



Aspiehelp / The Aspire Trust December 2016 Newsletter

Edited by Hazel Shanks

In this newsletter: Aspiehelp celebrates Leith's birthday, BBQ fundraisers over the holidays, holiday hours notification, and two articles on surviving the holiday stress — plus a survey.

Aspiehelp celebrates Leith's 70th

Combined with our annual end-of-year celebration, Aspiehelp also celebrated Leith McMurray's 70th birthday. Leith is one of the two founders of Aspiehelp, and today still leads the organisation and is 'on the front lines' delivering services such as counselling — without pay! Without Leith, Aspiehelp wouldn't exist. So we took the time to celebrate her and her life, on her 70th birthday.



Leith looks at the cake, after blowing out the candles.

Olivia made the cake, which was greatly appreciated by the people attending. Thank you to everyone who turned up and everyone who brought a plate.

Sausage Sizzle BBQs over the holidays

We have more Sausage Sizzles happening at the end of the month. We will be holding our BBQ fundraisers at Mitre 10 Beckenham, on Saturday **24th** December (Christmas Eve!) and Saturday **31st** of December (New Year's Eve!).

For **\$2.50**, we provide a sausage with bread, tomato sauce, mustard, and fried onion. If you're nearby on those days, please visit us and have a sausage.

*Our sausage sizzles are run by volunteers who donate their time and effort.
Our high quality sausages are provided by Fresh Meats Barrington.*



*Ian and Tony running our BBQ!
Thank you!*

Aspiehelp Holiday hours for 2016-17 holidays

Aspiehelp is taking a break over the summer holiday period. Our last day in the office will be 15th of December 2016, and we reopen on Tuesday 17th January 2017.

Our last Social Night for the year will be the 7th of December. There will be no Aspiehelp Social evening on the 21st of December nor on the 4th of January. The first social night of the New Year will be the 18th of January.

We understand that holidays can be stressful, with crowds, repetitive music, bright lights, social expectations, and family gatherings, all of which can be overwhelming. If you would like support from us over the holidays, please talk to us as soon as possible — we're taking some time off too!

We hope you have a great time over the holidays!

In Our Office

We have been busy, as usual!

Our Annual General Meeting took place on 2nd of November- thanks to those who turned up as it is always something folk attempt to avoid! Peter Brittenden was confirmed as Chairman for another year.

Leith has initiated correspondence with our Patron, Dr Stephen Shore, regarding his hoped-for participation in our conference next year. Basically, he is very keen to come, but we need to raise funds to get him here and accommodate him while he is here.

An all-star cast of Aspies is proposed for the conference, with a relaxed ambience, some stalls of useful agencies and purveyors of things like weighted animal soft toys, blankets etc, other autism friendly knicks and knacks for stimming with, and books by and for Aspies. We haven't chosen a venue yet, as we want one which will be comfortable and relaxing to be in. There will definitely be a quiet room and/or sensory room.



*Our staff, clockwise from top left:
Leith, Olivia, Julie, and Hazel*

Unfortunately Leith and Julie did not get to the Charities Services AGM as we were recovering from the North Canterbury earthquakes.

We are looking towards the end of our year which is looming up very quickly. We will enjoy recharging our batteries, so to speak, and getting out and about in the summer sunshine, as we hope you all will as well.

Have a pleasant festive season, and we look forward to catching up in 2017.

Social evenings

Our regular social evenings are on the first and the third Wednesday of the month, at a venue near Church Corner at 7:30pm. (Please contact Leith for the exact location).

We have board games, hot drinks and biscuits, and a selection of books from the Aspiehelp library available at every meeting.

The next meeting is on the 7th of December, and then there's a break until January 18th. You are welcome to attend. (New members should contact Leith or Julie first.)

Women's group

Our Aspiehelp women's group meets fortnightly on Tuesdays at 2pm.

A get-together for autistic-spectrum women and women living with aspie family.

The next meeting is on the 6th of December.

Please contact us if you're interested in attending.

Our Patron is Stephen Mark Shore, PhD.

The Aspire Trust, Inc is a registered Charitable Trust. Charities Services registration number is CC46192.

