

Coping With Challenging Behaviors In School

**(An Interview with Dr. Stephan Silverman
and Mr. Rich Weinfeld)**



00:00 Dave Angel: Okay. So the first question for yourselves is, can you tell me a little about your background and experiences of working with children with Asperger's?

00:06 Rich Weinfeld: You want to go first, Steve? Go ahead.

00:08 Stephan Silverman: You want me to go first? Okay.

00:10 RW: Sure.

00:10 SS: Yeah, well, those of us who've been diagnosticians associated with school systems have probably been testing youngsters with Asperger's long before anyone knew who they were. Because I see the full range of youngsters in diagnosis, I've been doing it for many years. But I think what really happened is kind of a two stage process for me. And that is, when I was working in a school for nine years, where in the last half, Mr. Weinfeld was the director of special education of a school for children with disabilities within a public school system. Rich was really one of the first people to have the idea of picking some of the brighter children with Asperger's and integrating them into gifted education programs. So, these kids we would call twice exceptional. Twice exceptional meaning, A, they're gifted, but B, they may have a weakness or disability, so they have two exceptionalities. So Rich became kind of a national expert in children with two exceptionalities. So after working with Rich for about five years there, I was, I guess promoted if you will, to the central board of education office in Montgomery County, Maryland where I worked primarily with schools with children who were privately placed. That is, children who were too complex or too challenging for school system programs. In other words, public schools did not have a place to put these youngsters so they put them in private schools that specialized in autism.

02:11 SS: And so I had the honor of being assigned for 10 years to all of the schools in the Washington Metropolitan region, and that includes the states of Maryland and Virginia, for children who have Asperger's Syndrome. So I spent about 10 years basically being a consultant to schools with these kind of youngsters and specifically kids with Asperger's syndrome. I built up an experience in that 10 years, plus the five I was with Rich. We were offered the opportunity to write this book, I felt it was fresh experience. And I felt we had something unique to offer because I had seen, I guess, a number of these kids. I have to give a plug before we move forward, at some point, just to let you know that we've just received notice that we are going to be asked to do a second edition of School Success for Kids with Asperger's Syndrome, which will come out after the DSM system reclassifies that diagnosis, probably in the year 2013. That's how I have experience in this field.

03:38 DA: Excellent. Thank you.

03:40 SS: Maybe Rich has more to add about his experience.

03:43 RW: Yeah. Well Steve kind of touched on my experience and as like Steve, I would answer that now that we have a diagnosis for Asperger's, when I look back on my career, I worked with many students with Asperger's without having a name for it. In fact, 15 years of my career in Montgomery County Public Schools was working with students who were categorized as having emotional disabilities. And looking back, I think we misdiagnosed many of those students who actually had Asperger's syndrome at the time we didn't know what Asperger's syndrome was and we were calling them schizophrenic. Looking back, I feel like we just did disservice for many of those students. But beginning in the mid 90s, Steve Silverman and I worked together as you described at the middle school that served students with a variety of disabilities, including students with Asperger's syndrome and we included them, as Steve said, in our program for gifted students with

disabilities and we had a lot of success with that.

04:52 RW: Then, during the last six years of my career with Montgomery County Public Schools, I was the director for the entire school district for gifted students with a variety of disabilities. And that certainly included students with Asperger's syndrome, where I would consult with individual schools about how to work effectively with these students and we also had some very unique special classroom programs for gifted students with disabilities, which included students with Asperger's. Like Steve said, after I left the school system and became an advocate and the director of Weinfeld Education Group, we had the opportunity to write this book *School Success for Kids with Asperger's Syndrome*. Steve and I came together to do that, and since then we've been doing a lot of training on the topic, certainly a lot of consulting about individual kids and advocacy for them for appropriate school placement.

05:57 DA: Excellent. Okay, so you've got bags of experience between you, bags of information which is wonderful. So the first question really to kick the interview off is, and any of you jump in whoever feels appropriate, from the school's perspective, what would you say are the three biggest challenges to successfully educate a child with Asperger's?

06:16 SS: If you ask me and Rich, you may get different answers just because we're different human beings. So I'm going to take a stab at it. And the way to do it is if you look at our book, what we've done, I have to say that very few people have written on the actual education of these kids. There's only two or three experts in this field. One being a doctor, Brenda Smith Myles in Kansas and she's at the University of Kansas. And she endorsed our book and she has maybe eight major factors and we have 10. So we have the 10 factors that need to be addressed, I would say if I had to ask what the top three were, I would have to give it some thought. Well, what are the top three? So I'm looking at our 10 factor. Well, we have a model of

intervention which are based on 10 factors.

