

THE ASC GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

St. Nicholas Academy for Autism Trust
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WENDY LAWSON: A TESTIMONIAL FOR THE ASC GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

Wendy Lawson was diagnosed with an ASC when an adult. Married, separated and divorced, Wendy's younger son also has Asperger Syndrome. Classified as having significant intellectual impairment when she was a child, Wendy has nevertheless gone on to earn no less than five University qualifications. Wendy is a qualified Social Worker, Adult Educator and also a Psychologist. She is also a highly-accomplished poet and author of a number of ASC-related books. Wendy runs ASC training programmes to students, staff, and support groups throughout the UK and Australia, as well as lecturing on ASC. For further information on Wendy, her forthcoming UK tour dates and how to contact her to ask if she can run a training programme or give a talk for your own organization, please refer to the "Conferences" section of this Guide. On *The ASC Good Practice Guide*, Wendy writes:

"What a terrific thing to be doing! One of the 'gaps' in good autism practice has been that lack of co-ordination of 'what's out there.' This 'guide' fills that gap. It also offers support through the journey and personal perspective found in readers' articles and other information."

Apart from being very proud of Wendy's praise, *The ASC Good Practice Guide* feels that it highlights a very important point: that the Guide is written not just ABOUT people with an ASC, and not just for parents or professionals, but also FOR people with an ASC. Wendy has also very kindly agreed to write some information for forthcoming Editions of the Guide, which is greatly appreciated.

STOP PRESS: GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE NEWS!!!

The ASC Good Practice Guide is delighted to announce that the Asperger Syndrome Foundation has contacted us, and very kindly offered to post copies of the Guide on the AS Foundation website! The AS Foundation values the quality of information in *The ASC Good Practice Guide* and considers it to be a worthwhile publication for their website audience. *The ASC Good Practice Guide* would like to acknowledge the generosity of the Asperger Syndrome Foundation and extend its gratitude to all our new friends at the Charity.

The Asperger Syndrome Foundation is a small London-based Registered Charity. Prior to its establishment in 2002, the Charity's Founder and Chair, Beatrice Buissenet, successfully undertook the tremendous task of raising the funds necessary to sponsor the first accredited Post-Graduate Course in Asperger Syndrome in the UK.

The Asperger Syndrome Foundation sponsors and subsidises high-quality Training and Support Days aimed at professionals in Education and Mental Health, as well being aimed at parents. These Days are subsidized by the Asperger Syndrome Foundation in order to make them affordable to all. All speakers at the Training and Support Days are specialists in the field of Asperger Syndrome.

For more information on the Asperger Syndrome Foundation, contact:

info@aspergerfoundation.org.uk or visit <http://www.aspergerfoundation.org.uk>

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WELCOME TO THE ASC GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

Welcome to the seventh issue of *The ASC Good Practice Guide*, a free monthly resource for individuals with an autistic spectrum condition, professionals, and parents.

Which organisation does this Guide come from? The Guide is written under the banner of the St. Nicholas Academy for Autism Trust, a non-denominational North-London based ASC and special needs charity.

Who writes and edits the Guide? The Guide is written by Christine Haugh, and edited by Chris Mitchell.

Christine Haugh's two sons are diagnosed with autistic spectrum conditions. She works at Middlesex University for a DfES-funded organisation called Aimhigher, where her duties include Project Management of Aimhigher London North's activities for learners with special educational needs, including autistic spectrum conditions.

Chris Mitchell was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome at University, at the age of twenty. For the first twenty years of his life, Chris felt that he was someone who didn't exist, trying to fit into a social environment he couldn't understand. However, once diagnosed, he found a reason for who he was and his self-confidence returned. Since his diagnosis, Chris has completed his MA (Hons) in Information and Library Management at the University of Northumbria. He has also become an advocate for Asperger Syndrome. Most recently, he has published the autobiography *Glass Half-Empty, Glass Half-Full*. Currently, he works as a clerical assistant with Durham County Council's Special Educational Needs Department. He also speaks about his experiences of Asperger Syndrome at various events and conferences throughout the UK, including the 2005 Aimhigher "Transition to University" Summerschool for students with autistic spectrum conditions, where Chris and Christine met, and at an annual lecture at the University of Northumbria. Additionally, Chris coordinates training workshops for professionals who work with ASC. To enquire if Chris is available to become involved as a trainer or a speaker at your event, please contact him at ChrisMitchell@mitchell17.wanadoo.co.uk

To ensure accuracy and relevance, prior to its publication, the Guide was read and feedback was contributed by a range of individuals including relevant education and health professionals from a number of different Boroughs, individuals with autistic spectrum conditions, and parents. Each issue of the Guide will continue to be "proof-read" in this way.