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Stress and the Holidays: Coping Skills for Adults on the Autism Spectrum

<http://www.adultaspergerschat.com/2013/12/stress-and-holidays-coping-skills-for.html>

The holidays often bring an unwelcome guest: stress. And it's no wonder since the holidays present a dizzying array of demands like parties, shopping, baking, cleaning and entertaining, just to name a few. But with some practical tips, people with Asperger's (high functioning autism) can minimize the stress that accompanies the holidays – and they may even end up enjoying the holidays more than they thought they would.

How to prevent holiday stress:

1. Make some time for yourself. Spending just 5 minutes alone without distractions can refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Take a walk in the evening and gaze at the stars. Listen to soft music. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner peace.
2. Before you go shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to that budget. Don't try to buy happiness with a ton of gifts. Instead, donate to a charity in someone's name, give homemade gifts, or start a family gift exchange.
3. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to your expectations. Set aside resentments until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get angry or upset when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress as well.
4. Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently stressed out or depressed, plagued by physical aches and pains, unable to sleep, irritable and disheartened, and unable to face everyday chores. If these emotions last for a while, talk to a mental health professional.
5. Saying 'yes' when you should say 'no' can leave you feeling angry and resentful. Friends and coworkers will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say 'no' when your employer asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.
6. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends, etc. Plan your menus, and then make your shopping list. This will help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten items. And be sure to get assistance from others for party preparations and cleanup.
7. If you feel lonely or isolated, find some community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Also, volunteering your time to help others is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.
8. Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Over-indulgence only adds to your anxiety and guilt. Have healthy snacks before holiday get-togethers so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese, wine, etc. Also, continue to get plenty of sleep and physical activity.
9. The holidays don't have to be perfect. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change too. Choose a few rituals to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones (e.g., if your adult child can't come to your house, find new ways to celebrate together, like sharing pictures, emails or YouTube videos).
10. If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sorrow and/or moodiness. It's perfectly alright to take time to cry or express your emotions. You can't force yourself to be cheerful just because it's the holidays.

Don't let the holidays become something you dread. Instead, take steps to prevent the stress that can descend during this time. Learn to recognize your holiday triggers (e.g., financial pressures, personal demands, etc.) so you can combat them before they lead to a meltdown. With a little planning and some positive self-talk, you can find serenity and pleasure during the festive season.

Asperger's and the Holidays — Face them with Open Eyes

<http://www.aspiestrategy.com/2009/11/aspergers-and-holidays-face-them-with.html> Cary Terra, M.A., LMFT

In my private practice I've noticed a trend. Around November, old, current and new clients call wanting to schedule sessions to talk about one topic: the holidays.

The trend is not surprising: most therapists find themselves busy at this time of year, when expectations and realities can clash, and even the most mature find themselves stuck in teenager roles and feelings long since discarded.

But for a therapist who counsels adults with Asperger's the increase in client need may be surprising to some. Aren't Aspies supposed to be unconcerned with the judgments of others, even family members? Don't Aspies face holiday family time with few, if any, expectations for intimacy or fun? Don't Aspies who find themselves alone during the holidays consider their solitude a "Get Out of Jail Free" card, rather than a reason for loneliness or depression? After all, Aspies don't really seek out relationships, right?

If any of these assumptions sound familiar to you, beware of the Aspie Stereotype, which pervades media (think "Rainman"), research teams (think "Yale"), pop culture (think SNL's "Nick Burns: The Computer Guy") and even some therapist circles (not me!).

Contrary to popular notions regarding Asperger's, many clinicians, those who work in the trenches with adults struggling with the challenges of Asperger's, find their Aspie clients confused and overwhelmed by the holidays.

Most of us harbor conscious or unconscious expectations about the holidays – how they should feel, who they should be spent with, how tall the tree should be, who should host dinner...the list can go on. A lack of awareness of one's own "rules" regarding the holidays can set the stage for confusion, disappointment, impulse coping skills and depression.

If you have Asperger's, you may be surprised at your own "automatic" answers to questions such as:

- Should holidays be spent with friends, or family?
- Should loved ones exchange gifts, or not?
- Who should travel where for the holiday celebration?
- Tinsel, or lights?

While these questions may seem trivial, they're not – and often they shed light on our automatic thoughts that go unchallenged and cause problems. For instance, if your "rule" is that Christmas or Hanukkah is a commercialized money-making holiday to benefit department stores, you may refuse to participate, and thus miss genuine opportunities to connect with loved ones. If you automatically decree that holidays should be spent with family or friends, you may miss the comfort that solitude can bring you.

