

Professor Tony Attwood - *Autism & Family Dynamics (Parents & Carers Virtual Advice Sessions)*

Session Transcript

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Autism and family dynamics. It's something we need to be aware of in terms of the effect of autism on the family and the families effect on autism. This is the program over the next really hour and a half and hopefully plenty of time for questions at the end. First is accommodating autism at home. By definition, an autistic person is different, and it's how do you accommodate that difference in the home setting? We're also going to explore a little bit on friendships, because it's something that parents are trying to encourage, but an autistic individual has the particular difficulties in social understanding, friendships and so on. But there's some strategies that parents can use to help Social Integration at school and with friends. But perhaps what may be a greater influence in the home environment is intense emotions. This can be intense anxiety, agitation. It can be despair, but it is the intense emotions. In fact, one of the first things that is often picked up by a parent of an autistic child is that when that child has a meltdown there, usual strategies of affection, compassion, distraction may not be working, and it's one of the reasons to refer that person to a GP and pediatrician, and so on is the intense emotions and parents feeling. How on Earth do I get the person back on stable emotional ground? So we'll go through that too. There's also one of my favorite parts, which is passionate interests, and I have learned all about dinosaurs, the Titanic, astronomy, all sorts of things, from autistic individuals who have, should we say, entranced me with their passion for their particular interest and will go through why do they occur and how to use them successfully. One thing about passionate interests, it does help parents know what to buy their autistic son or daughter as a birthday or Christmas present, we're gonna go through the stages of autism through the lifespan, and that will include some of our recent exploration of autism and aging, and what is it like to be autistic and 60 plus. So we'll go through that, which may be the future of a particular autistic child, but may also be extended family members who are in that particular age group and may never been formally diagnosed as autistic. But family knows there are autistic features there. We're also gonna go through the effects on the family of having several autistic jungle go through this in more detail, but there are many families that I see when there's more than one child who's autistic and the effects that that will have on the Dynamics. But another dimension is a mother or father with autistic characteristics. As we say, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. And is

autism in a parent a factor to consider here? And finally the the topic of sibling rivalry is sometimes the autistic child can be very envious of a brother or sister who is very socially skilled and has no problems with bullying and teasing, makes friends easily. And yet their autistic sibling finds that incredibly hard to do.

Now, this is the prevalence of of autism now in America, in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, every two or three years they do an exploration of the prevalence of autism in various communities and states within the United States. Now the suggestion is currently is that one in 36 eight year old children are autistic, so they choose a particular age range 8 years old. Go to various areas and find out how many 8 year old autistic children are there and they found a lot, one in 36. When I began my interest in autism and exploration of Autism back in 1971, there were one in 2500 autistic children. Because our concept of autism then was the silent nonspeaking high support needs. What is the person? So we now recognize that there is a continuum of autism from. Yes, those who are non speaking, high support needs to those who are speaking and sometimes they're parents say well, sometimes we'd like to stop him speaking cause he's so garrulous to those who have been very successful in terms of career partnerships and recognition of their quality and talent in the community. So there's a wide range now of expressions of autism. Now the male female ratio of eight year olds is for to one. However, the male female ratio for adults is 2 to one, which means that if they're looking at 8 year old kids, they're missing the autistic girls. That may not be diagnosed until nine years old plus, and especially the teenage years, and that's what may happen with the family. Is that an autistic child? May be diagnosed at four or five years old, but as the parents discover more about autism and it's breadth and nature of expression, they suddenly go, ah, that may be his or her older sister. And so it may well be that the prevalence is much greater than one in 36, cause they're missing autistic girls, who are often not diagnosed or later Primary and subsequently in secondary school or adults. I run a diagnostic assessment clinic and we've had a deluge of adult women seeking a diagnosis of autism for themselves because they recognize the characteristics in their son or daughter and think I've always been different. This is the potential explanation of why so a deluge of women seeking a diagnosis now the interesting thing from the American study was it virtually 60% had an intelligence quotient in the normal range. It used to be viewed that autism was associated with intellectual disability and the vast majority were intellectually disabled. Now we know it's a minority and so that person may have

intellectual abilities and school abilities that are within the normal range, but due to specific learning disorders like dyslexia, ADHD, and other characteristics may not achieve academically what their IQ would suggest.

