



# Aspiehelp / The Aspire Trust December 2018 Newsletter

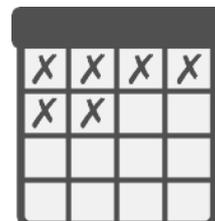
Edited by Anna Melling

This issue: Anna leaving Aspiehelp, In Our Office, Article: Coping with Anxiety at Christmas...

Article: How to Be a Good Friend to Someone Who Has Asperger's Syndrome Part 3

## Christmas break

Our last day in the office this year is Thursday the 13th of December. We will be back on Tuesday the 22nd of January next year. We hope you all have an enjoyable Christmas time!



## Anna leaving Aspiehelp

I took over as Office Manager from Hazel in May 2017. I'm very grateful for the time she spent showing me the ropes, and for all the useful documents and checklists that she had set up!

I have decided it's time for me to move on to different things, but I'm very grateful to Leith and Julie for this opportunity. I have learned a lot in the role, both about being an Office Manager and about Aspergers and Autism.

## Upcoming Fundraising Sausage Sizzles

Here are the dates for the upcoming Sausage Sizzles at Fresh Meats Barrington (Barrington Mall):

**Saturday the 22nd of December**

**Saturday the 2nd of February**

**Saturday the 16 of February**

If you're in the area, come and visit, say hello and perhaps buy a sausage!

**We are again short of volunteers to help out with the sausage sizzles - even 2 hours now and then is very helpful. Contact the office if you want to help out.**



## In Our Office

We have all been catching our collective breath after the Roundup and demand for our service has (mercifully) been less than usual. However, it is picking up again.

Jane and Francis have been very proactive with the sausage sizzles and have booked spots for all of 2019 already! We have a great rapport with the butcher and it is a good place for publicity for us.

Sadly, we are losing Anna after a bit over a year! She stepped into the breach when Hazel left and has been a rock keeping everything on an even keel and developing first class frameworks for financial reporting for us. She has also been a steady and calm colleague (someone has to be) and a martial arts expert (handy in case of difficulties!). (She was nearly needed on one occasion!)

We have no idea who will step into the breach this time around but time will tell.

There is lots of work being done about Disability Needs in New Zealand at the moment. Please keep an eye or ear out for any relevant news. We need, as a group, to be prepared to boost our presence and our opinions as much as possible until things start to change.

I've been putting through a lot of aspie-related posts from Facebook lately- some truly excellent ones! Do keep reading our page.

We aim to start again on January 22 2019

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Leith, Julie and Anna



*Our staff from top:  
Leith, Julie, and Anna*

## Social evenings

These are on hold for the foreseeable future.

### Our Patron is Stephen Mark Shore, PhD.

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# Coping with anxiety at Christmas if you are on the autism spectrum

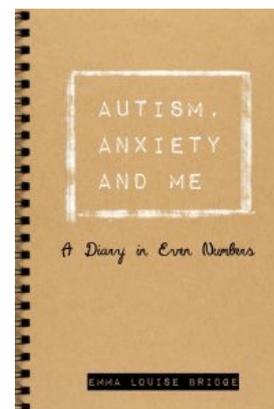
<http://www.jkp.com/jkpblog/2016/12/autism-christmas-anxiety/>  
 Reposted with permission from [Jessica Kingsley Publishers](#)



Emma Louise Bridge, DECEMBER 13, 2016

***The author of *Autism, Anxiety and Me: A Diary in Even Numbers*, Emma Louise Bridge, offers advice for those with autism on how best to cope with anxiety at Christmas time.***

The shopping, the crowds, the parties, and the art of present giving... it is easy not to feel quite so wonderful at this most wonderful time of year. However as much as Christmas is one of those times of year that is just unavoidably stressful, it doesn't mean you can't plan ways to survive the holidays. At best you can have lots of fun, and at worst, well you can at least make it through.



**The first step** in holiday survival is planning. I personally like to do this with lists; even-numbered of course. Even if you're not hosting the in-laws or planning a party, you will be surprised how much at Christmas can be thought out beforehand to save zig-zags in blood pressure. To provide a more in-depth example let's take present-giving; something that I find far more stressful at Christmas than any other time because it is reciprocal. So, first plan out the details.

