

Just one word would do

In all my conversations with partners of adults on the spectrum I hear partners yearning for some form of acknowledgement from their ASD partner. I know what they mean, I know what it feels like to have that yearning. Just one word.

One word that tells us they see us, that they understand how we're feeling, that they know what we need, that they recognise our need for connection, that they understand what we're saying, that they know we love them, that they value who we are, that they notice what we do, that they appreciate our care and all our effort, that we are important to them, that they care about us, that they're sorry for words or actions that hurt us, that they love us, that we matter.

That one word would make it all ok. Just one word. It seems so simple. But that one word would convey a world of meaning that our partners do not understand and cannot articulate. They look at us blankly, or argue the point, or think we're trying to compete with them. It's like we're asking them to suddenly speak fluently in a foreign language. A language they don't comprehend and have no words for. How can they see or measure what to them seems invisible?

Often our children are more fluent in the language of acknowledgement, of appreciation, of recognising another's contribution or significance. How joyful does it make our hearts when someone stops to say thank you? How do we live with joy when the one we've chosen to love goes through each day offering no acknowledgement of any way we've made a positive impact in their lives, and worse still, seems to notice only when they perceive we've impacted them negatively?

I'm asking questions I can't answer. But it's better if we change our expectations. Changing our expectations isn't about letting our ASD partner off the hook necessarily. It's about doing something to help us avoid our own repeated pain, disappointment and despair. Let it go, grieve for it, and expect only what's realistic. There may even be other relationships or situations where we've been hurt and also need to let go of the expectation to be known for who we are, or acknowledged for what we contributed. Once again, it may be the limitations of others we need to understand and accept.

It's a normal yearning to be acknowledged or valued, a normal need, one that neurotypicals understand and participate in, naturally. Once again, let's seek out, nurture and draw on the relationships we do have where there is a solid reciprocal quality present.

Carol Grigg, 26th June 2016