

ASPIA

Providing support to partners of adults with Asperger's Syndrome since 2003

ASPIA Newsletter – September 2018

 Our next ASPIA partner support group meeting will be this coming **Saturday 1st September**.

We were to have Clinical Psychologist Steve Den Kaat presenting, along with a colleague, but unfortunately the demands and pressures of providing psychological services through Diverse Minds Psychology Clinic have closed in on him, making it impossible for him to break off to be at our meeting this month. We wish him well, and hope to be able to secure him as our speaker for another meeting, hopefully in the new year.

For this meeting, instead, we will have a long overdue informal discussion time. There is great benefit in having a meeting like this from time to time so we can share with each other on a more personal level. It is also a valuable opportunity to draw on the collective wisdom that has been building up over many years as ASPIA has continued to provide a learning-place, life-line and connecting point for new and regular attendees, and welcomed excellent speakers to share up to date research and information.

ASPIA meeting location: Club Burwood at 97 Burwood Road, Burwood (Sydney) (corner George Street)

Who can attend: Partners and family members seeking support from the non-Asperger perspective.

Cost: \$10 for non-members, \$5 for members (membership is \$55 per year and includes several benefits including borrowing books from the library and being part of a private facebook group.)

Parking: The cheapest and closest parking is directly behind the Club in **John Street**. Wilson car park - \$5.

Lunch Club: Bistro area from 12 noon for those who'd like to chat over lunch before the meeting.

Dinner: Staying back afterwards for a drink or dinner has become popular.

ASPIA's remaining Meeting Dates for 2018

- September 1
- October 6
- November 3
- December 1

If you wish to know more about ASPIA, or read previous newsletters, other information and articles, or find the contact details for recommended professionals, etc, please visit our website: www.aspia.org.au

Thought

Once again we had a wonderfully informative ASPIA meeting on the 4th August, with Psychologist Eleanor Gittins as our speaker.

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She provided a hand-out, which once again, included some extremely useful and interesting information. I would like to reproduce the whole content here, because it is so valuable, but I'll just share a handful of key snippets that readers may find helpful. If anyone would like a copy of the hand-out, just email me at the ASPIA email address below.

- She reminded us that an AS person is largely anchored in perception (information available through the senses), while we (partners, non-AS) are working hard to help him/her understand the overall concept or bigger picture.
- Concept driven (non-AS) relates to knowing that change can occur at any moment depending on the situations or people along the way.
- From our sense of "fairness", we try to justify or explain why we need change from him/her. We include "context" for deeper meaning.
- Context is continually changing too, which is also difficult for the AS person.
- To the AS person, anything other than available facts is white noise, and is to be dismissed or opposed. Hence, hammering the point or having a meltdown.
- Concrete information is typically physically available to the senses, e.g, physical environment.
- Abstract information is not available to the senses. It includes ideas and concepts with no physical features. Some examples are intimacy, respect, fairness, responsibility.
- The AS person tends to avoid anything that has no data to prove it.
- The more abstract and general the language, the harder it will be for the AS person to understand.
- The more concrete and specific, the clearer it will be to them.
- AS person somehow needs to get to the point of realising it's not about who's right or wrong.
- We think **and** feel – this helps us to make decisions and informs common sense.
- The AS individual calculates. They miss feelings, and don't link or connect things. And they don't link their own behaviour to the partner's emotions.
- Eleanor recommended a book titled "Crucial Conversations: tools for talking when the stakes are high."
- She also said (which startled me) that AS people don't actually see communication as a tool for resolving stuff (I need an emoticon here for a dropped jaw and look of shock).
- Eleanor is concerned about us losing touch with our own values and self in the effort to try and understand our AS partner, and to get him/her to understand in general.

On another note, or thought ...

As a result of a recent email from a dear grieving partner, I realise I need to further develop the comment I often make that "Aspies choose their partners well". The comment is meant to lift up the self esteem and self worth of partners because it means we were esteemed to be good people with good qualities, qualities that the AS partner held in high regard in their choice of a partner (at a time when we also held them in very high regard).

The dear partner who wrote to me has experienced blatant rejection from her partner, and has taken the comment to mean for her that her AS partner didn't choose well at all, or has been a complete failure, because he has rejected her and left, not once but twice, while she was still deeply emotionally invested in the relationship continuing. You'll remember that we've also walked with our long-time member and regular presenter Natalie, whose story has similar characteristics.

It grieves me to think that my words, which were meant to encourage, could actually reinforce a sense of inadequacy, failure, low self-esteem and self-worth that many are experiencing, so I want to develop the concept a little further.

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I think the best way to do this is to remind us all that AS people tend to be “systemisers” rather than “empathisers” (this also relates back to the concrete/abstract concept Eleanor shared). The qualities they perceive in us when they are selecting a life partner/spouse tend to be seen perhaps more like us fitting the job criteria as in a job description. They take us on in a similar way to an employer taking on an employee who fits the job criteria to fill a particular role or do a particular task or tasks. Boxes ticked. After marriage, of course we tend to display human tendencies (God forbid!) in response to a host of unexpected and confusing “anti-relationship” and “anti-social” behaviours in our AS partner, and then we start to fail on the KPI's (key performance indicators) that the AS partner measures/assesses us by (their own “system”, or ideal, in keeping with the original job criteria). It's about the fixed role they've assigned to us (concrete), it's not about us as beautiful, caring, adaptable, growing, responsive human beings navigating what we believed would be a loving and reciprocal relationship (abstract). And it seems, in their eyes, our responses have nothing to do with how they're behaving. (See Eleanor's notes above again – “they don't link or connect things, or link their own behaviour to our emotions”.) We were doomed to fail before we began, as our own humanity and personhood is denied.

I don't know if this helps soften the experience of the AS person's rejection of us. For some it may be the blatant rejection of being abandoned completely, with the relationship ending on the AS person's initiative, as in the story of the lady who wrote to me and also Natalie. Or for each one of us, the rejection will just be in the moment by moment small rejections as the AS person fails to connect, communicate, support, show empathy and consideration, etc. This perceived rejection tends to subtly and insidiously pervade the whole relationship, and we all struggle with the grief of that. (Not knowing of course for a very long time that the difficulties relate to hard-wiring and the inability of the AS person to sustain the friendship and intimacy (abstract) aspects of the relationship in the way we had naturally and logically anticipated).

In closing, I am re-quoting from the meeting notes again: **“Eleanor is concerned about us losing touch with our own values and self in the effort to try and understand the AS person, and to get him/her to understand in general”**.

I think an important thought too is that we must not measure our personal qualities or worth by the judgments and responses of the AS person towards us in the ongoing relationship. These judgments and responses will be driven by their own concrete idea of roles, rules and criteria (their own system) and will not represent a generally valid yard-stick or benchmark. Our non-AS family members, friends, colleagues and social network will provide this, as will we ourselves as we grow once more in self-esteem.

My best wishes to all, Carol Grigg OAM, Dip Counselling, Member ACA,
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