



Asperger's & Marriage

Living with spouse who doesn't fit the mold

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How did I get here?

◆ **Individual therapy**

- ◆ Recent (1994) submission of AS in the DSM IV makes discovery in adults difficult
- ◆ Anyone 25 or older would have most likely missed detection

◆ **A child being diagnosed**

- ◆ The genetic component.

◆ **Marriage therapy**

- ◆ Seeing trends in relationship during courtship and marriage
- ◆ Current statistics report a higher than 40% divorce rate in America. Little research is established for AS and NT stats but some suggest that closer to 80% of these relationships end in divorce

Trends in Culture

◆ Traditional vs. Modern Relationships

- ◆ Many of the problems between men and women have been overlooked in the past but nowadays, women are expecting much better communication, emotional expressiveness, empathy and a deeper connection from men
- ◆ “They are no longer prepared to accept the ‘women feel and men think’ view” -*Maxine Aston*
- ◆ Changes in culture make these problems with their AS partner more problematic and pronounced



Asperger's is a Spectrum

- ◆ We use “spectrum” to refer to the many qualities that can be present within AS population
- ◆ The problems with labels- What is the difference between Asperger's and High Functioning Autism?
- ◆ Sometimes NT's and AS individuals share similar traits
- ◆ Out of 100 pieces, someone with AS will maybe have 80 and a NT will only have 10 *-Tony Attwood*



How Common is AS?

- ◆ The prevalence is reported to be anywhere from 1 in 1,000 people to 1 in 250 people.
- ◆ Males versus females: originally thought to be about 20:1, more recently anywhere from 8:1 to 2:1 (males: females).
- ◆ Often traits are observed in family tree.
- ◆ Engineers and Accountants often in the family of those diagnosed with AS.
- ◆ Technical and analytic careers are well-suited to Aspies.

Themes in the Relationship

◆ Strengths of the AS Partner

- ◆ Loyal, Consistent
- ◆ Honest, Moral, Ethical
- ◆ Intelligent, Logical
- ◆ Often less interested in physical appearance of partner
- ◆ Child-like or youthful in disposition

◆ Common Problems

- ◆ Difficulties in communication for both the AS and NT
 - ◆ Speaking a different language
- ◆ Sex and intimacy
- ◆ Loneliness
- ◆ Being understood and appreciated



Cognitive Differences

- ◆ **Central Coherence** – the ability to use information to see the big picture (often get caught up in the details and miss the gist of a situation)
 - ◆ Multi-channel input VS. single channel input
 - ◆ Big picture VS. detail and accuracy focus
 - ◆ Memory for gist VS. memory for facts
 - ◆ Sees things in context VS. sees things independent of context
- ◆ **Theory of Mind** – the innate ability to know and understand that other people have thoughts, feelings, and desires that are different from their own.
 - ◆ Lack of awareness
 - ◆ Problems reading non-verbal signs
 - ◆ Impaired empathy

Strategies

- ◆ Approach an AS spouse with logic
- ◆ Avoid multi-step tasks or requests
- ◆ An AS person will learn things cognitively while others learn through intuition
- ◆ You cannot change neurology but you can change the way you communicate

Strategies in Communication

- ◆ Many women cite communication issues as the most problematic in the relationship
- ◆ The partner with AS will have more difficulty reading and sending non-verbal information
- ◆ Make explicit your own needs and wants. Do not assume the AS spouse knows what you want. Do not assume you know what your NT partner wants
- ◆ It is often helpful to explain to the AS partner the logical rationale, or the “why” of your request



Communication Cont.

- ◆ Deal with one subject at a time
- ◆ Give the AS partner time to adjust to requests and new circumstances. Understand that “no” may be the first response to new ideas but this may mean “I need more time to think about it”
- ◆ Find ways to bridge the gap between the emotional world and cognitive/ thinking world
 - ◆ When NT partner wants the AS partner to know how she feels, use thinking words and sentences to go along with the feeling words - “I feel unimportant” & “When I tell you about something important and you don’t ask me questions, it often makes me think you do not care about what happened to me.”

