

# **ASPERGER SYNDROME PARTNER INFORMATION AUSTRALIA (ASPIA) INCORPORATED**

(Formerly **GRASP** Partner/Spouse Support Group)

*"Mutual acknowledgement and understanding  
of the Asperger marriage experience"*

## **NEWSLETTER – April 2011**

Our next support group meeting will be on  
**Saturday 2 April at the usual time and place**  
2pm – 5pm

College of Nursing, 14 Railway Pde, Burwood, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
\$2 Members / \$5 Non-Members (covers room hire, etc)

This meeting will be an **informal discussion time**.

The meeting will commence with ASPIA Member Nola Norris introducing her Research Project (see page 2 of this Newsletter) on **How AS people think and learn**.

Nola will return later in the year to do a full presentation.

Please bring something to share for afternoon tea

### **ASPIA's meetings are only suitable for non-Asperger partners and family members.**

ASPIA does not have the expertise to responsibly offer education or support to adults with Asperger's Syndrome. Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome are advised to see page 3 of this Newsletter and seek out groups specifically set up to address the needs of those with Asperger's Syndrome. Thank you for your understanding.

### **ASPIA Lunch Club (New Venue 2011)**

ASPIA Lunch Club meeting before support group meeting

**Now at LITTLE NEPAL restaurant**

**Shop C, 135 Burwood Road, Burwood (Sydney)**

From Burwood Station, go left & up the hill, a few shops past the Westpac Bank and then cross the road.

Arrive any time between 12noon & 2pm. All welcome.

### **ASPIA's list of self-care suggestions**

**Available on our website at**

<http://www.aspia.org.au/pdf/2009/ASPIASelf-CareSuggestions6June09.pdf>

### **Other partner support groups/contacts in Australia**

**Brisbane:** Asperger Partners Support Group (APSG): Phone Helen on 0418 761 652  
or email [helen@timelessvideos.com.au](mailto:helen@timelessvideos.com.au)

**Brisbane/rural Qld:** Visit [www.aspiepartners.com](http://www.aspiepartners.com)

**Gold Coast:** Phone Tricia on 0413 085 174 or email [tricia.lemontree@gmail.com](mailto:tricia.lemontree@gmail.com)

**Northern Rivers, NSW:** Phone Debbie on (02) 6676 0483, Email: [northernriversasdnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:northernriversasdnetwork@gmail.com)

**Central Coast, NSW:** possible informal group to start, contact ASPIA

**Perth:** Phone Roz on (08) 9284 5252, Email: [rozsdesk@inet.net.au](mailto:rozsdesk@inet.net.au)

**Perth, \*new group\*:** [aspiepartnerswa@hotmail.com](mailto:aspiepartnerswa@hotmail.com)

**Melbourne:** Visit forum at <http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/aspartnr/index.html> .

**Adelaide:** Phone Heike Haffer on 0431 039 136, email [heikehaffer@hotmail.com](mailto:heikehaffer@hotmail.com)

### **Book Supplier – Footprint Books**

For books on a wide range of topics relating to Asperger's Syndrome, including relationships, visit Footprint Books (Sydney) [www.footprint.com.au](http://www.footprint.com.au) . Online ordering available.

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<b>ASPIA Meeting Dates for 2011</b>	
March 5	April 2
May 7	June 4
July 2	August 6
September 3	October 1
November 5	December 3

**Family Law Web Guide**

A Family Law website has been recommended to us.  
It is a website specially set up where ordinary people can raise issues  
or ask questions in relation to Family Law matters.  
Visit <http://www.familylawwebguide.com.au>

**Research: How do people with Asperger Syndrome think and learn?**

(Repeated from February Newsletter)

How is it that people with Asperger Syndrome can struggle at school or have a learning disability and yet be so gifted and knowledgeable in their areas of special interest? A doctoral student from the University of Wollongong is researching how people with Asperger Syndrome think and learn. This is a new area of research as previous educational research has focused on social and behavioural issues at school, rather than learning.

**The researcher, Mrs Nola Norris, is a member of ASPIA** and is looking for participants who are interested in sharing their experience on this topic. Participants will be adults diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome and/or people close to them such as partners, parents, adult siblings, teachers and so on. Young people, aged 14 or older, are also sought because of their current or recent school experience.

