

Headlock

Recently I was reminded of that feeling of being like in a headlock when negotiating the daily happenings of life with a partner with Aspergers. The term “headlock” just occurred to me as fitting for how I felt.

Things might seem to be going along ok, and the level of effort we’re putting in is second to none, but one is acutely aware of how delicate the balance is. One carelessly spoken word, or badly timed question or request, a suggestion of something new or different, a role or task not completed on time or in the right way, a preference or need not anticipated, a different opinion voiced, and everything comes crashing down like a house of cards. Angry reactions, blame, resistance, a meltdown, rage; or withdrawal and silence. Everything collapses, and we find ourselves instantly switching modes to that of dodging verbal missiles and criticism, trying to reason with them, trying to cajole or appease, trying to defend ourselves or our motives, explain what actually happened, justify our mistake or unintended inconsideration, and desperately trying to restore the status quo, and that state of pseudo-peace. Typically to no avail, or perhaps briefly, until next time ...

Clearly, we know what’s required to keep the status quo, and we do a pretty good job of it, demonstrating our good theory of mind, and empathy. We care about our partners, we know how they think and what’s important to them; we care about the relationship, and the family dynamic, wanting to keep things as positive and functioning as well as possible. But it’s so nerve wracking and limiting, and completely unnatural to have to constantly work so hard to maintain the status quo, and peace. Not to mention exhausting. And disheartening and defeating when it collapses so quickly and easily. Often every day.

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