07:25 DA: Why don't you give me all 10, briefly then?

07:30 RW: Maybe, Steve, you give the top 10 and I'll take a crack at the top three.

07:35 SS: Alright, I'm going to read the top 10.

07:38 DA: Excellent.

07:39 SS: As soon as I locate the book I think and...

07:41 RW: Well, I can go ahead. I've got it right in front of me. So, the 10 are problems with social interactions; very focused areas of interest and expertise; the need for predictability; problems with language; problems with abstract reasoning; problems with sensory hyper or hypo sensitivity; problems with anxiety, depression and emotional regulation; problems with attention, organization and other areas of executive functioning; problems with motor issues including written production; and then finally problems with ritualistic, repetitive or rigid behavior. And I think Steve and I would agree by far the most prevalent issue, and this is the issue that schools would see and this is the issue that teachers would see, this is the issue that kids face themselves, is the problems with social interaction.

08:38 SS: Absolutely.

08:38 RW: And then many of these kids do fine academically, unless they're called on to interact with other

students. So when there's group work, cooperative work, that's where you see the impact. They also, even though, they may be doing fine academically, they may be suffering in silence because they don't have friends, they're socially isolated, they feel anxious. So this area of social interaction typically grows as they move on in school. It's often not as noticeable early in early grades and then as school becomes a more social place it's late, the late elementary school years, primary years and into middle school, and high school we see that is becoming more of a problem.

09:28 SS: I think, David, that the important thing to note, because there's so much disagreement and problems and diagnosis that the thing that the difference between someone who's simply just a little geeky or a little nerdy, the thing that makes someone autistic, to have a syndrome that we call Asperger's, is probably a central nervous system neurological problem in social reciprocity. So that social reciprocity translates to what Rich said in school, and that's the number one challenge. But I'm looking at the list now and I have it in front of me, too. I think the next challenge, I'm just guessing, is probably... And by the way, that first challenge is really expressed and painful when it comes to bullying. Being a target of a cruelty, which happens, a universal problem in education especially in middle school. If you read the literature, the problem with teasing and bullying throughout the world at that age level. So the other thing I guess, I don't know, I'm looking, I'm thinking maybe the need of the rigidity or the need for predictability which is number three.

10:51 SS: I think the rigidity, the need for routines when it's thwarted... I mean when you put a kid with Asperger's Syndrome in a school, a middle school, where young students are experiencing their most dynamic changes, so the rest of the social world is more variable than any other place if you think about it, because all the children are going through hormonal changes so it's a great emotional time for everyone, a time of great emotional sensitivity and anxiety. So if the entire environment's like that and you have a

youngster who needs routine and predictability to feel safe, that's when you have these meltdowns. So I think the rigidity or the predictability need is extremely important and I'm looking at the other ones and I'm just wondering, I know from the research, frankly, that the next is anxiety. With younger children, the number one co-morbid or coexisting condition for young children with Asperger's are attentional problems or ADHD or just small inattention issues. But actually with an Asperger's syndrome, probably... Not probably, the research shows that anxiety is the number one correlative. So, I'm saying those three, I don't know, Rich, what do you think?

12:20 RW: I wouldn't disagree but I'll mention a couple of others that I also think are very important.

Certainly problems with abstract reasoning, in fact, many students with Asperger's is in school. So, while on the one hand, they may have areas in which they are very bright, they may read early, decode words very readily, they may have an area of passion or interest that they know every fact about more than most adults. But when it comes to higher order, inferential thinking, particularly when it's not in that area of interest they may be lagging. And this, you ask a question as, what presents the problem for schools? I think this kind of dichotomy presents the problem for schools because on the one hand, you have a student who appears very bright and he's very bright in certain ways, and in other ways they are very challenged so that it calls for a very specialized approach that both cultivates their strength and works on improving their areas of challenge.

13:29 RW: And then, I'll also mention the need for work predictability. That's something that leads schools to incur behavior problem and often is attributed to kids that kids reap behavior problems when really they're reacting out of frustration to the unpredictability of the environment. So to be more specific, when we're going to analyze that classroom and look at what's not working for a student with Asperger's, one of the first things we look for is, is there a digital schedule that's up in the room so the student knows what's

coming up during the school day? If there's a change in that schedule, is the student prepared for that change or is it highlighted for that student. Are there structured places for the student to get materials to turn in assignments? Are there predictable consequences and rules, and are the rules very spelled out and clear? One of the terms that Brenda Smith Myles as Steve referenced before was Hidden Curriculum. It's a very, very good book for kids with Asperger's syndrome to figure out the hidden curriculum or the unstated rules of the school. The things that the teacher might not tell everybody but the other kids just figure out automatically like what behaviors are going to get in trouble and which ones aren't. Which assignments are really important to do and which one is alright. For the kids with Asperger's, there are things that need to be stated explicitly, they're not going to be readily inferred. So I think we gave you five instead of three.

