



Alone Together: Making an Asperger Marriage Work

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Communication is one of the biggest challenges faced by people with Asperger's Syndrome (AS), yet an Asperger marriage requires communication more than any other relationship. Thousands of people live in Asperger marriages without knowing the answers to important questions such as 'What behaviours indicate that my spouse has AS?' 'Is it worthwhile to get a diagnosis?' 'Is there hope for improvement?'

Katrin Bentley has been married for 18 years. Since receiving her husband's diagnosis of AS, their marriage has improved substantially. They learnt to accept each other's different approaches to life and found ways to overcome problems and misunderstandings. Today they are happily married and able to communicate effectively.

Alone Together shares the struggle of one couple to rescue their marriage. It is uplifting and humorous, and includes plenty of tips to making an Asperger marriage succeed. This book offers couples hope, encouragement and strategies for their own marriages.

Alone Together: Making an Asperger Marriage Work Details

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From Reader Review Alone Together: Making an Asperger Marriage Work for online ebook

Jeanette Levellie says

Excellent, down-to-earth advice

This well-written book gave me excellent advice and insights into relating to Aspies, and the many personal stories from the author's own marriage made it down-to-earth. I highly recommend it!

Lucy Wightman says

This book is a fast read and simply told. The particular brand of AS involved in this marriage is clearly stated, and some of the couple's solutions are outlined.

The author sounds exceptionally sweet, patient and tolerant. She married a man with a constellation of characteristics known as Asperger's Syndrome. He developed a remarkable amount of insight and flexibility. His willingness to explore himself, coupled with her gentleness, made the relationship grow through the discovery of their differences.

I have heard and read that more often than not, when an AS-like individual is confronted by differences, the common solution is to simply discard what is incompatible, therefore keeping their discomfort low. In this case, that did not happen, making room for the problem solving and growth.

This couple remained committed for better and for worse, and weathered the learning and adapting necessary in any relationship. According to the writer, there were many gifts on the other side.

The writer describes her husband lacking compassion when she was sick, and never offering any type of reassurance. She was perplexed by his complete lack of empathy.

Today I know that the lack of 'theory of mind' made Gavin unaware of the feelings of others; he was only able to look at things from his own perspective. Instead of realizing that I needed help he only noticed a change in my personality and he didn't like that. He wanted me to be pleasant, gentle and happy all the time.

This behavior is easily mistaken for narcissism, a stall that can occur in any of our early lives. Being that it is developmental, rather than more neurological, narcissism and other personality glitches can sometimes be adjusted and changed.

Often, people with an AS neurology must have their way, have trouble deciphering facial expressions, body language, and abstract statements. The need for predictability is troublesome, but the insistence on being right, at all times, **no matter what**, can shatter the relationship. It borders on the impossible to find a way to

embrace this.

The special interests of those in the AS range can seem obsessive, but it is very important and controls anxiety. Additionally, many discoveries and inventions have been made by those showing the characteristics of Aspergers. In men, the interest tends towards sports information, or athletic participation (more commonly semi-solo sports like running, cycling, tennis, rowing etc). Often the memory of this brain far exceeds the neurotypical brain in that facts, figures and statistics can be filed and readily available.

The sensory life of AS has degrees of disturbance and interference. Bright lights, certain noises (leafblowers, vacuum cleaners, chewing and crunching, certain music), food textures, and skin sensitivities are the hallmarks.

The writer had extreme patience weathering years of painful communication, aloneness and confusion.

Around others he turned into a talking machine, nobody else was able to get a word in.

Gavin had a list of topics that were open for discussion. Everything else was to be left alone. Our arguments stayed unresolved because we never talked about them. They were forbidden territory. His best coping mechanism was ignorance.

He was a fierce fighter who was never wrong. His one-track mind made it impossible for him to accept opinions that differed from his own. An argument was like a battle for him, a war about right and wrong. He always left the scene as a winner, anything else would have implied failure and that was something he couldn't tolerate.

He blamed me for all of our problems and didn't dream of apologizing. Saying sorry would have meant admitting fault and this was impossible. He loved to be the knight in shining armour.

