

# Effects of Differing Neuro/Developmental Levels on Neurotypical/ Autism Spectrum Adult Relationships

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| <p><i>A developmental milestone is a significant neurological step in the progressing physical, emotional, intellectual, mental, spiritual maturity of a person to adulthood.</i></p> | <p><i>Autism Spectrum Disorder is a term used to describe a spectrum of neuro-developmental disorders. It is genetic and results from neurological factors that delay or prevent the developmental maturity of many or sometimes nearly all functional brain systems.</i></p> | <p><i>Failure to reach certain significant mature milestones can have an aberrant effect on a person's ability to function successfully in relationships.</i></p> | <p><i>The confusing, differing maturity levels between the couple result for the NT, in a unique Post Traumatic Relationship Syndrome which Karen Rodman of FAAAS has termed Ongoing Traumatic Relationship Syndrome. (OTRS).</i></p> |
| <p><u>Mature developmental milestones reached by NTs</u></p>  | <p><u>Where levels of development may arrest in adults with ASD</u></p>   | <p><u>Effects on adults with ASD as a result of not reaching mature milestones</u></p>  | <p><u>Effects on NT partners of incongruous developmental milestones in the relationship</u></p>  |
| <p>Joint attention</p>  | <p>Interest only in one's own needs; OCD; narcissism</p>  | <p>Difficulty sharing experiences &amp; interests</p>   | <p>Perspective, interests &amp; needs disregarded by partner</p>  |
| <p>Theory of mind/Theory of own mind – awareness of self and others</p>   | <p>Inability to see one's own or another's point of view</p>  | <p>Inability to be "in someone else's shoes"; fails to acknowledge and denies truth of partner's view</p>   | <p>Loss of sense of self; insecurity; uncertainty of own reality</p>  |
| <p>Ability to read and interpret body language / facial expression</p>  | <p>Limited understanding of body language / facial expressions</p>  | <p>Inability to register others' emotions</p>   | <p>Emotions unacknowledged, not validated and disregarded by partner</p>  |
| <p>Ability to repair &amp; maintain relationships, have life-long friendships</p>   | <p>Inability to repair and nurture relationships</p>  | <p>Few, if any, real friends</p>  | <p>Unresolved disputes, unfinished interactions, unresolved emotional upset; no resolutions to problems</p>   |
| <p>Emotional reciprocity</p>  | <p>Lack of empathy for people</p>   | <p>Inability to relate to or sense others' emotions</p>   | <p>Lack of input / return of feelings / emotional support</p>   |
| <p>Desire or need to socialise and make "small talk", interest in others</p>  | <p>Inability to see the need for small talk; socialises for own ego/ manipulation; narcissism</p>   | <p>Difficulties in making relationships, uses role playing, copying &amp; masking outside home to cover deficiencies</p>  | <p>Lack of intimate connection such as "pillow talk", real friendship, loving foreplay</p>  |
| <p>Sense of humour / understanding of irony &amp; human frailty</p>   | <p>Limited humour/ inability to laugh at oneself and one's own mistakes</p>   | <p>Limited ability to admit to mistakes, sees others as the cause of their difficulties</p>   | <p>No redress when wronged, receives no "natural justice"</p>   |
| <p>Abstract language</p>  | <p>Limited to literal understanding of language</p>   | <p>Limited ability to understand irony / metaphor / jokes</p>   | <p>Unrequited efforts to make themselves "heard" / lack of loving banter</p>  |

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| Desire to share own and others' interests                       | Obsession with own interests; OCD   | Difficulty sharing anything  | Loneliness in the relationship, few shared positive memories  |
| Ability to generalise learning to new situations                | Rigid compartmentalisation of concepts  | Inflexibility in learning new ways and growing   | Unacknowledged and non-validated perspectives   |
| Abstract thinking; higher order thinking skills                 | "Concrete" thinking, lacking schema changes after childhood; lacking insight/inferences/extrapolation skills                | Little appreciation of "hidden" meaning in life; unable or very slow/unwilling to learn new ways of being  | Denial of truth; "gaslight" phenomenon; self-doubt  |
| Imagination and ability to dream of possibilities               | Solitary imagination  | Tendency to remain "stuck in a rut" in life  | Reduction and narrowing of life experiences   |
| Development of auditory skills and articulate verbal skills     | Deficient oral / aural communication with receptive / expressive language difficulties                                      | Tendency to misinterpret others' intentions; uses non-sequitur   | Object of misunderstandings producing self-doubt/ confusion   |
| Takes responsibility for own actions                            | Blames others for problems / mistakes; lack of insight into own responsibility  | Inability to acknowledge or learn from mistakes; belief in own superiority; always right despite evidence  | Falsely blamed, develops strong anger arising from injustice and false accusations  |
| Ability to share problems and concerns as a means to solve them | Inability to share problems or foresee consequences and possibilities   | Tendency to get into problem situations; "Mr Magoo" Syndrome; oblivious to turbulence of problems  | Requirement socially / emotionally to fix the unconsidered consequences   |
| Social conscience, sense of "fair play" and natural justice     | Undeveloped social conscience & overly strict adherence to own rules; narrowly focussed, unable to interpret nuance in life | POSSIBLE psychopathic, sociopathic or criminal behaviour, black and white attitude to life; extreme zeal for perceived righteous pursuits or power; "god-like" | Exposure to insufficient or unsafe conditions / dismissal of concerns and reality, may feel intimidated & humiliated; affected by family violence/abuse |
| Ability to react & act spontaneously                            | Inappropriate responses or no response  | Awkwardness, lack of caring in family and social situations; poor parenting  | Deficiency of positive feedback or assistance   |
| Innate knowledge about social behaviour                         | Lack of real understanding of social behaviour  | Desire for isolation or over socialisation   | Undesired isolation, lack of options for full participation in life; controlled, narrow social life   |
| Comfort, pleasure & pain in sensory experiences                 | Sensory overload or unawareness   | Excess or avoidance of appropriate touch & physical contact  | Deficiency of human physical contact; enforced/deliberate celibacy or uncomfortable assault   |
| Intuition about life; innate knowing                            | Lack of intuition   | Lack of common-sense   | Obligation to repair social gaffes & misunderstandings by partner   |