What is the purpose of the Guide? The purpose of this Guide is to provide practical support in the form of a one-stop-shop of information on existing good practice in the field of Autistic Spectrum Conditions, in relation especially to Transitions. "Transitions" is a broad term, encompassing phase transfer to nursery, primary, or secondary schools, as well as to further and higher education and even adult learning opportunities. "Transitions" also covers the area of transition between types of placement, for instance from specialist to mainstream, or from home education to school-based provision. Information provided in this guide will come from a range of reputable, identifiable sources, such as the DfES. Whenever possible, links to relevant websites will be included

alongside the information provided. Always, the intention is to empower the audience by keeping them informed of existing good practice.

How can you subscribe to the Guide? To receive the free monthly Guide, simply email ahaughc@aol.com with the words "Subscribe to Guide" as the subject! If you would like the Guide posted rather than sent via email, simply include name and postal address in your email.

How can you help this Guide? Any reader, whether a professional, an individual diagnosed with an autistic spectrum condition or a parent, who is aware of any existing best practice relating to autistic spectrum conditions and who would like to share this information with others, is welcomed to contribute an article to this Guide! Please email Christine on ahaughc@aol.com if you would like to contribute an article. Also feel free to email if you wish to get involved with the Guide in another way, such as helping to reformat or distribute it! All help is greatly appreciated!

RECOMMENDED ASC READING AND RESOURCES

AUTISM DATA, AUTISM UPDATE AND TITLES IN AUTISM- NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY

Autism Data, the National Autistic Society's database of 17,000+ journal articles, papers, books and multimedia on autism, is now freely available to search on the NAS website at www.autism.org.uk/autismdata

The contents include bibliographic records of everything in the NAS Information Centre Library, together with the details of research articles on autism published in journals which are not part of our holdings. All records are searchable by author, title, keyword or free text. Copies of articles in our library may be ordered, subject to copyright law restrictions.

Two bimonthly current awareness services, *Autism Update* and *Titles in Autism*, are available for £15.00 p.a. each. Subscribers access these via a login on the website. *Autism Update* lists recently added publications on practical approaches and accounts of autistic spectrum disorders, and *Titles in Autism* lists new peer-reviewed articles.

For further details and the NAS Information Centre enquiry service, please contact info@nas.org.uk or telephone 0845 070 4004.

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Stephanie Taylor, Information Officer at the National Autistic Society, for sharing this information with our readership.

TOWARDS JOINED UP LIVES: DISABLED AND DEAF LONDONERS' EXPERIENCE OF HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, AND POST-16 EDUCATION FROM A SOCIAL MODEL PERSPECTIVE

The Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, commissioned *Towards Joined up Lives* in order to uncover the root causes of the disadvantage faced by disabled and deaf Londoners. The Mayor has stated a commitment to implementing the recommendations arising from this report in order to improve the quality of life for disabled and deaf Londoners.

Towards Joined up Lives was specifically commissioned to examine experiences from a Social Model Perspective. As such, it focuses on three fundamental areas of daily life: education, employment, and housing. Barriers to equality are identified and, according to the report, the idea is for these barriers to be systematically removed via changes both in legislation and attitudes, in order that London can become a city where all individuals have equal opportunities.

Published in 2006 by the Greater London Authority (GLA), further information on *Towards Joined up Lives* can be obtained by calling the GLA on (0207)983-4100, or visiting the GLA website www.london.gov.uk. The ISBN for the report is 1 85261845X.

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks David Morris, the Mayor's Senior Policy Advisor (Disability), for contributing this information.

YOUTUBE POSAUTIVE GROUP

A Youtube (www.Youtube.com) Posautive (short for "Positive autism") group has been launched! The Group already contains a number of short videos which show autistic children and adults from a positive perspective. Posautive welcomes further videos, such as self-portraits, films of children by parents, siblings of each other... preferably no longer than three minutes running time per clip.