15:21 DA: That's great. No problem at all. I'm kind of looking at the reverse. Obviously, that's kind of the biggest challenges for the school. For the actual child with Asperger's in school, is there a difference is the child's seeing different challenges or they're seeing the same challenges but just from the different set of eyes from the child?

15:38 RW: Yeah. I would say that it's going to be those same issues or predominant ones. Certainly, I think Steven and I would both start with social interaction as number one. It's almost like a foreign language for a lot of kids with Asperger's. For many kids, they do want desperately to figure out how to relate to other kids but they just don't know how to deal with it. It does not come naturally and as they get older, it causes a lot of pain. Other kids may not have the same level of desire. It's like without the desire, it still causes them to have a hurdle that's in the way of them living comfortably in the classroom and relating comfortably in the classroom, so that's certainly number one. I'll let Steve jump in if he'd like.

16:33 DA: Sure.

16:34 SS: I'd like to agree, in that particular case, the school really is on the flipside of the same problems.

16:42 DA: Okay, excellent. In terms of the three to five things that you've identified, can you just go through them between yourselves? What are the better ways in general to be able to overcome these challenges? Start in social interaction, how do we start to overcome social interaction issues with children with Asperger's?

17:00 RW: I'll jump in first. I mean, actually, we're proud of the way we put together a book and it has been very, very well received and what we've done is we've taken big 10 issues that we've spelled out for you. And we've identified here the big 10 issues that a teacher is likely to see in the classroom and then we provided a Menu of Interventions that a teacher or parent has been left to work with these big 10. So, for the social interaction, what we say first is the student has to be protected from bullying and teasing. Steve mentioned before that this is an international problem for all kids. For kids with Asperger's, they may as well have a target painted on them. They tend to be the target and the victims of bullying and it's not always even noticed they're being bullied and certainly not know how to respond to it. So, schools have to have things in place to be proactive about that and to respond to it when it happens. Well, another thing we say is that we have to desensitize the other kids in the classroom. We have to help them to understand what Asperger's is, how it affects the student, how the student is different from them, how the student is the same as them so that they have awareness, an empowerment that then becomes helpful to the students.

18:45 RW: So, another thing we say is we all really like to start in a place of strength. So one of the strengths of these students, it's about their strength and their weakness, certainly, their strength is that they have these areas of passion, these areas that they know every little fact about, they are incredible experts about.

So one thing that we try to help teachers do is utilize those strengths and interests as a way to help students interact with other students. So kind of structure a time for the student to talk about his area of interest and teach them to do that in a way that's going to be appreciated by another child, another student. A big area that impacts the student in the social interaction phase is theory of mind. Steve can probably describe this better than I do. But the idea of learning to understand the perspective, feelings and thoughts of other people, understand that they have a point of view different from your own, that's something that could really be worked on and can gain experience with, and learn to appreciate that there are other points of view. It doesn't come naturally, but it can be taught. Similarly, teaching students how to read and react to non-verbal social cues, that's often something that they're very weak in, but that can be taught to them over time. I'll pause here. Steve, you want to add something?

20:22 SS: Yeah. The other thing, well, let's start with the classroom. Of course, youngsters gain by direct experience and direct training. You can't be abstract with these youngsters, just abstract about social skills. You actually have to train them directly. It's good to have a teacher who can model proper social behavior and also model emotion. Immediately pick up and respond immediately in the classroom to social conflict or someone missing a cue. So social skills have to be directly instructed in the classroom. Now the other thing is, we were very fortunate to work in a school that had then had had a special learning accelerated for, my goodness, over 20 years. So that the regular staff, the non-special education administration and the non-special education teachers had a tremendous tolerance for children with disabilities over the years. And the youngsters and other children, for the most part, were used to seeing children that were different. The whole idea is to be positive. The idea of a compassionate school. There's actually a book by that title called, The Compassionate School, the idea where human civil behavior is reinforced and rewarded. So when you have a school that reinforces positive social behavior, tolerance, forgiveness, acceptance, compassion, it's a lot easier for these youngsters rather than being in a hospital environment or even worse, placed in a

classroom where children are primarily emotionally or behaviorally disordered. So it has a lot to do with context as well as direct instruction.

