

ASPERGER SYNDROME PARTNER INFORMATION AUSTRALIA (ASPIA) INCORPORATED

(Formerly **GRASP** Partner/Spouse Support Group)

*"Mutual acknowledgement and understanding
of the Asperger marriage experience"*

NEWSLETTER – March 2011

Our next support group meeting will be on
Saturday 5 March at the usual time and place

2pm – 5pm

College of Nursing, 14 Railway Pde, Burwood, 2nd Floor
\$2 Members / \$5 Non-Members (covers room hire, etc)

Clinical Psychologist Jeroen Decates will present
and facilitate questions/discussion time.

Topic is open.

Please bring something to share for afternoon tea

ASPIA is a support group specifically focused on the support & recovery needs
of the non-Asperger partner in a relationship.
Please see page 3 of the Newsletter, and also our website for information about
support groups specifically for adults with Asperger's Syndrome.

ASPIA Lunch Club (New Venue 2011)

ASPIA Lunch Club meeting before support group meeting

Now at LITTLE NEPAL restaurant

Shop C, 135 Burwood Road, Burwood (Sydney)

From Burwood Station, go left & up the hill, a few shops past the Westpac Bank
and then cross the road.

Arrive any time between 12noon & 2pm. All welcome.

ASPIA's list of self-care suggestions

Available on our website at

<http://www.aspia.org.au/pdf/2009/ASPIASelf-CareSuggestions6June09.pdf>

Other partner support groups/contacts in Australia

Brisbane + rural Qld: Visit www.aspiepartners.com

Brisbane: Email Helen@timelessvideos.com.au

Gold Coast: Phone Tricia on 0413 085 174

Northern Rivers, NSW: Phone Debbie on (02) 6676 0483, Email: northernriversasdnetwork@gmail.com

Central Coast, NSW: possible informal group to start, contact ASPIA

Perth: Phone Roz on (08) 9284 5252, Email: rozsdsk@iinet.net.au

Perth, *new group*: aspiepartnerswa@hotmail.com

Melbourne: Visit forum at <http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/aspartnr/index.html> .

Adelaide: Phone Heike Haffer on 0431 039 136, email heikehaffer@hotmail.com

Book Supplier – Footprint Books

For books on a wide range of topics relating to Asperger's Syndrome, including relationships,
visit Footprint Books (Sydney) www.footprint.com.au . Online ordering available.

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ASPIA Meeting Dates for 2011	
March 5	April 2
May 7	June 4
July 2	August 6
September 3	October 1
November 5	December 3

Family Law Web Guide

A Family Law website has been recommended to us.
It is a website specially set up where ordinary people can raise issues
or ask questions in relation to Family Law matters.
Visit <http://www.familylawwebguide.com.au>

Research: How do people with Asperger Syndrome think and learn?

(Repeated from February Newsletter)

How is it that people with Asperger Syndrome can struggle at school or have a learning disability and yet be so gifted and knowledgeable in their areas of special interest? A doctoral student from the University of Wollongong is researching how people with Asperger Syndrome think and learn. This is a new area of research as previous educational research has focused on social and behavioural issues at school, rather than learning.

The researcher, Mrs Nola Norris, is a member of ASPIA and is looking for participants who are interested in sharing their experience on this topic. Participants will be adults diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome and/or people close to them such as partners, parents, adult siblings, teachers and so on. Young people, aged 14 or older, are also sought because of their current or recent school experience.

Involvement will be an audio-recorded interview, lasting up to an hour, which will be an opportunity to share thoughts and experiences relevant to learning and Asperger Syndrome. If they wish, participants may also share items of interest which express their thoughts and feelings on the topic, for instance, emails, blogs, diary entries, photos, drawings. If a face-to-face interview is not suitable, alternative communication such as email/chat can be used.

If you are interested, or know someone who might be, please contact Nola Norris by email at ngn01@uow.edu.au or by leaving your contact details on (02) 4647 5333. She will send you more information to help you decide whether you'd like to be involved. Participation is voluntary and all personal information is kept strictly confidential.

The results of the research study will be used to develop a framework for understanding how people with Asperger Syndrome learn and become highly accomplished in certain areas and for professional development of mainstream school teachers who teach students with Asperger Syndrome.

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Tony Attwood's Minds & Hearts Clinic will be holding a Workshop in Sydney on the topic
"Succeeding with Asperger's Syndrome in the Teens"

Saturday 16 April, 8.30am – 5.00pm

Venue: Karstens Conference Rooms, 111 Harrington Street, Sydney

Register online: www.mindsandhearts.net or Phone (07) 3844 9466

Support groups and resources for adults with Asperger's Syndrome

Support Group for Adults with AS – Burwood, Sydney

2nd Saturday every month

Contact Eleanor Gittins on 0408 954 358 or email janetgittins@hotmail.com

Support group for Adults with AS – North Shore, Sydney

Visit website for announcements www.jdpsy.org

Or call Jeroen Decates on 0402 028 588

AS Social Group "Social Steps" – Wollongong

Now on the first and third Wednesday of every month, 6.00pm – 8.00pm

The Palm Court Hotel, Corrimal.