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| Balanced development of emotional and intellectual skills                                | Development of intellectual skills over emotional skills                               | Interactions limited to intellectual responses unless prompted   | Feelings of being socially mimicked and depended upon, as a social "seeing-eye dog" & surrogate parent   |
| Ability to show love and respect in tone of voice, eyes, treatment of others             | Limitation to "gifts of service"   | Cold and unloving behaviour, lack of compassion, lack of empathy   | Object of manipulation, intermittent reward; experiences fear with loss of trust in the relationship & self  |
| Attachment to people, places and things  | Lack of attachment to people   | Attitude that others are dispensable   | Unrequited love; lose self-esteem, feel unappreciated, manipulated, used   |
| Reflection and insight into self   | Lack of sense of self in relation to others  | Inability to reflect on own life   | Obligation to solely accommodate partner's needs without compromise or negotiation   |
| Ability to make decisions using emotions and intellect                                   | Uncertainty of own feelings about things   | Poor decision making / naiveté   | Hopelessness in seeking partner's opinions or commitment   |
| Executive functioning  | Lack of organisational skills; prompt dependence or complete control                   | Inability to navigate complex processes and use forethought to perceive consequences; passive aggression                                     | Obligation to prompt or fulfil partner's neglected duties  |
| Ability to prioritise tasks and multi-task   | Limited to one task at a time, usually a special interest, strict routine or obsession | Neglect of urgent responsibilities / panic   | Obligation to solve urgent disasters alone and for partner   |
| Context awareness, fast intuition; unconscious cognition                                 | Context blindness; mindblindness; lack intuition                                       | Prompt dependent; inability to react/behave/adapt spontaneously to different social contexts/changes or making necessary exceptions to rules | Obligation to remind and prompt with cues each time; confusing interactions & conversations; feeling not understood  |
| Able to generalise implicitly and explicitly on global and local tasks                   | Unable to generalise learning  | Inability to adapt appropriate strategies when particular responses/ behaviours are essential  | Feels the need to constantly guide and assist their partner to avoid embarrassment for their spouse  |
| Physical co-ordination   | Poor fine/ gross motor skills; Tourette's; hand flapping                               | Unusual gait, unco-ordinated movement, tics; inappropriate facial expressions; immature attempts at "play"                                   | Senses the unusual movements and facial expressions as intimidation.   |
| Mature ability to control thoughts, emotions, words, actions according to circumstances. | Lack of impulse control, uncontrolled meltdowns, inappropriate anger; rage cycle       | ADHD, ADD, OCD, tantrums; manipulates and controls others by fear, anger, anxiety, verbal/ physical violence; possible depressive symptoms   | Living with constant stress, fear, unresolved anger, domestic abuse and violence. Death by a thousand paper cuts. Ongoing Traumatic Relationship Syndrome (OTRS) |

The chart was compiled by a widely experienced retired educator with post graduate qualifications who has been in an almost three decade long marriage to a man diagnosed with High functioning autism (Asperger's syndrome) by Professor Tony Attwood in 2005. The author has facilitated a support website for neurotypical spouses/partners for several years. The chart was compiled in collaboration with other facilitators of international NT support groups. These facilitators together have over eighty years' combined experience of living with a spouse on the autism spectrum. They have also heard from many tens of thousands of adult NTs living in marriages and relationships with someone with Asperger's/Hfa. The value of the quantity and quality taken together, of that experience of being in contact with so many NTs, cannot be ignored. The chart is also based on numerous neuro scientific research/investigations, along with results of other research into the circumstances of our situation conducted over many years.

#### RESEARCHERS OF NEUROTYPICAL EXPERIENCES:

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#### SUPPORT WEBSITES

[www.theneurotypical.com](http://www.theneurotypical.com)  
[www.faaas.org](http://www.faaas.org)  
[www.aspergerpartner.com](http://www.aspergerpartner.com)

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Based on the work of educational theorists

1. Piaget's Stages of Development
2. Bloom's cognitive/affective learning and taxonomy of higher order thinking skills
3. Kohlberg's development of empathy stages

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[Kourkoulou A](#), [Leekam SR](#), [Findlay JM](#) Implicit learning of local context in autism spectrum disorder

Vermeulen, Peter PhD Autism: From Mind Blindness to Context Blindness **Autism Asperger's Digest** | November/December 2011

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2. Autonomic and brain responses associated with empathy deficits in autism spectrum disorder. [Gu X](#), [Eilam-Stock T](#), [Zhou T](#), [Anagnostou E](#), [Kolevzon A](#), [Soorya L](#), [Hof PR](#), [Friston KJ](#), [Fan J](#)
3. how people with autism experience pain Society for neuroscience <https://spectrumnews.org/.../in-autism-brain-responses-to-pain-dont-matc...>
4. Perspective-Tracking Brain Response Could Help Identify Children with Autism
5. [www.psychologicalscience.org/.../perspective-tracking-brain-response-co...](http://www.psychologicalscience.org/.../perspective-tracking-brain-response-co...)
6. Charting the typical and atypical development of the social brain KA Pelphrey, EJ Carter - Development and psychopathology, 2008 - Cambridge Univ Press