As for the rationale behind Posautive, member Dinah Murray explains:

"This is not to deny that autism can be very hard for families to cope with and sometimes difficult for autistic individuals themselves, but it seems necessary to get across that autistic people (at every 'level' of apparent ability) can lead satisfying lives, make a contribution, have fun, relate well to other people, etc etc... In the face of a tide of fear, self-pity, and talk of suffering this is a small effort to offer a different perspective."

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Dinah Murray for contributing this information.

CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH SERVICES

FILM EDUCATION- NATIONAL SCHOOLS FILM WEEK

Film Education is showing over 1000 films across the nation during National Schools Films Week. In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, the week runs from 16th-20th October. In Scotland, the week runs from 30th October-3rd November. The screenings need to be booked in advance and are **free** for **schools** and **home educators** to attend! Certain cinemas are running special screenings specifically for children with ASC, for instance the Barnet Odeon is running a special screening of *Finding Nemo* specifically for children with ASC at 10am on Tuesday 17th October! Film Education has both a Primary Programme and a Secondary Programme, including some scheduled special events such as screenings incorporating storytellers. For further details, please visit www.nsfw.org or call (0207)439-4880.

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Stephanie Moriarty for contributing this information.

HARINGEY AUTISM- SIBLINGS GROUP FOR FOOTBALL COACHING

Alongside its established football coaching sessions for children with Asperger Syndrome/High-Functioning Autism aged 7-12 years, a **siblings'** football coaching group is due to be launched on 4th October 2006. The siblings' group sessions are aimed at 7-12 year olds and will run, alongside the AS/HFA children's sessions, on Wednesdays at 4:45pm. The venue is the New River Sports Centre, White Hart Lane, London N22. The sessions are run by Tottenham Hotspur Foundation, Mencap and Active London Project. For further details on either the AS children's or siblings football sessions, please contact Christina Heidensohn (Haringey Autism) on (0797)630-5684.

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Haringey Autism's Christina Heidensohn for contributing this information.

PARENTING TODAY CONSULTATION SERVICE (LONDON)

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Parenting Today's Penny Georgiou for contributing this information:

Parenting Today is a consultation service for those facing the challenges of raising a family and dealing with the pressures of contemporary life. More particularly, this service has been set up in response to questions and concerns posed by parents, whose children are experiencing difficulties at school.

On the side of the children, these difficulties often present in terms of obstacles to learning – such as those associated with conditions such as dyslexia, ASC, dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD. Here, often

apparently simple tasks seem impossible and become the site of a great deal of turbulence and distress.

What Parenting Today has to offer:

- * A perspective of learning difficulties that turns conventional thinking on its head, with surprising results.

- * Ways of approaching issues that reduce overwork by parents, pupils and educators. In a confidential consultation, discussing the issues specific to your particular situation, it becomes possible to identify new pathways for responding to challenges.

- * Parenting Today draws on experience and learning from several relevant fields including: parenting; youth work; higher education; secondary education – both mainstream and specialist schooling, and psychoanalysis.

For further details, email info@parenting-today.co.uk or visit <http://parenting-today.co.uk>

TRANSITION PROGRAMMES/SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS WITH ASC AGED 16+

AIMHIGHER LONDON NORTH/LONDON EAST THAMES GATEWAY

In October, Aimhigher London North together with Aimhigher London East Thames Gateway are running an all-expenses paid three-day Transitions Programme specifically designed for students on the autistic spectrum who are considering progression to any UK University.

The Programme content includes the following sessions: the range of courses available at UK Universities and entry requirements for different courses/Universities; the process of selecting possible Universities and applying to University, including the issue of disclosure of special educational needs; funding issues including fees, bursaries, grants and the Disabled Student Allowance; the role of disability support service, mentors, and support workers; managing social and emotional issues commonly arising in a College/University environment; tours of the campus, and the opportunity to sit in on lectures and meet lecturers and students alike in a safe, welcoming supervised setting.

