

Colluding with the Delusion

For better or for worse, a very strong thread that runs through our support work is the need to be understanding of our partners in relation to their ASD characteristics and difficulties. The truth of the matter is, this mostly means that we have to be the stronger, more accommodating human being in the situation, and go without the consideration and accommodation that rightfully should be ours too in a partnership or marriage relationship with another human being of equal status. But this is the nature of it.

We “get” that the ASD person has so many limitations in areas we are so natural in, and of course we can feel considerable compassion for their struggles and deficits when we see how stressed they can become in work, home or social settings, until we are reminded of how stressed we have become trying to stage manage home life every moment of every day to avoid the ASD partner going into shutdown or meltdown and the consequent disastrously stressful impact this has on the relationship, on the family, on us!

That long-winded introduction was heading somewhere ...

I was thinking how extremely sensitive the ASD partner is to any hint or whiff of criticism, to the point that they read criticism or personal attack into innocent statements that are just factual about whatever is taking place at the time, or for the purpose of making some sort of arrangement or improvement to household functioning or relationship quality for the benefit of all. It's called “family life” actually.

I thought of the word “collude”, how they seem to draw us into colluding with them in their belief that they are without error, that their perspective is correct, that their way is best, that they are a more advanced human being who we are privileged to be able to learn from. We find ourselves rehearsing every word, every phrase, every statement, every conversation before we speak it to purge it of any taint of criticism or judgment or attack, to the point we just can't speak or deal with anything for fear of bursting their bubble.

And that's how I think they like it, or in fact need it to be. There is only room for one reality to exist.

Perhaps they have arrived at their position and perspective as a result of having felt different throughout the formative years when social acceptance and inclusion were everyone else's priorities, but they couldn't achieve this, and so they had to become confident in whatever skill or strength they had in order to create an identity of their own. Still different. But typically using a skill or gift that has been more highly developed than any non-ASD person can achieve. One that sets them above as well as apart. One can understand this happening, their reliance on their superiority in a particular field as a “shoring up” of identity.

But as patient and sacrificing partners, we struggle every day with this apparent arrogance they portray and our own sense of powerlessness to influence them to consider our perspective, comment or suggestion as valid or acceptable, and so we become silent. Or eventually leave. No other option seems available to us.

What is even more horrifying and disabling for us is the requirement on our part to patiently endure being corrected, directed, criticized and often rudely spoken to regularly by our AS partners, sometimes constantly, as they work on forming us into more complete and tolerable partners for themselves.

While we weather the torpedo blasts of rage and reaction they direct towards us if we suggest an imperfection in them.

Survivable? I think not.

Carol Grigg, November 2015