22:30 RW: I'll piggyback on the direct instruction for a minute. Another book or an author we'd recommend to you, it's Carol Gray who has written about the use of social stories. So Steve was saying we have to explicitly teach kids how to improve their social interaction. I've heard some kids with Asperger's and their teachers refer to it it's almost like learning a foreign language. It's not that it comes easily, but it is something that can be learned. Carol Gray talks about social stories about scripts or situations that are difficult. So if we know that the student's going to have trouble every time they go into the lunchroom because they're not going to know where to sit and who to sit with that it's going to be overwhelming, we write a social story or script for the student that, "When I got to lunchroom, I will sit with this group of students. And when I sit with this group of students, I will listen to what they're talking about and I will try to add facts to their conversation and then I will listen to how they respond." So this is a script that it's actually written out for the student that they can refer to, that they can even look at before lunchtime to remind them of what they need to do at lunch. And again, these scripts can be written for any difficult part of the day, and then it proves to be very helpful.

23:59 DA: Excellent, thank you. Okay. Moving on to the question around bullying, which is one of the other things you talked about. How can we help children with Asperger's with that particular challenge?

24:10 RW: Well... Go ahead, Steve.

24:12 SS: Well, the first thing you have to understand is that bullying is such an important topic that actually President Obama has addressed it in a public forum. It's not just America where there's more bullying in

America than anywhere else, maybe even less, but that it's such a common phenomenon for all children. I mean, no matter what your flaw is, if you're vulnerable in any way as a young person -- and this applies to girls, too -- if you're vulnerable in any way, you can be subject to teasing and bullying. So it's not just youngsters with Asperger's but they are, in fact, tend to present as very innocent, very vulnerable, very defenseless, they don't carry themselves in a macho manner, and they are particularly vulnerable. And so again, this has to do with education in the regular classroom, education in a school. Having a zero tolerance policy in the school for teasing or bullying of any kind. I mean, it's going to happen when the teacher's not looking. It's interesting, I was reading that some countries like Norway, are considering having adult aids, volunteers, at the bus stops to protect children from bullying. We'll start with the environment, and maybe Rich wants to chime in on other interventions.

25:49 RW: Yeah. I think we need to think of it in two ways. One is, what's happening in the environment, so we need to be proactive, we need to talk to kids from day one of the school year about bullying, about the fact that we don't tolerate it, a little bit about why it happens, what to do if it does happen. And then for the students with Asperger's who are such a ready-made target and become the victims so often, again, they need explicit instructions about when it's going on, what does it look like, what to do as soon as they feel like it's happening. They need to know who to report it to, when they should report it. Very, very explicit instructions.

26:36 DA: Excellent, excellent. Okay. Moving on to the issue of rigidity and predictability which you kind of tied in together. How can we help children in that area?

26:46 SS: Rich, you want to go first? Or I...

26:48 RW: Yeah. Yeah, sure. So I think I touched on it before, but with predictability. Often when we come into a classroom to observe a student, and we're often called to do that because the student's having a behavior problem. And often what we find is the behavior problem is the result of some type of anxiety or frustration. And, as I was saying before, the first thing we look for in the classroom is, is there predictability? Is there routine? Is there a schedule that's posted? I had a situation not too long ago where I was observing a student who was agitated in the classroom, and I couldn't see any apparent reason for his agitation. And then I noticed it was 10:20, and on the board it said "10:15, we go to Phys Ed. We go to physical education class." Well, it's 10:20 and the class hadn't gone anywhere so he was expecting something to happen at 10:15. It didn't happen. No one had talked to him about the fact that the schedule was changed because this was a special day, and there was going to be an assembly in the afternoon so the whole schedule was different. That's enough to throw off a student with Asperger's syndrome for the whole day.

28:15 RW: And so now instead of being proactive and working with the changes in schedule to make it clear to the student before they happen, now the teacher was in the position where they had to work with a student who was misbehaving. So that didn't actually ever have to happen if they had been proactive. So that need for routine is so important and teachers just need to pay a great deal of attention to doing everything they can to ensure as much predictability as possible. And then another strategy, which I think is wonderful is there are always going to be things that happen that are unpredictable. So what do we do about those? So one thing, one way we prepare for that is on our schedule for the day at 2:00, it might say, "A scheduled surprise." So something's going to happen at 2:00, and we don't know exactly what it is, but it's going to happen right at 2:00. And so that's a way of... Still part of the routine, but we're starting to get students ready for the fact that they're not going to know about everything that's going to happen and you're going to have to build up some tolerance to that and what are some strategies you can use. A big piece that I'm sure we'll get into is using self-calming strategies, knowing when you are anxious or agitated

and then being able to choose strategies that serve to calm you. So that's something that a student might do as they approach that time when the surprise is going to happen.

