

Predictability and control

We were reminded at our last support group meeting how much individuals with AS rely on order and predictability. Predictability helps them know what to do next.

Lack of predictability increases anxiety for them.

Recently I overheard an Aspie say in response to a fairly ordinary event “How could I predict that? What do I do now? I have to work that out.”

Not only are they anxious, they are afraid of “getting it wrong” or making a mistake. They use their intellect to try to work out what to do. And they don’t recognise situations where they can do similar to what they did a previous time either. Each situation is new and they have to work out the “right” response each time. How stressful this must be, particularly when typical people and also life tend to be unpredictable.

It has also been suggested that Aspies may actually flood with emotion a lot of the time, rather than being void of emotion. One can only imagine that this could leave them feeling quite uncomfortable and out of sorts on the inside, although they may not actually know what they are feeling, how to articulate what they are feeling or how to manage it. They often seem angry, but deny they are, so perhaps to us the body language conveys anger, and they may be feeling anger, but not actually recognise it.

If they are flooding most of the time without us knowing, this could explain why some Aspies seem to escalate from 0-10 in half a second without any warning, or they may “shut down” and disconnect.

Knowing they use their intellect, it makes sense that Aspies can learn that certain behaviours such as withdrawal or emotional escalation have the effect of stopping dead everything and everyone around them. What better way to get everyone to back off and get a situation back under control. Like a technique or tool, without the intent to harm anyone, just to have the status quo restored so they can cope again.

An analogy I thought of is like when radio frequencies are jammed. All interaction ceases. If anyone else’s experience is like mine, I become fearful and disorientated when someone has a meltdown. Then I don’t know what to do, and I’m effectively disabled. And the Aspie has the situation back to how they need it to be in order for them to know what to do next.

And to take this to the next step - then they’re bewildered when we emotionally collapse and try to talk to them about what we believe has been at the very least a serious relationship crisis or at the worst some form of domestic violence.

Carol Grigg, January 2014