

Asperger's is a neurodevelopmental disorder that impacts the person's ability to be effective in communicating and socializing with others.

Unlike neurotypical people, they do not have the innate ability to notice and comprehend the mental and/or emotional states of others. These are the reasons many of us are experiencing communication difficulties with our ND spouse/partner. As well, many of us experience relationship challenges with them. We also see this play out in different social settings: holiday get togethers with friends or family, family gatherings, weddings, funerals, etc.

The NT becomes frustrated, angry, depressed because they are not receiving the relational and/or communication reciprocity they expect. There is no cure or fix for Asperger's. This was the most challenging fact I faced with Cooper. I needed to make the honest choice on if I had what it took to stay in my marriage. What it would take was a whole lot of ongoing education, and a relearning of how to have marriage and relationship differently. It took shifting my expectations from what our culture has taught us a relationship is supposed to be, to what is neurodiversely realistic and practical. I learned the art of eminence patience. It's been a tremendous journey. Likewise, Cooper has done years of therapy and continues. He has done his hard work.

However, measure for measure, I have done most of the changing. Cooper's ability has produced a lesser measure. But that's okay. His bits and pieces have brought me great joy, and for that I offer him my honor and respect. I have recently come across the article below. It's a very good reference to understanding both adult and child Aspies.

Asperger's Syndrome:
Problems Interpreting The Social and Emotional World | Kennedy
Krieger Institute

“Like people with autism, people with Asperger's syndrome have a dreadful time understanding what is going on, socially. They do not

always pay attention to the social scene in which they find themselves, and even when they do, they are often not able to make sense of what they see, or to respond appropriately.

There are some claims that what makes them different from people with autism is a greater desire to interact. Unlike more classically autistic children, who may be described as “aloof” or “passive” in their social interactions, children with Asperger’s tend to be “active but odd.”¹ Not content to be alone all the time, they long to form friendships (as they understand them) with others. Unfortunately, they have very little idea how to make friendship work. Their approach is awkward and one-sided, and reflects a lack of understanding that the other person in the exchange has needs and wishes that have to be taken into account, too. Because they cannot read social or emotional cues well, they come off as insensitive, pushy, or strange, yet have very little insight into how they are perceived. One group of clinician-researchers commented:

“They may be able to describe correctly, in a cognitive and often formalistic fashion, other people’s emotions, expected intentions, and social conventions; yet, they are unable to act on this knowledge in an intuitive and spontaneous fashion, thus losing the tempo of the interaction. Their poor intuition and lack of spontaneous adaptation are accompanied by a marked reliance on formalistic rules of behavior and rigid social conventions. This presentation is largely responsible for the impression of social naiveté and behavioral rigidity that is so forcefully conveyed by these individuals.”²

These social deficits, which may be somewhat masked at home where all is familiar and adults bend to a child’s unique style, stand out in sharp relief once the child is placed into a group context with typical peers, whether at informal play groups or pre-school. It is around this pre-school period that many parents first become concerned about how their child is functioning.³ Emotion is another realm that befuddles people with Asperger’s.

It is often said that they lack empathy. If, by empathy, you mean a deep understanding of other people’s specific emotional states and how to respond appropriately, this is true. What it does not mean, however, is that they lack all compassion. They are more “self-

centered than selfish."4 With an attitude towards others that may range from indifference to deep concern, but is rarely malicious. Because people with Asperger's are intelligent but "lack empathy," fears have sometimes been raised that they may be sociopathic. This is absolutely not the case. A true sociopath is a ruthless manipulator with an uncanny ability to read and utilize others' emotions against them for his own gain. 5 People with Asperger's are, in sharp contrast, clueless:

Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome often transgress rules at school, with people, and in the community at large, and their behavior may indeed lead to formal encounters with school authorities or law enforcement officers. However, they typically do not engage in these acts willfully or maliciously. Their social ineptitude and unawareness of social rules and expectations may lead them, for example, to make blunt requests of a sexual nature; or their intense and all-absorbing circumscribed interests may lead them to commit eccentric acts associated with those interests... More typically, however, these individuals are too naïve to become 'competent criminals.' In fact, individuals with Asperger's are much more likely to be victims than victimizers due to their inability to read the intents of others." 6 One result of their naiveté is an unedited, complete and utterly honest approach that can be both refreshing and alarming. People with Asperger's tend to say what they are thinking without the social filter "neurotypical" people employ. They might comment on somebody's race, beer gut, or disability without any awareness that such a comment could be negatively received. On the positive side, this is something valuable they have to offer in the area of friendship: a relationship devoid of double meanings, manipulation, or little white lies.

The more aloof individuals with Asperger's have been likened to Mr. Spock of Star Trek – the logic-bound Vulcan who saw human passion as distasteful and barely comprehensible,7 the warmer ones resemble Mr. Data, 8 also of Star Trek fame – the android who, like Pinocchio, wanted to be a "real" person, but struggled with understanding emotion, humor, and romance. Both characters provide an opportunity for insight into what it might be like to have

Asperger's syndrome: to be so bright in some ways, so lost in others."

References:

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