The author's discussion about 'energy exchange' came as a complete surprise. It was actually refreshing to read about this dynamic in the context of the oppression. I think her keen recognition of this opened the doors to growth and change.

In a successful relationship both partners should be able to uplift, inspire and energize each other. In an Asperger marriage this energy exchange doesn't seem to take place.

Usually the 'neurotypical' hands out energy but receives none in return, and thus feels permanently exhausted. Due to the high stress and anxiety levels, the AS partner finds it difficult to sustain his energy and therefore has little left to share. Whatever exists he retains to satisfy any personal requirements.

Not receiving energy from our partner is not the end of the world. On the contrary it forces us

to look for alternate sources.

By looking mysterious and distant we force others to guess what is bothering us. As long as they don't know what we are feeling and thinking we can gain energy at their expense.

This behaviour often occurs unintentionally in an Asperger marriage as partners have no theory of mind regarding each other. While the neurotypical tries to figure out what's going on in the partner's mind, the AS person struggles just as much due to his problems with reading body language and facial expressions.

For years I felt tired because Gavin was angry, sad, distant or critical. Most often he used anger to gain my energy while I used self-pity to get it back. The battle had started and was never ending.

Our natural instinct wants us to retaliate and steal back the energy we have lost, but it doesn't work. Instead of receiving a refill we lose more.

Have you tried to walk away and be aloof, only to see him more aloof and go to sleep without solving the problem?

Last but not least, have you tried to criticize him? Well don't! If I criticize Gavin he gives me a list of things that annoy him about me, or he gets so angry that I lose whatever energy I have left.

Being in an Asperger marriage gives us plenty of opportunities to use self-pity to deplete our partner. Trying to steal the AS partner's energy won't work. Instead it'll deplete us further.

Finally, the author discusses intimacy in a fairly hands-off manner, although there is some information to be gleaned.

Intimacy means being able to relate to each other emotionally. if we can do this we experience a feeling of well being and trust that in my opinion increases the enjoyment of sexuality. Without connection there is no intimacy. Without intimacy sexuality becomes simply an activity no different to golf or tennis.

It feels very strange to be physically close to somebody who isn't really there. When Gavin used to switch himself off I could still see him but I couldn't feel his presence. I knew that he was in the room but I felt as if I was alone.

Denise says

There were a few chapters in this that were like a punch to the face (she says, as the wife of a programmer). It was a little ... I don't know how to explain it, exactly, "woman-writer-y" in long stretches (lottttttttts of talking about her feelings) but then if you're reading it, you're probably reading it because your spouse has (or has similar symptoms to) Asperger's and it can be refreshing (?) or at least comforting to read someone's experiences and be reminded that you are not the first person to have gone through these things.

Elaine says

Whether or not one's partner is officially Aspie, this book is very helpful. A birds-eye view of living with someone with communication problems!

Jonathan Karmel says

Kudos to the author for her compassion and resilience in finding a way to make her marriage work. Perhaps the most helpful takeaway from this is that if what you're doing isn't working, try something different. Don't just keep doing the same things and expecting a different result.

I don't think, however, that all of the particular tactics the author used would be generalizable, because each person is different and every relationship has its own dynamics. (The author acknowledges this at the beginning of the book.)

Here are some things in the book that I thought might be useful to others besides the author (just my subjective opinion, I am no expert on the subject).

He probably uses language literally. You will get frustrated if you try to express things with body language, tone of voice and hints. No, he cannot take a hint. "If you need help put your request into simple words and express exactly what you want your partner to do." Good advice. When he uses words to honestly express what he's thinking, he's just trying to communicate; he's not intending to be hurtful. He uses words to pass on information. He doesn't naturally understand that: "It's not simply what we say, but how we say it." Therefore, he frequently, inadvertently, uses the "wrong" tone of voice, but without any intention to be hurtful. He often sounds angry when in reality he is simply trying to communicate. His natural inclination is to say what he thinks is true. He is not naturally inclined to tell "white lies" to protect people's feelings.

His long-term memory is probably better than his short-term memory.

He probably has a system for doing things and gets frustrated that you don't have one. Once he's developed an efficient and economical plan of action, he probably has a strong psychological need to follow through with it to its completion and not have it derailed.