Please don't fall into the trap of trying to live up to what you think "normal holidays" (an oxymoron) should be like. Holidays for Aspies are often riddled with "shoulds", which trigger resentment and resistance.

Adults with Asperger's who give themselves permission to meet their own unique needs for togetherness and solitude, fun and rest, engagement and disengagement, often find themselves less pressured, less anxious and more accepting of themselves and others. This balanced approach can prevent total shutdown mode, which is a natural response to overstimulation and helplessness.

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Here are some tips Aspies may find helpful:

Plan for taking breaks during visits. Examples are taking a walk outside, taking a nap with a book, taking some quiet time for deep breathing, taking a quick ride or offering to run an errand in the car, playing a video game with someone or alone, or announcing a time-out and removing yourself from the group.

Schedule realistically. Over scheduling during the holidays can lead to burnout when being around people is gratifying, but stressful (or just plain difficult). While it's great to push yourself to socialize, the holidays are a time to be reasonable – don't expect yourself to go from no parties to three or four in a month.

Beware of the lure of substance use. Many of us rely on the cocktail or two to help ease party anxiety. While there may not be too much harm in this, most clinicians see a surge in substance use during the holidays, which can lead to hangovers, a shaken sense of self, embarrassment, or worse. Remember that as long as you're using substances to quell the anxiety, you're not truly growing in your ability to handle social situations.

Be extra kind to yourself. This sounds corny, and it is. But think about it: we spend so much time during the holidays thinking about giving to others (or avoiding it!), but how much do we think about truly giving to ourselves? This is the time to use kind words and actions to take care of yourself. Ideas include buying or checking out a new book, going to the movies alone, eating a favorite meal, spending quiet time petting the cat.

Seek help if you need to. Holiday therapy can be a temporary bridge to January 2!

Here's to your success in creating a holiday this year that you can anticipate with groundedness and optimism.

Christmas can be a great time of year — Olivia Stacy

Christmas is one of my favourite times of the year. I really enjoy everything that it entails, decorating the tree is great fun, I enjoy my family's great decorations and looking at them and the memories they hold (and talking about them with family), I really enjoy Christmas food — making it and getting the food ready is fun and in my family we eat for days, my parent's classic Christmas music is enjoyable, and most of all being with family and friends.

However, it is stressful and probably always will be. To top it off, some of the things I love the most also can be the most stressful — the house is full of people, overly loud music and other sensory hazards, and making forced conversation with people (the dreaded 'small talk') can be both painful and tiring.

Over the years I've learnt that going into it, I have to be prepared for the stress of it, and put into play some coping strategies. These strategies are absolutely key to making sure my holiday season is something I enjoy. I think for anyone who feels stressed over it, they should think about what they find hard and look at some solutions. Some are simple quick fixes and other may take a little more effort and compromise, but I guarantee that if you put some strategies and come up with what works for you, this time of year can be enjoyable for everyone.



What do you think about the application of Serious Games in psychological therapy?

What are Serious Games?

Serious Games are computer or video games that go beyond the purpose of pure entertainment, and include an educational component (e.g. promote a healthy lifestyle, train cognitive skills, etc.). Serious Games are becoming more popular in many settings, including psychological therapy. We are doing an international survey to find out what patients/clients/mental health service users think.

Who can take part?

You can take part if you are between the **age of 16 and 85** and **have experienced any form of psychological therapy** (i.e. any form of “talking therapy” such as cognitive behavioral therapy/CBT, psychoanalysis or other forms of psychological counselling) in **New Zealand**.

Even if you **haven't** played any Serious Games in psychological therapy, your views are important and we want to hear from you.

How long is it?

The survey takes about **10 minutes** to complete.

To start the survey, please go to:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MRLGTZ9>



...or scan this QR code!

This study is being conducted by:

- Clinical Psychology Doctoral student, **Jessica Huss** (j.huss@auckland.ac.nz),

under the supervision of

- **Dr Karolina Stasiak** from the University of Auckland (k.stasiak@auckland.ac.nz), and
- **Professor Christiane Eichenberg** from the Sigmund Freud University in Austria (christiane@rz-online.de), and
- **Professor Heidi Möller**, University of Kassel in Germany.

Thank you for your support!

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Health and Disability Ethics Committees in New Zealand