29:50 SS: There are a couple of other things, too, for predictability. First of all, every school has a statement of the rules and regulations with the students and parents should sign. And they might be posted on the wall so we can know what behavioral rules that are expected in the classroom. Also, the open classroom for free flow doesn't always work. Some of these kids do better with the physical structure that's very predictable, not just where things are located. And a lot of preparation for change just like Rich said, prepare to have a surprise so they get to learn how to deal with change. Also, giving lots of notice about the schedule, when there's going to be a change in the schedule for those things that aren't a surprise. And then, to help them understand rules that are ambiguous, that's really a problem. How to tell... Let's say, if the teachers are not happy how can you read that on a routine way? How do you know when a joke isn't a joke? How do you know when it is okay to joke? How and when to ask questions? Basically, to build predictability in for safety and then maybe use some surprises as Mr. Weinfeld pointed out, Rich pointed out, so they learn to deal with the change.

31:30 DA: Excellent. Thank you. And anxiety was the next one on the list. How do we help children who are obviously very anxious in the school environment, how do we help them overcome that?

31:41 SS: Well, in our book on Asperger's syndrome and also I've written two books on ADHD, we have this... I believe, in best practices it takes a village. That is, there should be a wrap-around plan for these diagnoses so that the child feels supported in many parts of his or her life. So, for example, there is no medication for anxiety but there are medications for some of the symptoms. So actually, a medical consultation might be worthwhile regarding anxiety because of the two most popular medications that has

the longest history. Those that treat anxiety and depression are the most watched and the most effective. So, part of our wrap-around plan might include a consultation with a physician to look at pharmacological options. But there also are very structured treatment programs for anxiety, one being cognitive behavior therapy. Actually, there's a very good book called the Anxiety-Free Child by Dr. Bonnie Zucker. She's also with Prufrock Press, which is our publisher. And that book very concretely details a counseling or treatment program for anxiety. But there are established techniques. I might say, that on the horizon are some new things such as the use of calming techniques such as meditation, relaxation. I've been doing some looking into research on meditation for youngsters to help them self-modulate their anxiety. So, there are a number of clinical treatments for anxiety which are effective.

34:00 RW: Yeah. If I could just piggy back on what you were saying. What we wanted to help students do first is to monitor their own feelings. So, if they're aware that they're starting to feel anxious or starting to feel frustrated, they can then think about, "What strategies can I employ now," going back to what Steve was talking about with the common strategy. One of the classrooms, that the model classroom that we write about in our book for students with Asperger's, every student has a big visual thermometer on their desk and it goes from green into yellow to red. And they are... Periodically throughout the day they're supposed to monitor how they're feeling. So, when they're nice and calm, and things were going well, they have the marker on green. When they're starting to feel a little bit anxious they might move it to yellow. Red would mean highly anxious and things are really beyond coming back at that point. But the idea of that is you feel yourself moving between green into yellow and if you can recognize that then you can employ the strategies that will bring you back to green. And those strategies in that model classroom are posted for everyone to see. So, everyone is always thinking about, "Oh, yes, I can use one of those strategies and I know which one works for me to help me to calm." And it might be... To one student it might be meditation, for another student it might be listening to music, for another student it might be reading their favorite

book. So, this is the whole variety of different things that they can use.

35:46 DA: Excellent. All those are really helpful, really practical approach that can be used. Thank you. And then finally, fifth one is around abstract reasoning. Helping children with Asperger's with the abstract reasoning issues. How do we get over that hurdle?

36:00 RW: Yeah, this is really an instructional challenge, as I said before. And what we have to do as teachers is really be able to break down our lessons and understand that the concept that we want all the students to learn may be built out of several subconcepts. And for the student with Asperger's, and probably for other students in the class who don't have Asperger's but maybe new to this concept or they just may not be as equipped with their inferential comprehension, we need to make sure that we break it down and we teach all the subconcepts. Students with Asperger's tend to learn from specific to generalization rather than starting with the generalization. They need a lot of examples and then over time can make the generalization. That's another important strategy.

36:57 SS: By the way... Oh, sorry to interrupt. If you've read the work of Temple Grandin, Dave, Temple talks about the unique problems she had as a visual learner where she needed to generalize from specifics to general as Rich is pointing out. I'm sorry, Rich, go ahead.