WHERE: Hendon Campus, Middlesex University

WHEN: Tuesday 17th-Thursday 19th October (9:45am-3pm on the 17th and 18th, 9:45-3:30pm on the 19th)

COST: Free (including transportation costs and University refreshments/luncheon- please note that special diets can be catered for)

LEAD STAFF AT THE PROGRAMME: include Paul Craven (CONEL) and Chris Mitchell. Chris will be talking to students from a first-hand perspective about successfully making the transition from school to college and University. Chris is highly experienced at talking to both staff and students on this subject. One of *The ASC Good Practice Guide* readers, Louise Emerson (a Language Resource Base Teacher at Greencroft School, Stanley, in Co. Durham) has kindly provided a review of a talk recently given by Chris. This is what Louise says about Chris's talk:

"I listened to Chris give a talk to a group of teachers about being an adult with Asperger's Syndrome. Afterwards I thought this would be a great opportunity to ask him to do a similar talk with some Year 11 students back at school.

These students said they found this useful as they were able to talk to someone who had similar interests; it also helped them understand themselves a little bit more and further their understanding of Asperger's Syndrome. As the students were about to leave secondary school they had the opportunity to ask Chris questions. They said this was very good as Chris was able to give first hand experiences and to talk with them about any apprehensions they had.

The talk was invaluable to ease the worries these youngsters had about college and adult life. I would definitely like Chris to talk to students in future years and I have found this a valuable resource that other schools / colleges should consider. I also think that colleagues and the students' peers would have benefited from someone talking from a personal perspective about Asperger's Syndrome. Thank you, Chris." (Many thanks to Louise Emerson for contributing this review)

Who is eligible to attend the Aimhigher Transitions Programme?

Students MUST meet the following criteria to be offered a place on the Programme:

- participants must have an autistic spectrum or associated condition
- participants must be aged 16+
- participants must be resident in one of the following 10 London Boroughs:

Barking and Dagenham, Barnet, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest

Aimhigher will accept a maximum of 12 students on to the Programme. Participants must complete and return a Registration Form. Upon confirmation of acceptance of place on the Programme, participants receive a Welcome Pack detailing the scheduling of the three days.

Parents, carers, professionals and students themselves are all most welcome to contact Aimhigher for further information on the ASC Transitions Programme. Enquiries regarding further information or requests for registration forms should be directed to Christine Haugh, Aimhigher London North's Disability Development Officer, on (0208)411-6308 or via email to C.Haugh@mdx.ac.uk

CONFERENCES, LECTURES, SEMINARS AND SESSIONS

ACTION FOR ASD- SOCIAL STORIES WORKSHOP

Action for ASD have arranged a workshop produced by Carol Gray's Social Stories Team and presented by Team member Eileen Arnoon.

An all-day event, the Workshop consists of lectures, discussions, and practice in writing social stories.

WHERE: Northside House, Elm Street Business Park, Burnley, Lancashire, BB10 1PD

WHEN: Wednesday 31st January 2007, 9:30am-4:30pm (tbc, registration from 9am)

COST: Parent Members-£40/Parent Non-Members-£50/Professional Members-£90/Professional Non-Members-£100/Members with ASD-£40/Non-Members with ASD-£50

Payment is by invoice, BACS, or cheque made payable to "Action for A.S.D." (please send cheques to the Northside House address listed above)

For further information, please contact Action for ASD by calling (01282)714-218, emailing info@actionasd.org.uk or visiting the website www.actionasd.org.uk

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Action for ASD's Gemma Sampford and Hanna Ingleby for contributing this information.

THE ASPERGER SYNDROME FOUNDATION SEMINAR SERIES PRESENTS PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR DIFFICULT MOMENTS: "TRANSITION TO COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY FOR AS STUDENTS- SHARING GOOD PRACTICE"(CENTRAL LONDON)

"Transition to College/University for AS Students- Sharing Good Practice" is a one-day Seminar aimed at parents, carers, professionals, and of course individuals who themselves have ASC.

Speakers: Christine Haugh and Chris Mitchell. Christine Haugh will be sharing some of the many examples of best practice taking place at the schools, Colleges, and Universities she works with, and Chris Mitchell will be sharing his own personal experiences and lessons on best practice he has experienced in College and University as a student with Asperger Syndrome.

WHERE: The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), 66 Portland Place, London W1B 1AD
WHEN: Monday 20th November 2006, 10am-3:30pm (registration from 9:30am)
COST: £25 professionals, £15 parent/carers, free for individuals with Asperger Syndrome (please make cheques payable to the "Asperger Syndrome Foundation") Sandwich lunches and refreshments are included in the cost.

