

Helpful comments from a workshop with Tony Attwood and Sue Larkey in 2014

1) Aspies have a great fear of making a mistake and don't cope well when they make mistakes

- Aspies will have a “phobic” like reaction to making a mistake.
- Some will refuse to try because they believe that if you don't try you don't make a mistake.
- They fear appearing stupid and being ridiculed.
- They believe that mistakes prove they are stupid.
- They cannot change their mind because to do so would be to admit having previously made a mistake.
- High expectation of their own performance.
- Limited ability to tolerate frustration.
- Have no Plan B (no flexibility in thinking, one-track mind).
- Less likely to seek help from someone else.
- Quickly “hit the panic button”.
- Intense negative emotional reaction.
- Giving up quickly ends the pain.

2) Meltdowns, emotional reactions

- Intense emotions block them from accessing self-calming strategies
- Intense emotions reduce their IQ
- They need time to calm down
- They need time to process what to do cognitively, not intuitively
- An intense emotional reaction (meltdown) can be for them like a “cleansing” or a clearing of the air, but of course everyone else around them will feel terrorized.

3) Communication

- Match the length of what you say to the ASD adult's level of comprehension and memory. Give one instruction at a time.
- Allow them time to process.

4) Anxiety

- People on the spectrum typically struggle with high anxiety. This is the reason why they tend to be controlling.
- They have the belief that if they “share” they lose control.
- They use passive aggression.
- Create situations of emotional blackmail.
- Become oppositional and defiant (will not comply).
- Can be a “terrorist” at home.
- Parent (partner!) becomes a “slave”, they show lack of respect and punish parent/partner if they do not do what the “master” orders.

- Become intoxicated with his/her power.
- Parent/partner to be calm but as assertive as is possible, be non-negotiable, be impervious to emotional blackmail.
- Use hostage negotiation techniques - never lie, never promise.
- Routines and rituals (an anticipated sequence) help to soothe their anxiety, and help them relax and feel calm.
- The same routines and rituals can become compulsions to do in order to alleviate feeling anxious though.
- Special interest is used as a thought blocker.
- If denied access to the special interest when they are anxious, frustration at not being able to cope without the blocking activity turns to anger.
- Explosion or melt-down takes place, cleanses the system or clears the air.
- ASD adult wonders why everyone else is now distressed and upset because they're fine now!

Tony went on to talk about the “Emotional Toolbox” that he teaches on in each presentation. Things like physical exercise/outlet, relaxation, writing poetry or music etc, time with pets, talking to someone safe, using solitude, meditation, massage, sleep, special interest, reducing sensory overload, medication, etc that a person with ASD can learn to use to repair their feelings and hopefully prevent meltdowns taking place. (Helpful for us to use too!)