Expectations Outside the Marriage

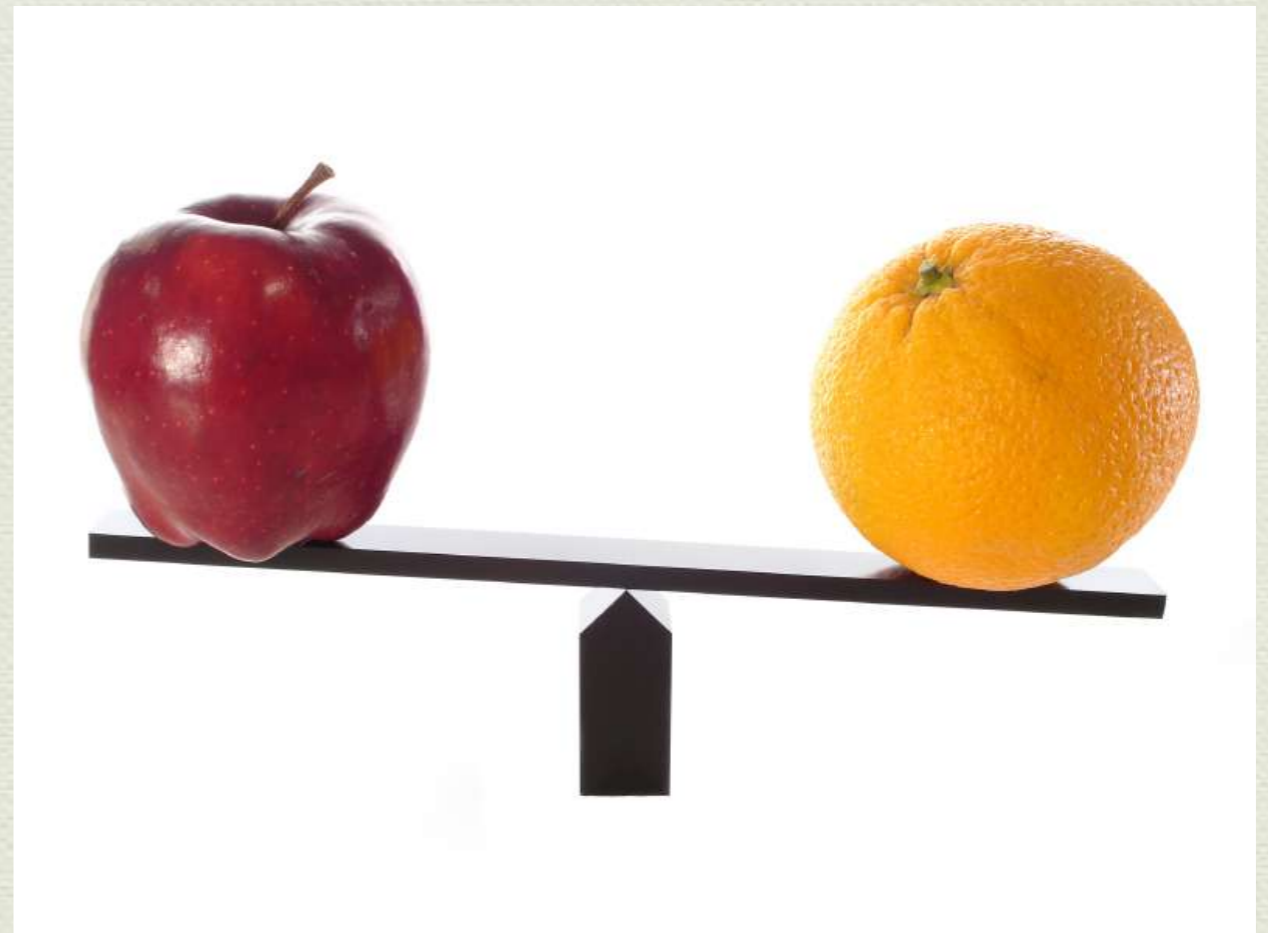
- ◆ Don't expect to get everything from your AS spouse
 - ◆ Look to connect with other women to build meaningful friendships with individuals and groups
- ◆ For the AS partner, utilize activities that are emotional restoratives
 - ◆ Time alone, away from others, possibly with special interest
 - ◆ Use the Sensory Budget concept: “anticipate what things will be hard and how much they will ‘cost’” -*Alex Michaels*

Other Strategies

- ◆ The transition from work to home may be especially difficult for an AS person
 - ◆ Try to allow time to contemplate and ease into transitions
- ◆ Do not attempt to negotiate when stress or anxiety is high. Call a “time-out” and re-approach the subject at an agreed upon time
- ◆ Be clear about the expectations for the division of labor within the home and parenting. Check in with one another about how adequately these expectations are being met