- Who do you have to buy for?
- Who will probably be buying for you?
- What is your budget?
- What you are going to buy?

Now I love surprises but at the same time I don't, mostly because the need to make sure that all my gifts are either of an equal monetary or emotional value as those given to me is too great. The easiest way to ease this stress is to introduce wish lists. Ask everyone what they want. If you want to choose something then ask them for a list of different options. On the same principle you can produce a list yourself. Even if no-one asks, produce a list of things you really want and just offer it as a suggestion. Even if other people weren't expecting it hopefully they will respect it as a way to make Christmas a little easier – after all everyone should be able to have fun.

Other lists can include:

- Anything you need like decorations or advent calendar
- Any parties you are invited to / hosting
- Who is coming or where you're going over the holidays
- Any events such as carols or services that are going on
- Food you need to buy

Planning, planning and more planning!!!

**The second step** to surviving the holidays is the guide to surviving parties. Christmas parties generally involve a lot of food, a bunch of being social and loud super cheerful music. So first things first: know you're going to eat more over Christmas. It just seems to be inevitable, so plan ahead for that. Also if you know you're going to go to a party where you might not be able to eat anything – because your entire family are on special diets – but you're going to be super hungry because there is food everywhere... putting something in your handbag or pocket for emergencies is a seasonal must.

The other thing that stresses me out at parties is the number of people who are going to ask how life is going, what my plans for the New Year are, how my job is, how much I have grown etc. Now the answer to some of those questions never changes – 'nope, still the same height' / 'yes it has been years' / 'happy Christmas to you too' – but there are some conversations where stock phrases won't do. This can be tough especially if your life isn't necessarily where you want it to be or you don't have much to talk about. The answer is simple and something I have learned over the years of trying to master the art of surviving in society. People love to talk about themselves, so bring the conversation back around to them every time you feel uncomfortable and you're on to a winner. Even better, join a group where there are a couple of people who love to talk and happily be a background listener for as long as you can get away with it. Also keep in mind that you're bound to not be the only person in the room who isn't exactly where they want to be at that point. Doesn't mean you won't ever be.

**So my final surviving the holidays tip is this** – don't be worried about asking for help. It's okay to not feel brilliant even if the world is covered in Christmas cheer. It is okay if it is hard or emotional. There could be a hundred reasons why. I know it is really easy to feel you have to shove a smile on your face and fake it 'til you make it. And sometimes trying to tough it out is the right decision. But sometimes you just have to sit down and admit to yourself, or to someone you trust, that you could use some help. Or even just that you could do with being cut some slack. Don't compare yourself to anyone else... you survive the holidays the best way you know how.

#### **In conclusion:**

- Lists are awesome
- Parties are survivable – just go in prepared
- Survive Christmas the best way you know how – don't let anyone tell you how you have to be

***Did you like this blog? If so why not sign up to the JKP mailing list to get updates on all our autism-related books.***

Jessica Kingsley Publishers' local distributor is [footprint.com.au](http://footprint.com.au).  
Take a look at their huge range of books on Aspergers and Autism.



# How to Be a Good Friend to Someone Who Has Asperger's Syndrome



<https://www.wikihow.com/Be-a-Good-Friend-to-Someone-Who-Has-Asperger's-Syndrome>

Asperger's Syndrome is part of the autism spectrum, and typically refers to people who are highly intelligent and "high functioning," but have significant social difficulties. While Asperger's Syndrome is no longer recognized as a medical diagnosis in the psychiatric field, there still are a number of people who were previously diagnosed with Asperger's, or who identify as "Aspies." Many of these people have difficulty starting and maintaining friendships. To be a good friend to an Aspie, you must understand how best to communicate with them so you can understand and respect their differences.

[See previous issue for parts 1 and 2]

## Part 3- Supporting Your Friend

**1 Make plans in advance.** Most autistic people are far from spontaneous. Your friend likely has routines they follow, and if you want to do something with them they need adequate time to prepare for the occasion and work it into their schedule.