The author said her husband "differentiates between sex and making love."

He doesn't naturally express or understand expression of emotion with the eyes. Rather, he finds eye contact distracting and tries to avoid it in order to concentrate on what's being said.

Being critical isn't going to help. You can complain without being critical. (Probably true in any relationship.)

I liked Gavin's comment about making friends: "I seem to bring a level of intensity with me that others aren't comfortable with and as I begin to feel this I make comments that completely alter the mood."

One method to enhance communication that I think could be effective for a lot of people is to communicate through writing. When you're getting nowhere addressing a problem through verbal, face-to-face conversation, the problem might be addressed via an exchange of e-mails.

Another method is to say what the author said to Gavin at one point: "I don't want to argue. I want to tell you something. You don't have to answer or say anything or do anything right now. Just listen." Then say what you want to say and walk away. Let him process what you've said and respond when he is ready.

He may need regular physical exercise to relieve stress and maintain a good mood. He may be happiest in that first hour after sunrise. That may be the time when he is in the best mood.

He might not like gift-giving. He might be thinking something like this: "It seems like the ideal gift would be something that the person wants but does not already have and cannot or would not buy for themselves. Since it's frequently difficult to ascertain what such a thing would be, people usually get gifts they don't want, especially if they're picky, like me. What am I supposed to do when I get something I don't want. I think I'm supposed to pretend that I actually do want it and I'm supposed to make the other person feel good about giving it to me. If that's what I'm supposed to do that's fine, but in that case getting gifts doesn't make me happy. It just forces me to lie to somebody to try to make the other person happy. In order to avoid giving another person something they don't want, I might ask the person what they want. But then the 'gift' concept is apparently lessened by the fact that I did not choose the gift. In fact, I could have just as easily given the person cash in order to buy the thing. On the other hand, the gift could be the act of buying the thing and delivering it to the other person. In some cases, a thing is hard to find, or the person receiving the gift might know the general or specific function they want the thing to do, but they don't know which type or brand of product will perform that function. So the gift could be figuring that out for the other person. Still, the person is likely not to want the thing I buy if the person is not able to or does not want to tell me exactly what they want. It would seem like a better practice to tell the person exactly what I intend to buy before buying it. Most people don't like to spend the time and effort to return something. Of course I could give the gift with the understanding that if the person doesn't want it, I will be the one to return it. But again, the usual practice is to lie and say you do want something even if you actually don't want it. Now it could be that I'm missing the whole point. It's actually the 'thought' that counts. But if that's true, why can't you just tell someone how you feel about them. I don't know about other people, but that would be a sufficient gift for me. But I suppose it's not good enough to just tell someone how you feel. You have to demonstrate it by doing something that requires a concerted effort. I have found, however, that in reality the other person doesn't know how much effort you expended buying the gift, and how much they like the gift really has little correlation to that effort. Now a gift is supposed to be wrapped and is supposed to come with a card. I can't understand either of these things at all. If someone comes to my house and gives me a wrapped gift, that's just an extra layer of packaging I have to get through to get to the present. It's hard enough opening packaging these days without that extra layer. Also, since I'm generally the one to ensure that garbage is taken away from my house so that it doesn't accumulate on my property, the wrapping paper creates that much extra work for me. And I know that even though the garbage does eventually get transported away

from my property never to be seen again by me, it does not actually disappear. All of that wrapping paper is sitting in a landfill somewhere, or perhaps it was incinerated and it's in the atmosphere somewhere. That's on top of the energy that was used to manufacture the wrapping paper and transport it to me in the first place. Everything I said about the wrapping paper also goes for the card. Now I know that cards sometimes also contain a funny joke, but still the person could probably tell me 10 jokes or more for the amount of effort it took to give me that card. It's true that people usually write stuff in the card, but again couldn't they just tell me those things? That would actually be a lot more personal and meaningful to me. A lot of cards don't even have jokes on them. What's the point of those cards? The whole gift-giving/wrapping/card presenting thing is a mystery to me. To me, it's just a tremendous amount of effort that is more likely to lead to bad feelings than good feelings. On top of that, I don't want more stuff. If anything, I wish I had less stuff. Instead of giving me a present, I wish someone would come over to my house and take away some of the crap I already have and don't want, like that stupid present they gave me last year."