Please email seminars@aspergerfoundation.org.uk to download a booking form from the Asperger Syndrome Foundation website. This form needs to be returned to the Asperger Syndrome Foundation along with cheque payment, to reserve a place at the Seminar. The Foundation's address is:

Asperger Syndrome Foundation
The Kensington Charity Centre
4th Floor, Charles House
375 Kensington High Street
London W14 8QH

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Asperger Syndrome Foundation's Founder, Beatrice Buisseret, for contributing this information.

TECHNOLOGY FOR CHILDREN WITH ASD- A ONE DAY CONFERENCE (COVENTRY)

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Andree Woodcock, organizer of the conference, for this information.

"Technology for Children with ASD" is a one-day conference on engaging children with autism through technology and multimedia. This AHRC supported event is hoped to bring together researchers working on digital or multimedia technology for children and others with ASD. The target audience is those who work with children as well as fellow researchers. The papers will be published (at least) on a DVD.

WHERE: Coventry University Technocentre

WHEN: 6th October 2006

COST: Free of charge

For further information, please contact:

Andre Woodcock

Senior Research Fellow

The Design Institute

Coventry School of Art and Design

Tel: (02476)887832

READER FEATURE! WENDY LAWSON'S AUTSCAPE 2006 KEY NOTE ADDRESS

The ASC Good Practice Guide warmly thanks Wendy Lawson for sharing her very recent Autscape 2006 keynote address with our readership. The address is aimed at helping people who are on the autistic spectrum to understand other people who are not autistic.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF 'TYPICAL', SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS 'NORMAL'- by Wendy Lawson BSS, BSW(Hons), GDip(psychStud), GDip(Psych)

Abstract

As adults with autism spectrum diff-ability (ASD) we experience the world differently to most people who are not on the autistic spectrum. Our differing experiences potentially cause conflict between us and them. This presentation aims to increase understanding of the typical mind and help us to understand other people who are not autistic. It builds upon the presentation already outlined by Murray (1992; 2004) and various Autism activist groups (e.g. autistics.org (2006); Frank Klein, (2003).

I remember the daily fear and confusion I lived with during my formative years (and that I still experience on occasion). Mostly it was associated with feeling frustrated, angry and let down by others. People said things they didn't mean; did things they didn't say; frequently changed their minds (altered apparent conclusions) and broke their promises. A large part of my adult formal education has been devoted to trying to understand 'why' people do what they do. This presentation explores the cognitive processes associated with typical thinking and the impact that has upon typical behaviour.

Introduction

It is very common to fear what one doesn't understand and, therefore, to react by hiding, running away, criticizing, ostracizing and/or attempting to make the fear go away (see de Gelder et. Al. 2004). I grew up in an era where families were recovering from war; where Autism was said to be the result of 'an emotionally unavailable mother' (refrigerator mothers) where Rock music was in fashion and the word 'teenager' spelt tight jeans and 'brylcreemed' hair. It wasn't a popular time for assisting children who didn't fit into the status quo. So, many individuals with intellectual disability and/or autism were hidden away in institutions. In today's western world however, society's attempts at inclusion for all, is posing some problems. It appears that we still fear what we don't understand and this means we often fear each other. The following presentation hopes to dispel some of the fear we, as autistic individuals, may experience around non-autistics. I hope to do this by exploring the Neurologically Typical (NT) condition.

Why Typical individuals may react badly to autistic individuals

There are many reasons why so many NT individuals find it difficult to relate to us. For example, we tend to be black and white in our thinking, literal, logical and have little time for 'small talk'. NT's can be quite the opposite and devote much time to being seen to be diplomatic (often involves much 'small talk'), non-literal, accommodating of others, (whilst wishing they didn't have to be) and occupied with the need to fit in. Where as, for many of us, we are often fully focused upon one interest to the exclusion of all other's, NT's tend to have lots of interests co-occurring.