Please contact Samantha at asd.support@hotmail.com

***New* Brisbane – AU-SOME Women and Girls' Group**

Contact Camilla Connolly camillaconnolly@optusnet.com.au or

Rachael Harris Rachael.counsellor@gmail.com

New website www.camillaconnollyasd.com

Aspect also has resources for adults: Email: info@autismspectrum.org.au or Phone: 8977 8377

and a ***social group in Sydney for diagnosed adults***

Contact Caroline Smith, the group Co-ordinator at carolinesmith@autismspectrum.org.au

Workshops on Relationships, social skills, sexuality – Liz Dore, www.relationshipsandprivatestuff.com

Giving Neurotypical Partners a Voice – Research being conducted through Bond University, Qld

18 Participants still needed please to complete the questionnaire and 4 more participants needed for interview

Dr Lisa Abel & Dr Vicki Bitsika from Bond University (Australia) are conducting research into the mental health outcomes for those individuals who are (or recently have been) in an intimate relationship with someone who has been diagnosed with (or is suspected of having) Asperger's syndrome. The aim of the research is to investigate the influence of fatigue, resilience, and stress on depression and anxiety in partners of individuals with Asperger's. While the impact on mental health and well-being in relation to parents with a child with Asperger's syndrome is being researched in earnest, little empirical research has been carried out in relation to the experience of partners of individuals with the disorder. Just as the demands of parenting a child with autism-based difficulties can often tax the emotional and physical resources of caregivers, it is anticipated that being intimately involved with someone with Asperger's syndrome would present its own set of unique challenges and difficulties.

The project involves the completion of a questionnaire and an interview (optional). If you are interested in participating, please contact Dr Lisa Abel via email (label@bond.edu.au) or alternatively access the questionnaire using the following URL: <https://www.psychdata.com/s.asp?SID=137615&Label1=EnterData>

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Thoughts . . .

In last month's Newsletter I discussed a particular aspect of communication, and this month I find myself pondering yet another aspect of communication. After all, some say that Asperger's Syndrome is primarily a disorder of communication, so it makes sense to look at all the ways our communication is affected.

What I've noticed specifically in some interactions this past month is how sensitive an Asperger person can be to the way we communicate with them. They notice and seem to over-react to the tone in our voice, the attitude they perceive we are expressing, the words we use and the intensity of our approach. It seems they almost always seem to perceive that we are attacking them, even when we feel we are just seeking to discuss a matter objectively, or make factual comments about a situation to which they are contributing; matters and situations that affect us or the family in significant ways, and that we need to create some dialogue around for the purpose of finding solutions or a pathway forward.

For so many, problems with communication create an impasse in the relationship or family situation and we have no idea how to work around all the technicalities that seem to jam up the cogs. All of us are loathe to criticize or attack our partners unjustly, but we know that the impasses are still happening even when we've gone to great lengths to form our words and attitudes carefully and non-judgmentally. It is easy to want to give up or stop trying so hard out of exasperation and a sense of hopelessness.

Added to this then is what we perceive is a great injustice when our Asperger loved ones seem to be insensitive towards us with their own tone, words, attitudes and intensity. It's easy to feel like there are two sets of rules and we can become very resentful over this. We feel like our own mouths have been stopped, but that we are unable to place effective boundaries in place around the ways they communicate with us that are emotionally harmful.

Before I get your hopes up too high, I have to say I haven't worked out what to do about this yet as it seems to come with the territory, but it's probably still very important for us not to just give up in exasperation or start "treating them the way they treat us" to try to teach them what it feels like, because that's a pathway that leads to nowhere, and it doesn't make us feel any better. In fact, it more than likely will just make things worse because our AS loved one will not understand why our attitudes have deteriorated so much or why we seem like we're out to get them.

You see, what I have realized is that they just do not seem to perceive how they're coming across. This instinct and the ability to moderate their responses just don't seem to be taking place, as much as it's so hard for us to get our heads around. I have no doubt that some of them learn to use an aggressive manner of communication because they've observed its effectiveness in securing the outcome they desire, but I actually believe in many instances that the reactions are based more on how important or urgent the matter is to them, or how fearful or stressed they are, rather than out of intent to cut us down or hurt us personally. I have heard that many with Aspergers are quite distressed in hindsight when they realise how much they've hurt someone's feelings, but they may not be able to convey this to us or know how to avoid it another time. Awareness of how their words and actions are impacting on us requires instantaneous empathy and imagination which perhaps are additional dimensions that their minds cannot hold at the same time. Remember they cannot hold awareness in their minds about what's happening for them and what's happening for us, simultaneously. That is part of Asperger's Syndrome.

When things are calm, perhaps it could be useful to try and provide some illustrations to the AS person that relate to the saying: "You don't need a ten tonne crane to lift a feather." Maybe describe the contrast between a tack hammer and a sledge hammer or a candle and a blowtorch. These concepts may be best presented in writing, using some describing words around how the sledge hammer or blowtorch make you feel, but try to remain logical and objective and keep the emotional terminology simple. Carol.

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