Finally, good for Gavin for saying "I married you for fun, not for problems." Even though problems (such as health problems) are obviously and unfortunately unavoidable, shouldn't we constantly strive to enjoy life rather than focusing on problems?

Carol says

This is a personal account of the impact of undiagnosed Asperger's Syndrome on their marriage, and how things improved once they knew what they were dealing with. The general pattern is that she describes an area of conflict and difficulty, and then explains how Asperger's traits made a normal situation more difficult, and often tells how she learned to accommodate his quirks even before the diagnosis. Until his condition was diagnosed, she was continually guessing what to do to keep their family life functioning. This was extremely stressful for her, and drained much of the joy out of her life. After the diagnosis, she was able to clearly define what was needed, and was able to communicate to him in ways he could comprehend. Because he truly did love her, he was willing to make the effort to learn how to express it better. He wrote a short Epilogue, in which he says, "I feel that I enter the next phase of my life with the tools to make it fuller than the time I leave behind."

Tara Calaby says

This was an interesting and informative read. I liked the way that the author focussed on her own relationship, so that it was always a case of saying what worked for her and her husband, instead of handing down a decree about what everyone should do.

Barak says

It was somewhat less boring than most books about the subject as it is described by a woman living with someone behaving most of the time like an ass. Luckily, in 1944 Hans Asperger did some work with kids; the outcome of this work came into psychological legitimacy as Asperger Syndrome (AS) in 1981 and got popularised in the early 1990s.

So now every ass is just an AS. And if you tell them that often enough, it might trigger them to be less of an ass, as everyone wants to cure themselves, right? but perhaps that's my AS talking...

What I cannot get to terms with is why just because someone has the tendency to behave in ways that normal (the modern term being neurotypical it would seem, as if culture can be reduced to neurology) society is discouraging, this someone should feel he or she must become more annoying and antagonistic to others, or society's nemesis - that comes from a competitive/vengeful nature that does not have to accompany AS in my opinion.

Since writing this book was courageous by the author, and did provoke some thoughts in me (if not the intended ones) I gave it 3 stars. Still, I did find it repetitive too many times, and I do think more editing would have benefited it, as I found two cases where "then" is used instead of "than", and one where "relay" replaced "rely". In their website Gavin the AS (or ass, depending on your view) partner is describing himself (mentioning his granular family in the last sentence only) and is using "loosing" instead of "losing" (a typical error in Oz for some reason) and "pursued" instead of "persuaded", so I guess he is of the AS type that is not too good in proofreading (saw that in another book, written by a woman AS), his attention to details focused elsewhere.

The book mentions a lot the concept of "Theory of Mind" or rather its lack of in people on the Autism spectrum (AS specifically in this book's context); it got me reading about it a bit and I still find it, as well as Mind-blindness and going philosophical about it, Solipsism, to be curious at best. They are now trying to use MRI and whatnot to scientify it, but I think the conceptual levels there are incongruent.

Anne says

While I enjoyed this book, there were parts of it that I had to discounted as based in theory rather than actual evidence based science. I will not add spoilers to this review - because I feel the book makes some great points. The author is writing of her own experiences married to a man with Asperger's. The book is heart felt, the process she writes about in finding happiness and fulfillment for her marriage and family is familiar.

Nandini says

This book came to me at the wrong point in my life. Two stars off for that!

Choice quotes:

"Gavin had a list of topics that were open for discussion. Everything else was to be left alone. Our arguments stayed unresolved because we never talked about them. They were forbidden territory. His best coping mechanism was ignorance.

"He was a fierce fighter who was never wrong. His one-track mind made it impossible for him to accept opinions that differed from his own. An argument was like a battle for him, a war about right and wrong. He always left the scene as a winner, anything else would have implied failure and that was something he couldn't tolerate.