Involvement will be an audio-recorded interview, lasting up to an hour, which will be an opportunity to share thoughts and experiences relevant to learning and Asperger Syndrome. If they wish, participants may also share items of interest which express their thoughts and feelings on the topic, for instance, emails, blogs, diary entries, photos, drawings. If a face-to-face interview is not suitable, alternative communication such as email/chat can be used.

If you are interested, or know someone who might be, please contact Nola Norris by email at [ngn01@uow.edu.au](mailto:ngn01@uow.edu.au) or by leaving your contact details on (02) 4647 5333. She will send you more information to help you decide whether you'd like to be involved. Participation is voluntary and all personal information is kept strictly confidential.

The results of the research study will be used to develop a framework for understanding how people with Asperger Syndrome learn and become highly accomplished in certain areas and for professional development of mainstream school teachers who teach students with Asperger Syndrome.

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Tony Attwood's Minds & Hearts Clinic will be holding a Workshop in Sydney on the topic  
**"Succeeding with Asperger's Syndrome in the Teens"**

Saturday 16 April, 8.30am – 5.00pm

Venue: Karstens Conference Rooms, 111 Harrington Street, Sydney

Register online: [www.mindsandhearts.net](http://www.mindsandhearts.net) or Phone (07) 3844 9466

**Support groups and resources for adults with Asperger's Syndrome**

**Support Group for Adults with AS – Burwood, Sydney**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday every month**

Contact Eleanor Gittins on 0408 954 358 or email [janetgittins@hotmail.com](mailto:janetgittins@hotmail.com)

**Support group for Adults with AS – North Shore, Sydney**

Visit website for announcements [www.jdpsy.org](http://www.jdpsy.org)

Or call Jeroen Decates on 0402 028 588

**AS Social Group "Social Steps" – Wollongong**

Now on the first and third Wednesday of every month, 6.00pm – 8.00pm

The Palm Court Hotel, Corrimal.

Please contact Samantha at [asd.support@hotmail.com](mailto:asd.support@hotmail.com)

**\*New\* Brisbane – AU-SOME Women and Girls' Group**

Contact Camilla Connolly [camillaconnolly@optusnet.com.au](mailto:camillaconnolly@optusnet.com.au) or

Rachael Harris [Rachael.counsellor@gmail.com](mailto:Rachael.counsellor@gmail.com)

New website [www.camillaconnollyasd.com](http://www.camillaconnollyasd.com)

Aspect also has resources for adults: Email: [infoline@autismspectrum.org.au](mailto:infoline@autismspectrum.org.au) or Phone: 8977 8377

and a **\*social group in Sydney for diagnosed adults\***

Contact Caroline Smith, the group Co-ordinator at [carolinesmith@autismspectrum.org.au](mailto:carolinesmith@autismspectrum.org.au)

Workshops on Relationships, social skills, sexuality – Liz Dore, [www.relationshipsandprivatestuff.com](http://www.relationshipsandprivatestuff.com)

**Giving Neurotypical Partners a Voice – Research being conducted through Bond University, Qld**

Re-printed from previous newsletters: last call for participants.

Dr Lisa Abel & Dr Vicki Bitsika from Bond University (Australia) are conducting research into the mental health outcomes for those individuals who are (or recently have been) in an intimate relationship with someone who has been diagnosed with (or is suspected of having) Asperger's syndrome. The aim of the research is to investigate the influence of fatigue, resilience, and stress on depression and anxiety in partners of individuals with Asperger's. While the impact on mental health and well-being in relation to parents with a child with Asperger's syndrome is being researched in earnest, little empirical research has been carried out in relation to the experience of partners of individuals with the disorder. Just as the demands of parenting a child with autism-based difficulties can often tax the emotional and physical resources of caregivers, it is anticipated that being intimately involved with someone with Asperger's syndrome would present its own set of unique challenges and difficulties.

The project involves the completion of a questionnaire and an interview (optional). If you are interested in participating, please contact Dr Lisa Abel via email ([label@bond.edu.au](mailto:label@bond.edu.au)) or alternatively access the questionnaire using the following URL: <https://www.psychdata.com/s.asp?SID=137615&Label1=EnterData>

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Thoughts . . .