The literature suggests we are governed by a triad of difficulties in the areas of social understanding, communication and rigid thinking (e.g. DSM-IV, 1994; Jones, 2002; Jordan & Jones, 1999; Lathe, 2006; Wing, 1988; Wing, 1993). For an alternative view, to the DSM (1994) on the autistic triad, see Murray, Lesser and Lawson (2005). If you like you can think of NT's as having their own triad of difficulties (Klein, 2003; Murray, 2001; Lawson, 2001; 2003). For example, they may misrepresent reality at times (and call it diplomacy); they have a disposition that enables them to say one thing but mean another and at time, being socially adaptive (e.g. they say thank you and smile as they receive a gift they don't like) may mean being dishonest. Their communication style, therefore, might seem evasive, indirect, off the point and even untruthful. It's not that they want to mislead or misrepresent, but their need for social acceptance can over ride their need for honesty and may lead to some problematic outcomes, especially for us.

However, in the NT world, their own 'impairments' hardly get a mention. In fact I've heard few professionals argue that the NT condition is not cracked up to be all they say it is! The NT need for social understanding (obsession with fashion, formality, fame and fortune) dominates much of their thought and action. Many are driven to talk about trivia; gossip and television soaps. However, their communication styles may actually lead to miscommunication and eventual communication breakdown. Building relationships and getting married, for example, you would think takes quite a lot of good communication, but one in 3 marriages break down and NT's experience lots of every day difficulties, just like us.

For fear of not having societal recognition they shape themselves into being what they believe society wants in order to be accepted. This process will involve misrepresentation, hiding from reality and much obsessive ambition. Ultimately this leads into the third area of their triad of impairments, stereotypical or rigid beliefs and behaviours.

I believe that at the core of this different state of being lies an unconscious fear that dictates the idea "anyone who is not like me is a threat". In fact we all experience this at times. But, it seems that

the typical population will go to extreme measures to ward off such threats. Whether you are autistic, gay, disabled, female or from a different culture, you may be seen by some as inferior or sub-standard. This paper will not go into the history or origins of such beliefs but it will explore some of the cognitive processes behind them. At first glance one would think that NT individuals are better equipped to cope with change, difference and diversity. However, when fear is added to the equation we see that their 'common sense' goes out the window. I am sharing this with you so that you will have more understanding towards the NT population and also to help improve our relations with them. We need to understand the way they are designed, so we can better accommodate them as individuals and work together to create a more cohesive society.

Below is an outline of the differing processes that inform either the NT experience or the ASD experience. Of course, these ideas need to incorporate one's differing personality styles, education, value system and so on. Each of us is influenced by a battery of other things, including our own choices. However, our learning styles predispose a particular use of attention, therefore:

The neuro-typical (non-autistic) cognitive experience is informed by the following processes:

Poly-tropism can be likened to a supply of attention that, because it facilitates the dividing of attention. It allows the brain to process several different forms of information simultaneously. At the sensory level of awareness, for example, visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and spatial information can usually accost the senses all at once without overwhelming the host. At the cognitive level, having many interests simultaneously aroused is common. For example, looking and listening to a conversation can occur whilst wondering about the football results. Being aware of the world both within and without of oneself is usual because one can make multiple connections, identify context and scale, and easily model alternative possibilities and viewpoints.

Polytropic attention, therefore is wide spread and, of necessity, appropriately shallow. From this form of attention the following result:

Non-literality is a component of dividing one's attention. It enables the understanding of incomplete sentences, incomplete concepts, metaphor and the non-literal 'sense' of everyday life. It makes it possible to read a person's non-verbal body language, intention, the context and the scale of most events and access the over-all meanings that lead to interpretation and subsequent action.

Thinking in open pictures/concepts is enabled through polytropism. This means being able to connect experiences, often visually, in an open and ongoing manner. This process informs awareness, aids the understanding of social cueing, helps with the sorting of priorities and appropriateness. When NT individuals have an experience it is usually stored in long term memory but is also available to working memory. This occurs even outside of that person's interest because thinking in open concepts allows one to put one's own interest on hold to accommodate the interest of 'other' even when one isn't interested!

Social prioritising or having one's needs for social status take priority over anything else is a natural outcome from wanting to fit in. It often enables NT individuals to perform feats of dishonesty and/or seeming selfless acts too. For example, they say thankyou for things when they don't feel thankful, but offer to go last when they wanted to be first. Social norms, rules, expectations and being sociable, are seen as a priority. Although this ability may help with collating information about self, other and society, it can put undue pressure upon an individual who feels the constant need to be accepted. It can also be a useful tool in social relations that require diplomacy, cheating, part truths and hidden agendas.