Now recurrence rates? One of the things that that we recognize is that there can be more than one child, autistic child in the family. What researchers have done is that OK to a family, you've got an autistic child. If you are thinking of having another one, could you let us know and and we would like to follow them up because we'd like to know what are the chances of having another autistic child? What is the going to be the expression and so on? So over the last 10 years, 20 years, we've been following up a number of families, one autistic child. What is the chance of recurrence now? It depends on the age at which this occurs, but if you know extend it to 9 years old so you're gonna start picking up some of the girls. The recurrence rate is 35%, which is much higher than we first thought, so there are many families with more than one child on the spectrum, with all the associated characteristics, and no two autistic individuals are identical. Even identical twins can have different degrees of expression of autism.

One of the things we're often do is talk to mum and dad and say and what is your career, because that could be useful information as to how they make help that person in in future life. Now this was researched of a few years ago and found that fathers in technical fields are more likely to have an autistic child. Engineering twice as likely finance, which is accountancy 4 times, but the highest level was in healthcare with fathers who are often medical specialists, GP's and so on. So in in a way I describe it, I would like my physician to be autistic because they have a phenomenal knowledge and retrieval of information that's going to be important for diagnosis. We'll have visual acuity of a dermatologist picking up the possibility of skin cancers or radiographer. Having a look at what radiologist having a look at X rays and so on, and spotting details that others may not have spotted. So yes, there are certain components of what we tend to find. Dads are more likely to be technical, engineering, finance, mum and this research didn't explore mums, mums are more likely to be in the caring professions, mum is more likely to be teacher, nurse, social worker, (Psychologist) et cetera. So there's teams to be a dynamic that's going on here, umm and one of the things that I I say is people fall in love with someone who's autistic, otherwise it would have died out years ago. So their qualities that can be appealing to a partner for that individual. Ah, One of the things that I've noticed is talking to

parents and asking them because we're talking about their son or daughters emotional difficulties and and ask are there any issues within the family? And since the 1970s, when I began in this area, early 70s, we've known that there's a higher level of anxiety and depression in the parents of an autistic child more than you'd expect by chance. Now I know there's the phrase madness is hereditary. You get it from your children? Yes, I know having an autistic child is going to check your stress levels and can make you a bit anxious and depressed at times and agitated at times, but this was a description of the person before the child was born. Now, one in three had an anxiety disorder. Also, virtually one in three are depressive disorder, with no significant difference between mothers and fathers. Now this is going to be important because what an autistic child may have inherited is a predisposition for very powerful emotions. But the autism has deprived them of the mechanisms of picking up those emotions early on in their expression due to problems with interoception. They're not picking up the heart rate, the breathing that indicates intense emotions are building. And alexithymia, so they have difficulty disclosing what their thoughts and feelings are. So it may well be that they are. They have inherited a predisposition for strong emotions, not able to pick it up as effectively as others, but also having less effective emotion regulation systems of affection, compassion, consoling the interpersonal ways of alleviating powerful feelings. It may not be as effective for an autistic individual, but one of the characteristics of autism is actually being incredibly sensitive to negative emotions in other people's emotional empathy is very, very powerful, and I talk to autistic adults and read autobiographies and so on. And they will say I just get infected by emotions in other people, and it may well be that sometimes the autistic persons withdraw from social situations isn't purely social confusion, sensory sensitivity, but it can be a protection mechanism because of negative emotions in others. Some autistic individuals have said it's like emotional COVID - I was OK this morning. I was fine and then I started to feel depressed and I thought why? Why am I depressed? What on Earth has happened to make me feel? Uh, I've been talking to Rebecca. Rebecca's feeling depressed, and I've absorbed like a sponge her emotions.