More Strategies

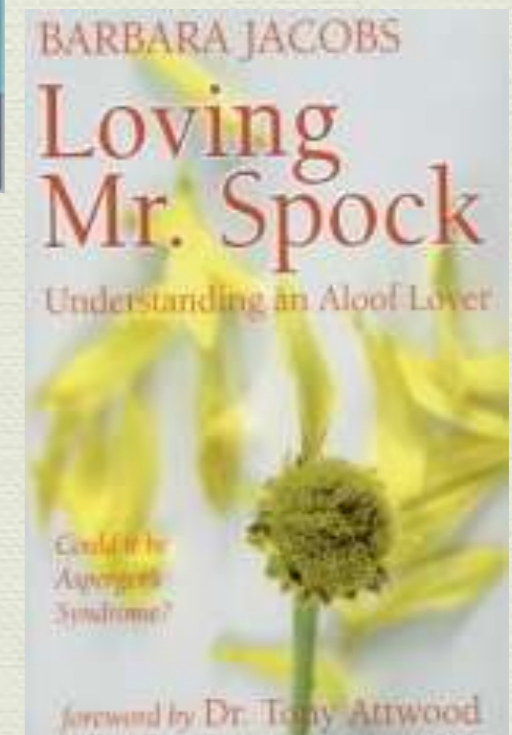
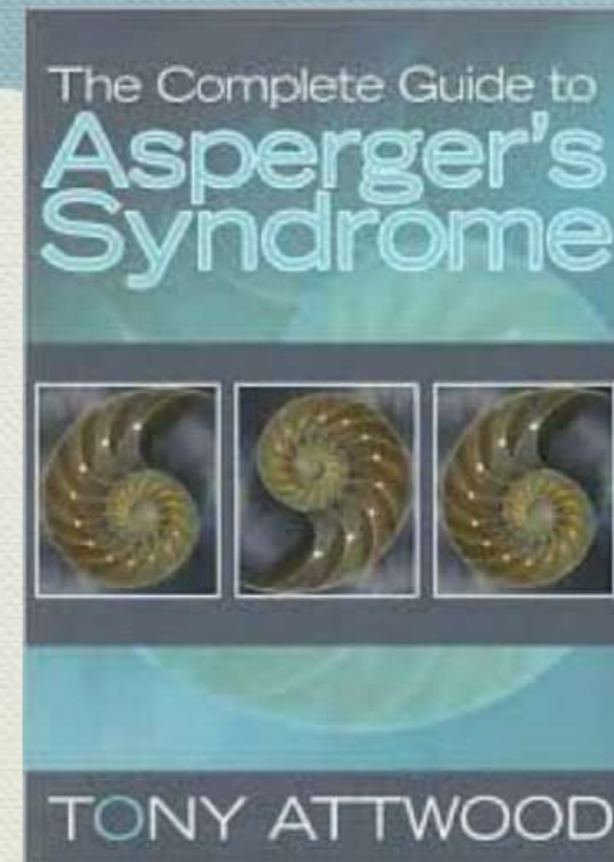
- ◆ Do not take AS partner's behaviors or apparent lack of interest personally
- ◆ Don't be afraid to ask the AS partner about ambiguous remarks
- ◆ Comparison to NT couples can be misleading
- ◆ Be mindful to review your AS partner's strengths



Family and Friends

- ◆ Family and friends may have a difficult time understanding your relationship either by minimizing difficulties “he’s just a man” or by seeing the relationship as intolerable “why do you put up with that?”
- ◆ It is very common to feel alone within marriage. It is important to know that many others have felt just as you do. Family and friends understanding will take a great deal of time and effort
- ◆ Develop a level of expertise to explain AS to family members. Ask for help and support when possible
- ◆ Find others you can trust and if possible, share the same issues.
- ◆ Find experts in AS who can guide you through and offer marriage therapy if necessary

Resources



- ◆ Kathy J. Marshack “Going over the Edge” (2009)
- ◆ Maxine C. Aston “The Other Half of Asperger Syndrome” (2001)
- ◆ Tony Attwood “The Complete Guide to Asperger’s Syndrome” (2007)
- ◆ Barbara Jacobs “Loving Mr. Spock” (2003)



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