- Giving your friend plenty of advance notice shows that you respect them, and also increases the chances they'll be willing to accompany you to an event or participate in an activity.
- Your friend will be more likely to do things with you if they are familiar things occurring in familiar locations. Many autistic people are resistant to trying new things or going to different places where they don't know if they will be comfortable.
- Be specific with the details. Most autistic people don't enjoy surprises, and even if you have the best of intentions your efforts could backfire.
- Let your friend know if other people are going to be there, particularly if they are other friends or mutual acquaintances.



**2 Defend your friend to others.** Autistic people frequently are the target of teasing and bullies, particularly when they're younger. Autistic adults may misinterpret friendly teasing from others, especially if it comes from someone they don't know very well.

- You don't have to draw additional attention to your friend or single them out to stand up for them.
- You can simply say something like "Hey, I think that was a little over the line," or "I realize you were just joking, but you went too far."
- Another way to defuse a situation is to point out something good about your friend or about the thing they're being teased about.



- For example, you might say "I get that you think her interest in comic books is weird, but she won \$500 in a comic book trivia contest last year."

**3 Respect your friend's privacy.** Not all autistic people necessarily want everyone they encounter to know they're autistic. Before you disclose such personal information to someone, make sure your friend is okay with it.

- Keep in mind that many autistic people have been bullied or teased in the past because they were different. They may be trying to fit in without pointing out their differences, which can make them feel vulnerable.
- For this reason, when someone tells you they are autistic they are often indicating that they trust you and feel safe with you.
- There is so much dehumanizing and negative coverage of autism in the media, they couldn't be sure how you might react.



**4 Don't make a big deal out of stimming.** Many autistic people "stim" (short for self-stimulation). For example, your friend may flap their hands, or fidget with or chew on a necklace or other accessory. Stimming is a natural and healthy response to an environment that can be overwhelming or difficult at times.

- Sometimes people stim as an attempt to stave off sensory overload. If you notice that your friend is starting to feel overloaded, help them find a quiet place where they can recover immediately.
- Stimming can also be used in neutral situations, or to express happiness. If this is the case, there's no need to react. Treat it the same way you'd treat someone jumping for joy or scratching an itch. Some people think that this stimming is cute, and will smile or laugh if they see an autistic person doing it. (This is also okay.)
- Never pin someone down or stop them from stimming. This is really damaging, and you could seriously injure them.

**5 Assist your friend in reaching their social goals.** Your friend may have particular social skills that they want to improve. If they let you know of anything like this, do what you can to increase their comfort level in that area.

- For example, you can simulate social situations with your friend in a safe, comfortable environment so they can practice interacting with other people.
- Since many autistic people rely on scripts to interact in social situations, these simulated practices can help improve their social skills.
- Keep in mind that if your friend is older, they may have already written off some social situations and decided they don't need them in their life. For example, your friend may have decided that they won't go to any holiday parties.
- You may be able to encourage them to give something another chance, but generally you should respect their decision.



**6 Ask your friend for resources.** Autism is a “spectrum disorder.” This means that there are many different kinds of autism – as many as there are people with autism. Learning about your friend’s autism can help you better understand them. The more you know about autism in general and your friend’s in particular, the less you’ll feel upset or insulted if your friend happens to do something that you don’t consider in keeping with your relationship.



- Find out what organizations your friend likes, or if there are any particular books they recommend. Your friend will appreciate the fact that you're making an effort to understand something that they consider an important part of their identity.
- Ask your friend or someone close to them about their autism, their needs and preferences, and the obstacles they've overcome. Keep in mind that people with autism can't always communicate their needs and preferences.
- Offer to accompany your friend to events at autistic-run organizations, take part in Autism Acceptance Month, and share articles written by autistic people.
- Keep in mind that many autistic people have gone through abusive therapy, been dehumanized in the media and by medical professionals, or been reduced to a burden and list of symptoms.
- For this reason, it's important to regularly let your friend know that you care about them and love them for who they are. Treat them with kindness and compassion, just as you would any other friend.

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