

AS in Relationships: CHANGE TAKES TIME

As the co-ordinator of a support group for partners of adults with Asperger's Syndrome, most of the phone calls and emails I receive are from partners who have just discovered that Asperger's Syndrome could be what is affecting their situation.

Their search had become one of desperation as their emotional and physical reserves are near depletion and they are losing hope for the relationship, and in some cases, the whole family.

The discovery of Asperger's Syndrome can be an exciting relief, bringing renewed hope and some renewed energy ... for a while ... until we realise that there is no magic wand.

This part of the journey can be very dark, and it is usual to feel like everything we ever knew has been tossed upside-down and we don't know which way is upright anymore. The discovery of Asperger's Syndrome requires that we re-think the way we view everything and the way we approach everything within our relationship and family. On top of the immense effort that has already been channelled into surviving the situation and searching for an answer, this can seem beyond overwhelming.

It is at this point we need to be merciful towards ourselves and allow for a process to take place over time.

With the search over, it is important to take time to learn more about Asperger's Syndrome and understand where the behaviours are coming from. Time gives you an opportunity to seek professional help for information and guidance. Time provides an opportunity for you to experience the validation that a peer support group like ASPIA can provide. Time will allow you to begin the process of healing and recovery for yourself. Time gives you a chance to think everything through carefully before you make an attempt to introduce the possibility of AS to your partner, family or friends if and when the time is finally right. Time gives you an opportunity to reflect and to forgive yourself, releasing all the guilt you feel from not knowing and understanding it was a disorder. You did the best you could with what you knew. With time you will find you can let your partner off the hook for some things, and you will develop the wisdom you need in order to know what behaviours and characteristics are harmful to yourself and the family and that need addressing.

For the partners who've acknowledged they may have Asperger's Syndrome, change will still take time, sometimes a long time. People with AS have difficulty with change and adaptability at the best of times, so presenting to them that they've got it "wrong" could be enough to cause a shut down or a melt down, and could explain a lot of the denial and hostility we experience from them. Professional guidance and supervision of this process is seriously recommended. An adult with Asperger's Syndrome won't know how or what to change. They won't have a Plan B or an alternative way of doing daily life. Some non-AS partners have observed that as they themselves calmed down and began to quietly change their own expectations and behaviours, their partners with AS began to move towards them and develop curiosity about what was going on. This is the kind of opportunity we all pray for – let's keep praying!