



Aspiehelp / The Aspire Trust November 2018 Newsletter

Edited by Anna Melling

This issue: Roundup Report 2018, In Our Office, Article: How to Be a Good Friend to Someone Who Has Asperger's Syndrome

Upcoming Fundraising Sausage Sizzles

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

Saturday the 1st of December

Saturday the 22nd of December

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.

Roundup Report 2018

As you all know, we had our 2018 Roundup last weekend. It was a small group, but we had people travelling from all over New Zealand to attend.

We had a wide variety of presenters and presentation types. Dr. Emma Goodall started it off with an informative and thought-provoking talk on interoception and body awareness.

One of our topics was Aspie Creativity, and we had some artwork by Rod Wintour, a new short film made by Michael Woods, and videos from Yvonne Moore from Scotland showcasing her artwork.

Another topic was Designing an Aspie-Friendly Future, for which we held a brainstorming workshop. Richard Cullingworth from the Barrier Free Trust gave a talk about Universal Design. Julie gave a related talk about "what's good for us is good for them".

Dr. Annie Southern gave an interesting talk about how the brain is affected by trauma. Sébastien Mathieu talked about his experiences with autism treatment in France. Jeanette Purkis and Debbie Ball both send videos that were very well received.

One of the most exciting events was the demonstration by Christchurch's Choi Kwang Do branch. This tied in well with Emma's talk, which highlighted how beneficial it is for aspies to practise body awareness. Anna (editor) believes that it's almost compulsory for aspies to practise a martial art, tai chi, dance, yoga or a body-awareness focused form of meditation - whichever is most appealing!

In Our Office

This month has been very busy, with the Aspie Roundup taking place on 16/17 November.

We had a super programme with great speakers and it was sad that very few people actually attended to hear them!

As a result, we will not be running a Roundup next year. However, Leith and Julie might do more regional workshops like the one we presented in Motueka in April, but with a fee attached!

Leith attended a meeting run by Access Alliance, which is a newish organisation lobbying for better accessibility legislation in NZ. The main speaker was David Lepovsky, a blind Canadian lawyer, who reported on recent changes in Disability legislation in Canada. He is a very powerful speaker and urged us to “just say yes” and to get us to say the same thing to our politicians (about changing legislation). David was also meeting with folk in Auckland and Wellington.

We will be working with Access Alliance and also the Barrier Free Trust in the future to ensure that “our” people get adequate representation in proposed legislative changes for the future.

Representatives from Pegasus Health and “MyCare” came to see us also, regarding using our services for some of their clients.

Oddly, the rush of clients earlier in the year has tapered off markedly but will no doubt increase again in the beginning of 2019.

We will be “shutting up shop” on 13th December until roughly mid-way through January, but will still be receiving messages by email and text (027 220 5372)

Happy news for “older” members is that Jan Brooking and Zee Davis are marrying on 8th December, in Auckland. Jan’s mother is too frail to travel to Christchurch so they are having a simple celebration under the plum tree in her backyard!

If you want to send good wishes, Jan has a Facebook page (and so has Zee). They will be returning to Christchurch in the New Year.

Also in the last month, Anna got her brown belt in kung fu at Chan’s Martial Arts



*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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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.

Part 1 - Communicating with Your Friend

1 Be patient. Patience is important in any relationship, but it may be most important if you are a neurotypical person who wants to be a good friend to an autistic person. Your friend may do some things that confuse or frustrate you, but you have to be willing to make the effort to understand where they're coming from.



- Keep in mind that all autistic people are different, just as all neurotypical people are different. If you've met one autistic person, all this means is that you've met one autistic person.
- This means that just because you may have an autistic person in your family, that doesn't mean you can interact with your friend in the same way, or expect them to act similarly or have the same difficulties.
- Many autistic people say things that are very direct, and your friend may say something that hurts you. Try not to take this personally. They probably had no idea that what they said was hurtful.
- Let your friend know that what they said upset you, and help them understand better how to communicate in a more tactful and productive way.
- For example, your friend might say "That shirt makes you look ugly." You can explain that it hurts to be told that, and ask them what they dislike about your shirt. In the future, they can avoid a similar situation by saying something such as "I don't think that's your best color," or "I thought the shirt you wore yesterday was more flattering."

2 Use simple, concrete language. Autistic people tend to understand what you're saying better when you speak in short, active sentences and use specifics. While you should make an effort to do this so you will be better understood, this doesn't necessarily mean you should significantly alter your normal pattern of speech.



- For example, instead of saying "Hey, do you want to hang out tomorrow?" you might say "I want to spend time with you tomorrow. Would you rather watch a movie or go to the coffee shop?"
- If you talk to your autistic friend differently from the way you talk to other people, they'll notice and might find it insulting.
- At the same time, they will appreciate it if you make an effort to communicate effectively with them.
- If you find that you're frequently having to explain yourself or clarify your statements, try to find out why and make an effort to speak more clearly.

- Don't condescend to them by speaking slowly, "dumbing down" your vocabulary, talking about them as if they weren't there, or assuming they won't understand anything. This is really insulting, and it will annoy your friend.

3 Avoid sarcasm and figurative speech. Autistic people may not pick up on facial expressions, social cues, or **figurative language** such as sarcasm. If you notice that your friend seems confused, ask why, and offer to clarify.