Generalised learning, or the ability to take learning from particular domains and transfer across many others, comes from the above connectedness resulting from wide spread attention. Having the ability to transfer skills and knowledge (social, academic, physical, mental, etc) across differing domains enables one to deal with the typical changes one

encounters in every day life. For example, changes to menus, shops, work schedules, human development, fashion etc. It also helps accommodate the various learning's we all experience and allows space in our thinking for alternatives.

Most NT individuals have little difficulty with time and movement. They appreciate length of time, timing and sequencing. They commonly negotiate stairs, personal space, crowds, timing of conversation, turn-taking and so on. This is also a natural outlet or flow-on from their ability to divide their attention. Cognitively, for example, they can attend to non-verbal as well as verbal language whilst noting where they wish to walk at the same time as reminding themselves of a project they need to do and so on.

The ability to forward think, hence little issue with appreciating the concept of consequences, is yet another development of dividing one's attention. When you understand and can predict an outcome, change is less fearful and it's easier to learn from mistakes. (Lawson, 2001; 2003; 2005; 2006)

Conclusion

The polytropic supply of attention, with its emphasis on multiple diffuse interests, is broad and narrow. It caters less for highly focussed interests. Even during intense times of narrowed attention (focus upon a particular interest, hobby or activity) it allows the individual to shift attention relatively easily. For example, one can respond to ones name or a danger call such as 'fire'. In many ways therefore, as long as the ideas correspond to ones own morality, value system or accepted norms, it can assist one to accommodate the notion of 'other'. However, the other important factor here is that it also means a lot of brain space is being used for interpreting and maintaining social norms. This, I believe, is where the problems stem from in the NT non-acceptance of such neuro-diversity as is seen in autism.

Knowledge is power. Power has the potential to energize one into appropriate action. Rather than continue to be ruled by fear and subsequent reaction, when we understand the NT condition we can accommodate it. Just like autism, the NT condition is here to stay. It is who we are that counts and how we relate. I don't want anyone to change who I am but I do want to be heard and understood. Dismissing who I am or trying to see me as part of a tragic disaster, is not the way to go. As people with ASD we have so much to give back to our communities. Those around us can help by being involved in our lives in a positive way. Understanding the NT condition is one of the tools that we can use to equip us to deal with their intolerance. It seems they often cannot help themselves. We need to be patient and take the time to travel with them through their difficulties. They really do not understand why we are not like them. This lack of understanding is frightening to them. So, let's help them understand and be less fearful of us. In this way we will also be assisting ourselves in finding our place in this fast pace world that we are all part of.

Autism: My Gender

My gender and I are a package.
We come as part of the deal.
"But autism shows far more damage".
"Look at the things that you feel".
I cannot account for these feelings.
Emotions intense and extreme.
But my issues with everyday dealings,
Can cause me to rant, shout and scream.

I don't desire the 'make-up'.
Fashion and high-heels don't appeal.
I don't like perfume or my hair cut,
But my need for 'understanding', is real.
The expectations placed upon me,
Being female and all,
Push me further into pain and grief,

With my back against the wall.

"I cannot multi-task", I say.
"But you must, you're a woman. You can".
You must cook, clean, organise and play
The role that supports your man.
Your children and men depend on you,
You must be strong, in control and sure.
"What if these things I cannot do?"
"What if my timing is poor?"

"You must work harder, try harder to be,
What society says and dictates".
"But both my autism and gender are me, you see"
They both influence my states".
As a woman I function differently.
As a woman I think, see and feel.
As a woman I value all that is me.
My autism is part of the deal.

References

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FINALLY: READER QUESTION- SOCIAL/SUPPORT GROUPS FOR PARTNERS

One of our readers (London/South East) has asked if there are any social/support meeting groups specifically for partners (rather than parents) of individuals with Asperger Syndrome/Autism. The reader is aware of webgroups but not any groups where partners actually have the opportunity to regularly meet one another in person. This reader would be interested in joining such a group.

If any of our readers would like to share details of any Partners' Groups, or any Groups would like to get in touch, please feel free to contact *The ASC Good Practice Guide*, and these details can be forwarded to the reader who asked this question. Alternatively, *The ASC Good Practice Guide* would also be happy to hear from any individuals who would be interested in themselves joining a Partners' Group.

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