

ASPIA NEWSLETTER - December 2016

Next ASPIA partner support group meeting: **Saturday 3rd December**

AT: THE RUGBY BAR, CLUB BURWOOD, 97 Burwood Road, Burwood (Sydney)

(Not to be confused with the RSL Club in Shaftesbury Road)

Club Burwood is a smaller club, and is on the corner of George Street, just a short walk down the hill from the railway station. **The Rugby Bar is downstairs.**

Time: 1.30pm for 2pm start, concludes 5pm.

Cost: \$10.00 for non-members, \$5.00 for members (membership is \$55 per year, includes library)

PARKING: The best option is the John Street car park behind the Club (Wilson parking). \$4 daily rate for weekends. Plenty of available spaces. Other options are mostly metered or too far away.

LUNCH CLUB is at the Club (from 12noon), and drinks/dinner after the meeting for those who can stay on. There is great benefit in getting to know each other informally over dinner or drinks.

GOOD NEWS – Club Burwood has accepted our room booking for 2017! Meeting dates below.

What's happening at our DECEMBER meeting?

We will welcome Carer Support Specialist **Patricia Berrutti** to talk to us about Self Care.

If there's anyone who understands the needs of carers, it is Patricia. I (Carol) was privileged to attend several therapy groups which Patricia facilitated back in the early 2000's while she was undertaking the Carers Mental Health Project. She is fabulously engaging, friendly and supportive, and I feel honoured and excited to introduce her to our group of "Carers".

Patricia holds a Diploma of Communication and Counselling with ACAP, and a Diploma of Clinical Supervision, both of which she obtained to give credibility to the Carer Education Programmes she provided to Carers. Patricia is excited to share that there has been a longitudinal evaluation with the Carers Mental Health Project demonstrating that carers continued to benefit from these programmes well after three years, which resulted in very much reduced admissions to hospital for the people they cared for.

During her working life, Patricia was Patient Liaison Officer for the Cardiothoracic Office at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Regional Coordinator for the Carers Mental Health Project, Carer Support Officer for South West Sydney Area Health Service, and Carer Support Coordinator for the Australian Foundation for Disability. In these roles, she was providing support for Carers.

Patricia also has her own personal carer experience of over 30 years, and continually promotes the importance of Self Care for Carers.

Please consider staying on for a drink and/or dinner after the meeting. This is the last support group meeting until February.

(Additional Note: Bring something warm to put on during the meeting just in case. The air conditioning in the Rugby Bar is inconsistent and can be freezing, although it seems of late it has been too warm.)

This Saturday 3 December is our final ASPIA Support Group Meeting for 2016	
Meeting Dates for 2017	
January – No meeting (see "Meetup" group)	4 February
4 March	1 April
6 May	3 June
1 July	5 August
2 September	7 October
4 November	2 December

ASPIA Meetup Group – for partners

ASPIA has created a Meetup Group to increase our social profile and help us stay in touch better. We have called it Sydney Partners of Adults with Asperger's Syndrome (ASPIA), and it is a closed group, meaning people need to apply to join. It is free for ASPIA members and Yahoo Group members, \$5.00 for others. Please follow the link, and click on "join us".

<https://www.meetup.com/Sydney-Partners-of-Adults-with-Aspergers-Syndrome-ASPIA/>

We will use this Meetup platform to organize a social get-together in January, and other events. Please follow the link above to join our Meetup Group so you can stay informed.

Older news and items

Reminder about Divorce Partners who offer low-cost settlement negotiation packages for couples who hope to avoid the horrendous cost and adversarial experience of lawyers and the Family Court Process.

Website: www.divorcepartners.com.au Facebook: www.facebook.com/divorcepartners

ASPIA's online Yahoo discussion group – \$25.00 subscription.

Visit ASPIA's website at www.aspia.org.au/contactus.html to request to join – Carol will email you with instructions once she receives notification of your payment. Please indicate which group you prefer to be a part of. The forum is a great place to discuss sensitive stuff that can't be published in newsletters, etc, and with an option for men now, more needs can be met more effectively.

ASPIA's website contains lots of helpful information sheets, plus information on other support groups, professionals, links, etc: <http://www.aspia.org.au>

Sydney Groups available for adults with AS and also couples

Clinical Psychologist Jeroen Decates runs groups for adults with AS and also for couples.

Psychologist Eleanor Gittins is running a couples group in Menai.

Please refer to the professionals list on the ASPIA website for their contact details.

Thought

As the year comes to an end, and we face end of year events, celebrations and holidays that don't always go smoothly, perhaps there are a few things we can remember to help us climb our way through this time a little more "intact".

