

Eye-witness memory and suggestibility in children with Asperger syndrome.

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Individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) present with a particular profile of memory deficits, executive dysfunction and impaired social interaction that may raise concerns about their recall and reliability in forensic and legal contexts. Extant studies of memory shed limited light on this issue as they involved either laboratory-based tasks or protocols that varied between participants. **METHOD:** The current study used a live classroom event to investigate eye-witness recall and suggestibility in children with Asperger syndrome (AS group; N = 24) and typically developing children (TD group; N = 27). All participants were aged between 11 and 14 years and were interviewed using a structured protocol. Two measures of executive functioning were also administered. **RESULTS:** The AS group were found to be no more suggestible and no less accurate than their peers. However, free recall elicited less information, including gist, in the AS group. TD, but not AS, participants tended to focus on the socially salient aspects of the scene in their free recall. Both general and specific questioning elicited similar numbers of new details in both groups. Significant correlations were found between memory recall and executive functioning performance in the AS group only. **CONCLUSIONS:** The present study indicates that children with AS can act as reliable witnesses but they may be more reliant on questioning to facilitate recall. Our findings also provide evidence for poor gist memory. It is speculated that such differences stem from weak central coherence and lead to a reliance on generic cognitive processes, such as executive functions, during recall. Future studies are required to investigate possible differences in compliance, rates of forgetting and false memory.

J Child Psychol Psychiatry. 2007 May;48(5):482-9. McCrory E, Henry LA, Happé F. The Anna Freud Centre, UCL, London, UK. e.mccrory@ucl.ac.uk