Now this means that in a family, an autistic Family, if mum gets anxious, the autistic child may be very sensitive to that and also gets anxious. And the fact that the autistic child is anxious may make that mum more anxious, which makes the autistic person more anxious. So sometimes when it comes to

mood issues, it may be a family issue that needs to be addressed, but also to recognize that the autistic individual is perhaps extraordinarily sensitive to emotions in other people's

The next one is is accommodating autism at school. The thing is, an autistic child. Well, often. Uh realized that they are different and often I'll ask the person, when did you sense that you were different from others? And it's usually in early primary school. Well, what the kids were interested in. I wasn't interested in. I thought that was boring and what I was interested in, they weren't interested in at all, and and there were these social rules and I just didn't get them. And they were just meet and play and I don't know how they did it. And I didn't know how to to join the group and I wanted to play my way, not the way of everyone else. It had to be my rules, and so the person may start to realize I'm sensitive to things that other people aren't. I think differently. I play differently. I converse differently too. Now when you know you're different, you have one of four Psychological reactions. One is to become depressed, sad - there's something defective about me. And so a child as young as seven, 8-9 years old, can feel despairing. Will I ever have a friend? Will I ever be successful with people? Stop bullying me and so on. So it can lead to a depressive pessimism of your life at a very young age. Another way is in many ways to escape into imagination of imaginary worlds. The world of dinosaurs. No people, no school. Another planet. It can be anywhere else but here, and that person has a very rich and vivid imagination. May not be shared with others, but has a phenomenal imagination which can lead to a talent in the arts and as a writer, for example, a fiction and reading fiction too. But there can be. Those are two internalizing escape into imagination and depressed. But the two externalizing are the opposite of should we say depression, but a sense of feeling superior to other people, especially if the person is intellectually talented and as one, umm, autistic woman said to me, what one occasion? She said. Tony, anyone can get a stylist, but not everyone has an intellect. And so you value intellect very much and it's something that comforts you. But the 4th reaction is to see other people not as the cause of your problems and so on, but to observe, analyze and imitate. You know you're not very good socially. It's quite aware, but you don't wanna make a social mistake. Desperately don't want kids to laugh at you if you do make a social mistake. So you observe and are part of autism is being very talented in systems and patterns. Mathematics is the study of patterns, and so that individual says right? I'm not good at socialize, but I will observe people. I will analyze them and I will imitate them and it's a learning, Social and friendship rules by observation and analysis and camouflaging. They're Autism now. To do that, when you're at

school, you must suppress your autistic characteristics and avoid being rejected and bullying, so you've got to stop your your rocking, you're flapping all those sorts. We just soothing and actually needed to calm the autistic person down, so they gotta suppress that now. That means that it's suppressed, but when they come home from school, it's released almost two different characters in a way person at school and person at home. But you've also got a camouflaging to join a group so that you're not bullied and teased. So you analyze people, you learn the social rules, you become almost the class policeman, forcing the rules, and you are seeking acceptance by your peer group. Now what you've got then, is a surface sociability, but a lack of social identity. You're suppressing the authentic self. You're becoming the person. That other people expect you to be, it gets you noticed. It gets you into the group, but it is absolutely exhausting. It's inconspicuous at school because often that's where it begins, and so it can lead to burnout of trying to be like everyone else and successful. Maybe parents are the only ones that sees the real autistic person at home, where they're not. Should we save suppressing or constraining their autism? And it's almost like two different characters.

Is creating a mask and this is a quote from a mum Emily masks in public and will meltdown the second she is out of the situation is Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde. It's I can be the person there. It's successful. I the teachers like me, I am part of the group, but people may not understand the amount of mental energy that has been consumed in processing social situations. Intellectually, not intuitively. So they are absolutely exhausted, as one autistic woman said I can dance, I can dance with anyone who wants to dance with me, but it is always their choreography. I've become what people would expect me to be and the authentic self cannot be expressed.