- For many people, friendly teasing is one of the ways they show friendly affection. However, many autistic people may take what you say literally and think you are insulting them or that you no longer want to be their friend.
- If your friend is a teenager or adult, they likely have learned how to understand some figurative speech. However, it still may take them a minute to realize you didn't mean something literally or that you were saying it in jest.
- For example, if you say "Oh that's just great" in a sarcastic tone when your friend is telling you about something bad that happened to them, they might take it to mean that you think it was good that something bad happened to them.
- Rather, speak literally. If your friend is telling you about something bad that happened to them, just say "That's terrible. I'm so sorry that happened to you. Would you like me to help?"
- If your friend takes something literally that you meant as a joke and is hurt by it, apologize immediately. Don't try to excuse your behavior or blame them for misunderstanding you.



4 Understand the friendship may be one-sided. Autistic people often inadvertently alienate friends because they have difficulty understanding when they need to reach out, or how they should keep in contact with you.

- Part of being a good friend is understanding that you may have to put forth the bulk of the effort to keep in contact and to do things together.
- If your friend doesn't get back to you right away, or if weeks go by without you hearing from them, try not to take it personally.
- Keep in mind that many autistic people will assume that you will contact them if you want to talk to them or hang out with them. If they don't hear from you, they believe you're busy or don't want to do anything with them.
- For this reason, try to initiate contact on a regular basis. Don't worry if you're the only one in the relationship that ever texts or calls first, or you're the only one who ever makes plans.



5 Express interest and curiosity. Autistic people typically have an intense interest in a particular thing – sometimes even several things simultaneously. These are referred to as "special interests," and are very important to each person.

- Aspies typically have few friends, so if you've already started a friendship it's likely that friendship revolves around some mutual shared interest.
- Autistic people often research their special interests extensively, and have a vast amount of knowledge on the subject. By asking questions, you can learn a lot from your autistic friend.
- Autistic people also enjoy talking about their special interests, so you often can use a special interest to kickstart an engaging and stimulating conversation.



- However, keep in mind that your friend is likely to get so involved in talking about their special interest that they keep monologuing about it long after you've lost interest.
- Ask questions or steer them to another topic when you feel like you've had enough – autistic people often have trouble reading body language and may not pick up on the fact that you're bored.
- For example, you might say "I know we were talking about world records, but that reminded me of the World Series. Do you enjoy baseball? Who do you think will win the game tonight?"

Part 2 - Understanding Sensory Sensitivities

1 Ask your friend about sensory sensitivities. Most autistic people have issues with how they perceive things through touch, sight, hearing, smell, or taste. These sensitivities vary widely among individuals, so the best thing to do is ask your friend about theirs.

- If your friend doesn't enjoy a particular place or activity, this may be because of their sensory sensitivities.
- For example, someone who is overly sensitive to sounds may not enjoy a loud, busy coffee shop. While you're able to tune out the background noise, they can't filter the sounds in the same way and end up getting overstimulated.
- Many autistic people who have visual sensitivities have problems with fluorescent lights. This may mean that your autistic friend wouldn't enjoy shopping with you at some department stores or malls.



2 Accept differences even if you don't understand them. Being a good friend means accepting what your autistic friend says about their sensory sensitivities at face value. Even if they have particular sensitivities that make no sense to you, expressing doubt can upset your friend.

- Think about how you perceive the world through your senses. You likely assumed everyone perceived the world the same as you did until you had a reason to learn otherwise. Autistic people are the same.
- For example, if you wear glasses or contacts, you likely can remember a time before you were prescribed these aids. You probably thought you could see just fine, until a test revealed your vision was impaired. Once you got your glasses, you realized how you were supposed to see the world.
- Sensory issues are much like this. Your friend may not realize that there's anything "different" about the fact that certain perfumes give them a headache, or they get tense and frustrated when in a room with fluorescent lighting.
- Sensory issues can be particularly difficult to explain, which means your friend may not be able to explain a problem in a way you can understand, or provide a reason for why a place or activity bothers them.



3 Make accommodations. Sometimes, you may need to make accommodations for your friend's special needs. For example, you may need to eat in a quieter corner of the cafeteria, rather than right in the middle where it's louder and busier. Your friend will be able to tell you what they need to make the environment work for them.

- It is not rude to ask, for example, "Is there anything I should know about your needs before we go to the concert?" In fact, your friend will appreciate you thinking ahead and wanting to be helpful.
- Give your friend as much information as you can about the place you're going so they can evaluate the situation and prepare themselves.
- If you invite your friend over to your home often, you want to make sure it's a place they find safe and comfortable. To be a good friend, display a willingness to change things they find overstimulating or uncomfortable.
- For example, if there are televisions in several rooms, you may want to close doors so there are not multiple sounds competing for attention.



4 Learn to recognize the signs of overstimulation. When an autistic person goes into overload, they may panic, melt down, curl into a ball, run away, or lose the ability to speak. You can help the autistic person by escorting them to a quiet place, not putting demands on them, and giving them time to recover.

- Particularly if your friend is a teenager or adult, they've likely learned to identify things they do when they're approaching their limit. Ask them about these signs so you can be on the lookout for them.
- Keep in mind that sensory overstimulation often is quite painful for your friend. They need to get out of the situation as soon as possible so they can recharge.
- If you're going to a public place where overstimulation is possible, be on the lookout for a quiet place where the two of you can retreat.
- Help your friend by leaving with them, and making excuses to anyone with whom they were talking so no one takes offense if they have to leave abruptly.



5 Try to treat your friend like any other. Many people with autism have been misunderstood or bullied, and sometimes treating them like a regular friend is what they really want. Sure, it takes a little while to get used to someone's idiosyncrasies, but people do that for each other all the time. If a teenager or adult with autism is participating in social activities, they're trying to interact with others without calling attention to their autism. Be sensitive to this possibility.



Part 3: Supporting Your Friend coming next issue

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