

How To Speak To Your Aspie

Communication - Day 3

Learn and Use Communication Strategies (that work best for you and your partner)

Optimum communication is important in all relationships. Social communication, by definition in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013), is a deficit for a person with ASD.

Non-verbal communication, such as interpreting facial expressions, gestures and vocal intonation is often extremely difficult. Verbal communication can be difficult for people with autism to initiate. These difficulties are due to a difference in neurology and not a lack of motivation.

It is helpful to your partner if your communication is clear, calm and predictable. The person with ASD will usually want to meet their partner's needs once s/he understands how to meet those needs. Explicitly communicating your social, emotional, mental, physical, including sexual needs, is important. Together, partners should discuss information about behavioral expectations. Think in terms of explanation instead of correction. Tell your partner your expectations and have him tell you his expectations. Often you will need to provide very explicit and concrete instructions that your partner can follow. For example, if you need your partner to help with a chore such as doing laundry, give step-by-step directions on what, when and how the clothes need to be washed. If your partner cannot figure out what to wash, perhaps having a system of preparing laundry baskets is needed. For example, circular baskets can be used for dirty laundry and square baskets for clean laundry. You may need to give your partner with autism explicit information and practice on how to give hugs. This may seem as though your partner does not want to be affectionate with you, but remember not to judge his actions and needs through your non-spectrum lens. Any areas of need are important to address in detail. Communicating very literally and concretely will be important for many aspects of life.

Some couples find that texting, emails and/or information written out on paper, sticky notes, calendars or wipe-off boards is very advantageous.

Consider scheduling a time each day to both sit and communicate. Sitting side by side might work best for communication. People with ASD almost universally say it is difficult to process verbal information while maintaining eye contact. This would be especially true when discussing each other's needs. This time together can go a long way to making life more satisfying and keeping your bond as a couple strong.

Again, consider using visual information (notes, email, a white board, even examples from books or other visual media) to convey or supplement verbal messages. Be creative. Visual information is much easier for most individuals on the autism spectrum to process, and it can be used as a permanent resource when anxiety, sensory overload or executive functioning skills are causing challenges for our partners on the autism spectrum.

Realize you might not understand your partner's perspective. Seek to clarify. Recognize your partner may have a hard time asking (initiating) for clarification and/or even knowing that clarification is needed. Non-spectrum partners cannot interpret ASD behavior through their non-spectrum filter and assume that they understand the meaning of a particular behavior of their ASD partner. Likewise, the partner on the autism spectrum may have a hard time understanding their own needs. Each partner should identify their needs and tell their partner. It may not seem genuine if you have to tell your partner every step to meet your needs. Though it can be hard at first, do not think of it as meaning your partner does not care. Think of it as an important step to better appreciate, trust and respect each other.”

From: Indiana Resource Center for Autism
Tips for Women in Relationships with Partners on the Autism Spectrum

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