

What is Asperger's Syndrome and how does it affect relationships?

Asperger's Syndrome is a milder form of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Many adults with Asperger's Syndrome are well educated, hold down good jobs and are married and have families. On the surface, although maybe seeming a bit "different", they appear to manage more or less normally. However, the experiences of partners and family members strongly indicate that many adults with Asperger's Syndrome struggle terribly with the intimate and constant demands of relationships, home life and the variety of changes that typical lifestyles involve.

Relationships can deteriorate as conflict increases and neither the individual with ASD nor partners or family members possess naturally the knowledge or skills to understand or resolve what is taking place in the relationship and home. This leads to great confusion, frustration, distress, sometimes domestic violence and often marital and family breakdown. Due to the hidden nature of the difficulties, a general lack of recognition of Asperger's Syndrome in society and limited access to support and experienced professional help, partners can become isolated, developing symptoms of depression, low self-esteem and confidence as well as stress-related illnesses in the long-term.

It is my belief, and that of all of the members of our partner support group ASPIA, that with adequate information, support and professional guidance, along with the motivation of the adult with Asperger's Syndrome to accept guidance, these situations can improve.

If the adult with ASD will not consider learning about ASD or accepting guidance, there is little hope for improvement in the relationship, and the non-ASD partner is encouraged to strengthen his/her personal support network and seek professional guidance about ways to alter expectations and responses within the relationship in order to reduce his/her own emotional distress. Partners of adults with Asperger's Syndrome may need support in relation to loss and grief.

Carol Grigg, May 2014