37:16 RW: No, no, no. I'm glad you said that. That's probably the first time we mentioned this visual piece other than talking a little bit about visual schedules or visual rules. Visuals are very important for learning too. Students really need to see things not just to hear them, so that's an important piece of learning as well. I think we should... Most of the important parts, again I'll just emphasize, breaking things down into small parts, making sure the students have each of the small parts before we go on to the next piece. Also, a

big thing is not assuming because the student is a voracious reader and has been reading since they were four years old and is reading... is able to decode words way above grade level, not to assume that that means that they have above grade level, or in some cases using grade level comprehension. We have to...

38:16 RW: To differentiate.

38:18 SS: Rich, it's funny, Rich just read my mind and we are not of course in the same room. But it's a very important point that Rich just made because again, because of their high vocabulary, you'll think that they're analyzing information at a very high level. But actually, what they might be doing is systematizing, like almost hoarding or it's called systemizing, as you probably have heard, where they'll collect information on weather or maps or railroad schedules or airplane schedules, and it's really kind of a parallel lateral kind of assembly or collection of information but it's not the same thing as higher level abstraction. So, they really fool people because they stick at a very... Almost a professorial level sometimes, but they really just don't get it when making sequential abstract generalization.

39:13 DA: Excellent. Okay, the next question is, which you've started to talk about a little bit on one of the other answers in terms of what are the reasons, in your experience, why children with Asperger's can display meltdowns and temper tantrums in school? I know you've talked around predictability being a big issue to set people off, are there other things that can occur?

39:59 RW: Yeah, let me... I have a quote from our book that I think kind of sums up the whole behavioral issue and assess it very well. So, if you'll bear with me I'll read it. It says, "Negative behavioral outbursts are most frequently related to frustration, being thwarted, or difficulties in compliance when a particularly rigid response pattern has been challenged or interrupted." So to kind of put that in simple terms, I heard a really

expert teacher of students with Asperger's say don't think of it as they won't think of it if they can't. Think of it as something that has gone wrong. Something is not working in the way it should be. And it's not often a willful disobedience or a student just trying to misbehave, it's something... We've talked a lot in this hour about all the preparations that the teacher needs to do, or that school needs to do. When you're seeing this behavior, most often, something is missing. I'm not blaming teachers because this is very difficult and they need to step back and do some more planning just for the student or the student might not be appropriate for this typical classroom environment to be in. Not for the entire day and that's something we could get into but every student with Asperger's is different. Some need a small class environment, some students, they're just fine in a large class environment. But again, I think in terms of the misbehavior, it's coming from a place. There's something in the environment that's not working for the student. I don't know if you see it that the same way, Steve.

41:52 SS: I do, and I want to add something. I want to just reinforce first what Rich said that they're not being bad, they're losing control because they're desperate, "Help us, we don't know what to do." Now, I do want to add something that's kind of an interesting thing that I'm seeing clinically. Because we have this idea that all people with Asperger's syndrome are innocent victims and they're just vulnerable and helpless. But I am seeing that as people get older with Asperger's, if they haven't had early intervention, and since this is a relatively new diagnosis in the United States since around 1992, we have a lot of 40, 50 and 60-year-old people and up who are undiagnosed with Asperger's. And as they get older, if they continue to experience social isolation and social rejection, you'll see them talking to themselves, you'll see them making more serious social faux pas from inappropriate behavior in trying to relate to people, inappropriate behavior. Although, they almost have sometimes a paranoid tinge, they think that people are picking on them even when they're not because they've gone too long experiencing social rejection, and that's when you get some pretty nasty behaviors. Although, it's certainly a great minority in terms of seeing a terrible

outburst or criminality, it does occur. And so, that's why it's so important not only to intervene when these youngsters are melting down but to help them have coping mechanisms for social rejection and to develop those skills early on.

43:47 RW: And again, and I would say even before intervening with the melting down to have plans in place, that is proactive plan. So, what we encourage teachers and educational staff to do is to create a behavioral plan for students to sort of look at specifically when are the times that the student does melt down? Is there a pattern to it? Does it always happen right before lunch time? Why did it happen before lunch time? Is the student anxious about going to lunch? What is lunch time like for that student? And then once we've figured out the pattern then we look at what things can we put in place that will change that pattern. So, an example I just gave, that maybe the student needs a social story about lunch time, maybe they need to be partnered with a supportive friend who goes to lunch with them and help them. Maybe they need an adult sitting at their lunch table to facilitate social skills. But we need to look at the antecedents of behavior and then we also need to look at the consequences of behavior. When the student does meltdown, what happens? Well, maybe every time they have the meltdown they get the sense of timeout and they don't have to go to lunch because they've learned that that's the way to avoid the lunch time. So we realized, we look at the whole picture what's going on and then make the changes that are going to be proactive. They're going to help to not to get to the point of the meltdown in the first place.

