

A difference that will remain

A thought that has been on my mind recently has been how we all seem to have a natural expectation that as soon as we find the right strategy for reaching our ASD partners, they will suddenly become neurotypical and we can get on with our relationship.

We seem to have a subconscious belief that somewhere tucked away deep inside our partner is a neurotypical person who will emerge once we find the key or the right method to reach them. After all, each day we do see some little glimmer that keeps our hopes and efforts alive.

Sadly this is a very difficult reality to have to come to terms with, that even if we do find some methods or strategies that improve our communication and interaction, our ASD partners will still have ASD. They think and operate differently. Like Clinical Psychologist Jeroen Decates reminded us whenever he presented at our support group meetings – the difference between a neurotypical partner and an ASD partner is like the difference between a PC and a Mac. They are completely different operating systems. And they can't talk to each other without interpretation or assistance. Much the same with us and our ASD partner.

We need knowledge. It is imperative that we read and learn. The ASPIA website has many articles that countless partners have found helpful and I always recommend ASPIA's handbook as essential reading too. There are many definitions and descriptions and interpretations listed in the handbook that will help partners to understand the different way their partner thinks and operates. I would also strongly recommend reading the Diagnostic Criteria in the DSM 5 – it is reproduced on the Autism Speaks website - <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/diagnosis/dsm-5-diagnostic-criteria> (this lists the social (pragmatic) communication disorder criteria also which is absolutely relevant too!).

One of ASPIA's greatest strengths as a support group has been to provide education and we are so privileged to have had quite a few psychologists and other presenters attending our meetings to teach us and keep us up to date with knowledge about Autism Spectrum Disorder. This has been a great strengthener and enlightener for those who attend.

We need professional support. I don't know how any partner can hope to know how to negotiate daily life with an adult on the spectrum without at least a few consultations with a psychologist or a counsellor for guidance and support, especially in the early days of learning.

And peer support. How many of us have had our sanity saved by being able to talk to other partners? Of course, the face to face support group context that ASPIA provides in Sydney (and other groups in other capital cities) is the ultimate experience but for those who live too far away or can't attend, there are facebook groups where partners can talk with other partners.

We have been reminded many times in our workshops and support group meetings that we cannot manage a relationship with an adult with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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without knowledge, understanding, professional help and support. We don't have the knowledge naturally. Our natural instinct gives us the ability to relate to other neurotypicals, but to relate to those on the Spectrum we need specialised learning.

Carol Grigg, July 2015