Instead of writing something myself this month, I thought I'd re-print (with permission) a very interesting article here that was brought to my attention just this past week.

The author of the article is John Elder Robison, the author of the book "Look me in the Eye" and also the new book released just a few days ago with the title "Be Different: Adventures of a Free-Range Aspergian, with practical Advice for Aspergians, Misfits, Families and Teachers." See John's website at [www.johnrobison.com](http://www.johnrobison.com) . (BTW, John is the elder brother of the author of "Running with Scissors".)

### **Are Aspergians really Rude and Inconsiderate?**

By John Elder Robison

One common characteristic of people with Asperger's is that we are more or less blind to the non-verbal communications of others. As a result, we find ourselves forever saying and doing the wrong thing, with the best of intentions. We're described as arrogant, aloof, uncaring and inconsiderate.

I contend that we are none of those things. I believe we are simply blind, emotionally.

We do not respond to other people's observable cues because we don't see them. Neurotypical people read the signals and respond; we don't. But just as a visually blind person can understand a world he can't see, I can understand and feel empathy and emotion even though I can't automatically see the triggers.

For example, I'm quite sure I feel empathy for other people. If my wife were to be injured in a fall, I would immediately share her pain and distress. I would become distressed myself, and my top priority would be to relieve her discomfort. That's what empathy is all about.

When it plays out in the real world, though, it's easy for people to get a wrong impression. Imagine my wife and me, walking on the recreational trail. She trips on a stick and falls. I turn and look at her. There's no sign of injury. None of her limbs seem twisted or broken. She did not yell loudly, and she's not making any loud noises now.

"Are you damaged?" I ask because I know it's possible to sustain damage that's not visible from the outside. I'm not too worried, though, because I know most falls do not result in injury. I've seen this before.

"No, I don't think so." Her answer reassures me that there is no cause for alarm. I'm relieved.

"OK, then, get up and let's go." I give the only practical answer I can see. The day is passing, and we are standing still. Time to get moving again!

I have had third parties observe exchanges like that with a very critical eye. "I can't believe you're so callous," they say. But if you read my thoughts, I wasn't callous at all. I made a reasoned evaluation of the situation and acted appropriately.

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Article by John Elder Robison, cont'd  
**Are Aspergians really Rude and Inconsiderate?**

The relief I felt when she said she wasn't hurt was a genuine empathy reaction. And in that case, it's all that was needed. There was no real injury or pain to share or mitigate. If there had been injury, I was calm and logical and ready to act. Luckily, that wasn't necessary.

Why is my wife satisfied with that response?

Sometimes observers challenge us with questions like that. It's a valid question . . . we meet many alienated [Asperger](#) spouses at my speaking events. In our case, the answer is simple. She's known me for many years. There have been times when she was hurt, and in those times I never failed to be there, supportive and helpful. I have shown my empathy by my actions over a period of years. She knows it's there even though the superficial manifestations may be missing in situations. Therefore, she's perfectly comfortable with my response, as nothing was really wrong. She knows that I'd have responded very differently if her leg had been broken.

What might one conclude from that? She is very sensitive to me, and she can sense what I'm thinking and feeling even though I give very little sign. She's comfortable with what she sees and senses. Her greater than average sensitivity offsets my own partial blindness. Together, we make a successful [team](#).

She knows that I am just as caring as anyone else. I just show it in different ways.

Sometimes people ask me, "What kind of person should a guy with Asperger's look for?"

I can't speak for you, but this is an answer that's worked for me:

People with Asperger's have very weak sensitivity to other people's thoughts and feelings. But we often offset that with exceptionally strong logical brains. Therefore, we are [wise](#) to seek a mate with exceptional emotional sensitivity and less logical brainpower. Then, our mental abilities compliment each other's. One of us has great [emotional intelligence](#), and the other has great logical [intelligence](#).

Individually, we're each weak. Together, though, we are very strong. Of course, your mileage may vary.

By [John Elder Robison](#). Originally posted on [PsychologyToday.com](#)  
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