type of help will help you feel more comfortable learning and making friends in high school.

If you answered mostly "c": You are doing a good job understanding what you do well and how to ask for help. Read on to find other ways to build on your strengths and learn how to do better with the help of others around you.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR STRENGTHS AND OBSTACLES

Before we think about how you can make yourself feel more comfortable in school, take an inventory of what you do well—and what you need to improve. Taking an inventory is similar to assessing

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which strengths or skills your character possesses in a role-playing video game, or determining the unique personality, behavior, or characteristics of a protagonist in a book. Each character is unique and has some strengths and lacks others; similarly, you have some unique strengths and some strengths you may need to acquire or develop.

Take an inventory of what you do well—and what you need to improve.

Another useful way to think about taking an inventory is to pretend you are packing for a trip to the beach. Before you leave for your trip, you must think about what you need to bring on your journey. Do you have a bathing suit? Do your flip-flops still fit? What about sunscreen or sunglasses? While packing, you take stock (or an inventory) of what you already have and think about what you still need to acquire.

Now is the time to think about your strengths. What skills or talents do you have that you consider to be strengths? What things can you do well? What are other skills that you would like to have?

Your Strengths

Think about your top three strengths. Jot them down on a separate sheet of paper to help you remember them. These can be related to school, such as "I'm good at understanding how to do research on the web," or they can be other qualities such as "I'm good at working with small children." Whatever you choose is up

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to you; if you are stuck, ask a trusted friend or a parent or teacher to help you.

WHAT DO I DO IF …

Question: I really don't know what my strengths are. What do I do?
Answer: Try thinking about what other people, such as your teachers or other kids, say you do well. You can also think about your interests because areas of interest can often represent strengths. For example, if you are interested in astronomy, you may be motivated to learn more about it and may know a lot about this subject. If you are really stuck and can't come up with any strengths, ask a friend or adult you trust what he or she thinks your main strengths are.

Strengths You Need

Spend some time thinking of strengths you would like to have for school and for your social life that you don't yet have. The strengths you need are similar to skills you would like to acquire in a role-playing video games or items that you need to get to prepare for taking a trip. You can think of things like, "I would like to learn how to be better organized," or "I would like to find ways to make more friends in school." If you are stuck and can't think of anything, work with a trusted friend, parent, or teacher to come up with an answer that sounds right to you. You could add these strengths you need to your written list, too.

Your Obstacles

Now, think about what is getting in the way of your developing the strengths you would like to have but don't yet possess. These

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are obstacles that are similar to what you might find in a video game—things that prevent your character from advancing to the next level. Your obstacles can be internal barriers, meaning that they come from within yourself, such as, "I get frustrated when I try to work on something very hard," or they can be external factors such as, "I want to finish my homework, but I just don't have a quiet place to study." You will refer to these obstacles later, at the end of the chapter, in order to develop goals or what you want to achieve. Don't worry if you aren't quite sure yet about how to work around these obstacles. This book will give you some more information and strategies to help you start thinking about how to work on your obstacles. Now, note three obstacles on a separate sheet of paper.

CREATING YOUR PERSONAL PROFILE

Look at the list of strengths you already have, the list of strengths you need, and the list of your obstacles. Can you use these three lists to develop a few sentences about yourself? One easy way to do this is to take the strengths you have and the strengths you need and turn them into full sentences.

You can use the following as a guide, though you don't need to stick to it:

I am a person who likes _____ (fill in the strengths that you wrote down earlier here). My other talents are_____ (fill in other strengths). While I have a lot of strengths, I would like to develop certain areas, including _____(fill in two or three strengths you want to develop here from the list you created). What often gets in my way is _____ (fill in your obstacles from your earlier list here).

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For example, if the strengths you have were "working well with children," "cooking," and "drawing anime characters," and the strengths you need were "becoming more organized," "learning to ask for help," and "learning to handle frustration," you can write something like the following:

"I am a person who enjoys babysitting and works well with children. My other talents are cooking and drawing, particularly anime characters. While I have a lot of talents, I would like to develop certain areas. I need to work on becoming more organized, learning to ask for help, and learning to handle frustration. What often gets in my way is that I think I should be perfect at all times."

Everyone has both strengths and weaknesses, though different ones, in their profiles.

While it may seem redundant to turn your lists of strengths you have and those you need into full sentences, this personal statement will help you present yourself to teachers, and it will help you formulate goals. It is helpful to know how to describe your **profile**, meaning your list of skills, strengths, and weaknesses, and it may help you to know that everyone has both strengths and weaknesses, though different ones, in their profiles. In other words, everyone has some strengths that they carry with them and that can help them get through parts of high school life that are more difficult for them.

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If you have Asperger's, high school can be a time of great promise and opportunity—to learn more about subjects you're excited about, join clubs and activities that interest you, and make new friends—but it can also be uncomfortable at times. This book helps you use your strengths and unique personal style to feel more comfortable in high school.

Chock full of quizzes, exercises, and examples, this book can help you:

- Understand your unique strengths and weaknesses;
- Work well with your teachers;
- Connect with other kids at school;
- Recognize and deal with bullying;
- Use social media safely and politely;
- Develop healthy habits;
- Cope with stress and strong emotions; and
- Become more independent.

Take a look inside, and find some ways to help yourself feel more comfortable and more relaxed in high school—and better able to make friends, understand teachers, and get the grades you are capable of!

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