45:24 DA: Okay. Good. And obviously, it sounds like a lot from what you're saying, it is the pre-planning, the preparatory work. If on occasion that hasn't been done or maybe more than an occasion and it gets to a point where a child may be having a meltdown and actually potentially causes significant physical risk to themselves or to others, what's the best way to work with that situation when you're actually in that situation?

45:45 RW: Well, let's see... Go ahead, Steve.

46:11 SS: Already here in the states we have part of a national law for special education, you may have it over there, it's called dysfunctional behavioral assessment. It's part of a special education... Any child with a behavioral challenge can receive a functional behavioral assessment and then a behavioral intervention plan. And so, a lot of these kids actually have a documented plan in their folder about what is the thing that sets them off and what do we do about it? So, they may actually have a written plan. Also, many youngsters can get a time out, sometimes having an emergency meeting with the counselor built into their plan, whether formally or informally. A lot of these youngsters receive counseling outside of the classroom in addition to social skills support in the classroom. And they have a signal when they're going off or the teacher can detect a signal and have the youngster go to an emergency counseling session right away.

47:25 RW: Yeah, or it may just be that they need a time out in the classroom or a chance to use their calming techniques. But I think Dave, you're saying, what happens when all fails and the student is out of control. First of all, I haven't seen that happening a lot with kids with Asperger's, and when it does happen, things had really failed. Something has really not been done correctly in terms of their environment. But when we're at that point, hopefully the staff has been provided with training about how to therapeutically protect the child, so they're not in danger to themselves or others, how to restrain them in a very careful and positive way, and then once the student has been able to calm down then, I think we're back to all the things that we've been saying about behavior for the past hour. We have to think about why did it get to that point and what could we have done in a much, much earlier stage to see that coming and to interact with that and what things do we have to proactively put in place so that it doesn't happen again.

48:36 DA: Okay, sure, excellent. Thank you. Another big issue for a lot of children with Asperger's and their parents is school refusal. A lot of children with Asperger's for some of the reasons we already talked about, do find school difficult and often would just point blank refuse to go to school. How do we work with them? How do the parents work, and how do the school work with them to try and overcome this and get them back into school and do as well as they can be?

48:58 RW: Yeah, I'm... Maybe we'll break this into two parts and let me check the first part and maybe Steve, can talk a little bit about school phobia in general and overcoming that. The first part that I would look at is... Why the student's so desperate to avoid the school situation. I want to know if that school situation is really a match for what that child needs or if the child is really desperately figuring out that they just cannot handle being in that school environment. That's where you might need an outside educational consultant and that's the kind of work we do here in the stage where we would come in to the school, we would observe what's happening in that classroom, we would talk to the teachers, and then we would talk to any other private professionals who might be working with students. And we want to analyze is, is that school environment really the right school environment for the child or do we need to be looking for some other types of environment? Or do we just need to be recommending some changes in the current environment? That's where I would start as an educational consultant. What's the mismatch here? Why isn't it working? Why is it the student has gotten to a point where they feel like they cannot attend school, and then maybe Steve can talk a little bit about school phobia.

50:21 SS: You may actually need a psychological evaluation or psychological evaluation update to help determine if the youngster really is in the right place. I've got many, many of this kind of cases. And first of all you have to make a distinction between a school phobia which is a very specific problem with separation anxiety. A very special kind of geo-dynamic school phobia, but you properly use the term school refusal.

And what happened to these kids is usually they end up getting a psychologist or psychiatrist, social worker or some other mental health provider helping the child and the family on the outside working with the... Like a point person, a case manager, maybe like a counselor or special educator, or assistant principal and working on... Or helping that Asperger's kid to get back into school. It's frequently unsuccessful because some kids get to the point where there's been a very bad bullying experience or a meltdown where they simply cannot make themselves go back. I don't know what the percentage is, but sometimes this local disciplinary counseling support approach works and every time, as Mr. Weinfeld points out, you may need an educational specialist to help look what the other educational options are. Not every child... You should look at school participation on a scale of least restrictive environment on a regular neighborhood school, all the way to needing special schools. So someone has to be skilled in the ability to make this determination as where the child is best placed, and that's what our company specializes in. We have a lot of specialties, but our advocacy department is skilled in looking at just this kind of child and say given all the data, the good history and updated psychological information is this child in fact in the right place?