Human contact: As Jeroen continues to remind us, remember and cherish your "neurotypical self" and seek contact, conversations and experiences that nourish your "neurotypical" needs. Our AS partners cannot do this, as they are not socially wired or emotionally tuned in, so it is essential to remember that we cannot survive emotionally unless we take deliberate steps to create those opportunities with other neurotypical souls. It is my aim to develop and promote the "Meetup" platform (Sydney Partners of Adults with Asperger's Syndrome Meetup Group) to enable us to organise more social get-togethers between meetings. We'll try to organise something informal for January, but please let me know if you'd be interested in leading an informal one-off get-together for any partners who may live in your local area too. Just breakfast, coffee, a meal or drinks is all it would need to be.

Pre-plan events: Many partners report that social events, etc, are more successful if there is a plan developed with their AS partner prior to the event. Talk about where it will be, who will be there, what to wear, how you will travel, what time to leave, what time it finishes, how long you'd like to stay, what food to bring or what type of food is on the menu, etc – by talking about this stuff you can reduce some of the unexpected stuff that escalates an AS person's anxiety and causes conflict and crossed-wires in the middle of everything. Some couples go in separate cars so that the AS person can leave as soon as their social energy has expired, leaving the NT to enjoy a bit more time with family or friends. Maybe talk about some "cues" too, pre-arranged signals if a plan needs to change, or if a discussion is needed, etc. Or if social events are a nightmare, go on your own, or be absent from the events where your AS partner insists on going but behaves badly.

Consider what you can change, not what you can't: Most of us develop such a feeling of powerlessness around our AS partners because they are so stuck in patterns of behaviour and expression, and can't change or adapt to the circumstances or needs around them. Of course, we continue to adapt around them which adds to the feelings of ineffectiveness, resentment, and also to a loss of a sense of self. We can't change or manoeuvre them. And we've changed so much about ourselves in order to adapt or avoid meltdowns that we can barely recognise ourselves anymore. So what can we do? We can take a moment to look at our responses to them, and how we may be able to adjust or alter these even just a little. It will take courage. Often the first time is the scariest. Start small, but gradually and calmly refuse to adapt, comply, enable or be present around any unreasonable expectation or behaviour. Often an AS partner's bad behaviour is driven by a need to quieten us, align things with their ideals or control their environment so that they can cope. We can remove ourselves, or change the way we respond. Sometimes an adult with AS is actually ok when we become a bit more predictable or clear about what we want or are going to do or not do. If it's a lack of predictability that causes most of their anxiety, then maybe they'd welcome some clearer signals from us. I'm convinced that, out of consideration (which is an NT strength!) we often wait for the AS person to acknowledge or give their approval or permission before we proceed with an idea or plan of our own. Can we just respectfully but firmly inform them what we are going to do? No debate. Give them time to process. Don't react to their reaction. Of course, everything is always an experiment, and so often we do what we do because we're afraid or feel intimidated, and want to avoid a meltdown at all costs. But the meltdowns often happen anyway, no matter how hard we try to facilitate and appease. It's scary to oppose someone's demands, or refuse to comply, but as an adult we are equal and can choose our responses and actions. It is always important for me to add that if you actually fear for your safety, it is essential to have an escape route planned or a safe place to go to, and someone to call. Make sure a professional has documented the presence of any abuse or violence in the relationship or family context.

Remember your dignity: Part of the grief we feel over our loss of a sense of who we are is that we have begun to behave in ways we never used to, and it feels so wrong, and causes us such sadness. But we must be merciful and forgiving towards ourselves. Our behaviour has been understandable as a result of having lived for so long in circumstances we don't understand, and which don't respond to our "normal", conventional or even creative attempts and efforts to create relationship, home and family with an AS partner. It is hard to have to be the "bigger person" and accept our partner's reduced relationship and social capacity, but we feel better about ourselves when we know we have stopped punishing or shaming them for their deficits. Of course, we need to address any destructive behaviours they display, but this must be done with professional support, and with dignity, rather than by resorting to acts of emotional terrorism ourselves, which achieves nothing but escalation and emotional distress even for us. With knowledge and developing understanding, as well as regular support, we can begin to adjust our expectations and set out on the long journey back to restoration of ourselves as empathic, caring, patient and warm individuals who enjoy social interaction and human experiences, but we must begin to recreate this with other like-minded and like-hearted souls, rather than re-investing in the black hole.

As always, best wishes to all for a peaceful and meaningful Christmas, New Year and holiday season, and please take good care of you!

Carol Grigg OAM, Dip Counselling, Member ACA

I provide phone and skype counselling for partners who need to talk. Please see my website www.carolgriggcounselling.com.au

- We have had a phone app recommended to us: [Asperger Marriage Instant Help](#) "Advice, empathy and support for people in an Asperger marriage."
- You may be pleased to learn that [ASPIA's Handbook for Partner Support](#) has now been listed directly on Amazon as [paperback and kindle](#). Follow this link: https://www.amazon.com/ASPIAs-Handbook-Partner-Support-information-ebook/dp/B01MXKY6WM/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1479882551&sr=8-1&keywords=ASPIA%27s+Handbook+for+Partner+Support