"He blamed me for all of our problems and didn't dream of apologizing. Saying sorry would have meant admitting fault and this was impossible. "

and

"Today I know that the lack of 'theory of mind' made Gavin unaware of the feelings of others; he was only able to look at things from his own perspective. Instead of realizing that I needed help he only noticed a change in my personality and he didn't like that. He wanted me to be pleasant, gentle and happy all the time. "

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"Usually the 'neurotypical' hands out energy but receives none in return, and thus feels permanently exhausted. Due to the high stress and anxiety levels, the AS partner finds it difficult to sustain his energy and therefore has little left to share. Whatever exists he retains to satisfy any personal requirements.

"Not receiving energy from our partner is not the end of the world. On the contrary it forces us to look for alternate sources.

"By looking mysterious and distant we force others to guess what is bothering us. As long as they don't know what we are feeling and thinking we can gain energy at their expense.

"This behaviour often occurs unintentionally in an Asperger marriage as partners have no theory of mind regarding each other. While the neurotypical tries to figure out what's going on in the partner's mind, the AS person struggles just as much due to his problems with reading body language and facial expressions.

"For years I felt tired because Gavin was angry, sad, distant or critical. Most often he used anger to gain my energy while I used self-pity to get it back. The battle had started and was never ending.

"Our natural instinct wants us to retaliate and steal back the energy we have lost, but it doesn't work. Instead of receiving a refill we lose more.

"Have you tried to walk away and be aloof, only to see him more aloof and go to sleep without solving the problem?

"Last but not least, have you tried to criticize him? Well don't! If I criticize Gavin he gives me a list of things that annoy him about me, or he gets so angry that I lose whatever energy I have left.

"Being in an Asperger marriage gives us plenty of opportunities to use self-pity to deplete our partner. Trying to steal the AS partner's energy won't work. Instead it'll deplete us further. "

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"Intimacy means being able to relate to each other emotionally. if we can do this we experience a feeling of

well being and trust that in my opinion increases the enjoyment of sexuality. Without connection there is no intimacy. Without intimacy sexuality becomes simply an activity no different to golf or tennis.

"It feels very strange to be physically close to somebody who isn't really there. When Gavin used to switch himself off I could still see him but I couldn't feel his presence. I knew that he was in the room but I felt as if I was alone."

Denise says

Interesting read. Written in a friendly, casual, personal tone.

Ietrio says

The pain and suffering the christian doctrine can bring. The two can be friends. They can be sexual partners. Any sort of partners. But in this relationship both have suffered. And this is one happy case happening now when people start understanding the physical limitations of the humans. I can only imagine the millions suffering over the centuries because of the same rigid stone age tribal morals.

Christine says

I would recommend this for anyone who has someone in their life with Aspergers, or who suspect that it is present in a loved one. Although one thing to remember is that you can't generalise, even though this is their story and experience it is not the same for everyone. People with Aspergers do not have all the characteristics that the man described in this book has. Also it is all from the point of view as the man having Aspergers, its not something that is limited to men. However a good book as a starting point, and I like the fact that it is written by both the husband (who has Aspergers) and wife. One thing for sure is that it is not a disability! Every single person has "specific needs" or particular needs. Society doesn't always cater for the minority, for people who have different needs. It would be great if more people start to understand that we all are unique even "neuro- typicals" , a term which in a way is not really relevant. The more we humans understand about the brain the more we realise what we do not know, and how unique each person truly is.

Still an excellent resource especially suited for couples (but male with Aspergers ! not female) with plenty of examples and practical strategies, as well as explaining how someone with Aspergers views the world. Again this is not totally exact as it is only a guide since it varies, just as individuals vary, they are more like specific "likely traits". Not sure how else to word it.

The more you understand your partner, in any partnership, the better your relationship can be. I think everyone can benefit from that approach whether or not their partner has Aspergers.

Fascinating read, well written, explains any jargon, clear and logical flow to the book. I actually wonder what she would be like as a fiction author or if she has written other books.

Andrew Lind says

ABSOLUTLEY AMAZING! In this book, Katrin Bentley tells her story of how her and her husband with Asperger's syndrome met, got married, had kids, and most of all made their marriage work. It is a very powerful and moving story of a couple and their struggles.

Michael D Keen says**Life changing book**

I am so thankful that I have taken the time to read this book. It helps me understand more why I act like I do in relationships. It is good to know that I am not alone with having Asperger's and relationship problems.