52:39 DA: Sure, sure. Okay, brilliant. Thank you for that. And what about school exclusion, because obviously they can, for some children with Asperger's for various reasons may end up being temporarily suspended or even sometimes ultimately excluded from the schools. Is this avoidable or is this sometimes a natural consequence of the way schools are coping or not coping with the child?

52:58 RW: Yeah, and I think that thing figures very much ties in with the last answer, if the school... If students are being excluded from school, we really want to look at if that school is the appropriate place for the child and what other school might be more appropriate. We certainly believe that there is... First of all, we believe strongly that every child has the right for an education. Every child needs an education and we believe there's a right school for every child. So, if it's not working in the current school to the point where

the school is excluding them, something is going terribly wrong in that environment and/or it may just be a total mismatch between what the student needs and what that particular school has to offer because then we have to find alternative school placement that are appropriate for that child.

53:57 DA: Okay, right. Thank you. I'm conscious of the time, slowly ticking up on us. So just to kind of finish off today, I know you've shared a bunch of different books and resources, are there any other helpful resources that you could recommend for parents who want to know more about Asperger's and education? Websites, books, things like that?

54:16 SS: Rich, what do say?

54:18 RW: Well, another book that I would recommend is not so much for parents but for the students themselves. Two of our colleagues have written a book that has strategies for students with Asperger's Syndrome that come from other students with Asperger's Syndrome. The authors of that are Jennifer Fisher and Janet Price. Believe it or not, I'm drawing a blank on the name of the book. Do you remember the name of the book, Steve?

54:54 RW: Something like School Success Strategies, I think, for students with Asperger's and non-verbal learning disabilities. Something to that effect, but you can surely find it by looking up their names on Amazon, Janet Price and Jennifer Fisher. Certainly, the seminal books, the seminal folks in this field we've already mentioned: Brenda Smith Myles. Tony Attwood, I think we've not mentioned, and he's certainly one of the seminal authors and teachers in this field. Steve would probably have a few other folks to recommend as well.

55:29 SS: Well, of course, you have the writing of Cambridge University by Simon Baron-Cohen who's been there for a long time at Cambridge. But in terms of specialization, frankly, there's not that much out there and I think that's why we've been so graced by having our book be so successful. And we're very excited, and I don't mean to plug for us really, but we try to be very researched based and are very excited about the second edition coming out in 2013. We're going to cast the broader net to make sure we're very inclusive of all the strategies we can find.

56:19 RW: What we really set out to do, Dave, is to take the information in the field that included the work of people like Tony Attwood and Brenda Smith Myles and Amy Quinn and we could name others as well, but to present it in a way that is very accessible for parents and for beginning teachers so that anyone can read and understand it and then use our Big 10 issues that you find in the classroom, and then the Menu Work Interventions and really know what to do tomorrow to help the students in their lives. That's our goal and we're getting a lot of good feedback that it is working that way.

57:02 DA: Excellent, excellent. Now I am sure that a lot of the parents will read more about this or hear this interview would probably want to quite possibly make contact with you. What's the best way people can make contact with you and also where the best place they can get a hold of your book? Can you just give me that book title again so everyone's aware of it?

57:16 RW: Sure. The book title is School Success for Kids with Asperger's Syndrome. It's available on Amazon and through Barnes and Noble and through most big booksellers. You can find out more about us on our website. The website is www.weinfeldeducationgroup.com. We have a contact page on the website where you'll see our emails and you can see biographies of all the folks in our group. We welcome questions, we're happy to converse with parents and teachers and to answer questions the best we can.

58:14 DA: Excellent, okay. Anything else to add to that?

58:20 SS: Well, thank you so very much. If you do have more questions, you'll find our email addresses on our website and we're always happy to talk to institutions and individuals. I'm focusing in the next few years mostly on diagnosis, so if you... For those folks who want to talk about diagnosis or assessment, you might want to contact me. And Rich is really... Although, he and I have a lot of overlapping knowledge at this point, but if you want to talk about consultations regarding school instructional techniques and training, we'd love to be invited to England to speak to your group over there.

59:06 DA: Sure.

59:06 RW: Absolutely, absolutely. Thank you for taking the time to interview us and I hope your listeners will find this helpful.

59:14 DA: Absolutely. No, thank you, thank you both for taking the time today. I do appreciate it and have a great day for the rest of it.

59:20 RW: Alright, take care.

59:21 SS: Our pleasure. Thank you, Dave.

59:22 DA: Thank you.

59:23 RW: Bye-bye.

59:23 DA: Thanks. Bye-bye now. Bye.

59:24 SS: Bye.