So we're not gonna cope with aspects of friendship and going through the four stages of friendship in a way, this is stage 1A friendship that the picture there on the left is our daughter, Caroline, when she was 3 1/2, she's now in a few months. No few weeks time she'll be 40. We're actually visiting my wife's family in the Lake District. My wife Sarah and I were living in Herefordshire, Ross on Wye. Not too far from Wales and really enjoying Hereford life, but The thing is, with Rosie and her friend Katie, there was something that was to do with the character that became such good friends. It's a chemistry. You cannot say you two will become friends. It's a chemistry that occurs between them, and so friendship is something that you only really understand. How complex and difficult it is when you try

and explain it to an autistic individual who may use intellect rather than intuition to process social information and friendship skills.

If we're going to look at how would we help a child three to six years old in terms of social play and so on. Often the kids when they walk into a room or just the kids three to five years old, walk into a room and see toys to play with. Not necessarily friends to play with. They're looking at the objects. What can I play? How can I play with them and so on? That's the main thing that you're there for and kids are boring and stupid and getting the way of what you want to do and you want to be with adults, cause adults know things and they explain things and they help you. You feel calm and there's a, shall we say, a quality to adults that the person finds much more relaxing and accommodating for the autistic features. So I ask a parent. Usually it could be mum or dad, but sometimes it may be to say to dad and this is with a son autistic three to six years old. I say right? OK, your son, I need some exploration and guidance in social play. So I want you to be a four year old boy as you were at one stage and I want you to interact with your son. It may be with a daughter as well to go through what the kids are playing. What are their games? These change over time and my day when I was 345 years old. The games that you had marbles and things like that, I don't know whether the people do marbles anymore. That was one of the games we did. Uh, so learn. What are the games and the rules? And actually rehearse and act as a friend with your autistic son or daughter because they may relate to you as an adult more easily than with a chart. And you can adjust slow down, pause and explain aspects of friendship far more effectively as an adult, but also Learning child speak. Listen to the other kids. How do they greet each other? We had one particular group and we had group of kids playing Lego and we're working on how do you join in? And an autistic child came up to them and said, excuse me, can I join your play, please? On the other kids Nonautistic went what? You don't say that. That's what adults say, and often what we find is a young autistic child may model themselves on adults, not their peer group. So the Adult who's their mentor needs to have child speak. Some of the things of friendship that are important at this stage taking turns. So if the child likes being pushed on the swing, great, then they push you on the swing. If you're doing an inset Board, he does the piece you do a piece, he does the peace, you do a piece. It may be that with your daughter you're looking at a picture book and you may point your daughter says what it is. Next page, your daughter points and you say what it is. So it's that concept of reciprocity and balance that is so important in friendship, but also a good friend helps you so deliberately can't do it

etcetera and say ohh can't do this. Could you help me please? Ah, thank you. Being helpful is a friendly thing to do. It's also if you can videotape peer group playing and so on, and replay those games. Hide and seek. Chase, whatever the games are that are a should we say the currency of friendship of that particular age group you watch the other kids playing it stop and then play that game with the same equipment and so on. But also if you've got it on video, you can use for example the pause button to indicate the queue to join in the smile needing help the gesture. So it's to point out this is the queue to joining, cause some autistic kids want to join in, but they can't see the green light of welcome to the group. And sometimes what they may do is not see the red light and interrupt when they're not welcome in that group, which isn't going to be very popular.

We would also use paragraphs. Social stories. I'm a great fan of carols Work. Social stories are designed to explain the social world to autistic individuals. Carol has developed a formula, I suppose, in a way of the value of a description of different people's perspectives in an event starting with the child's perspective. What are the social conventions and what can you do in that situation? So it's to provide guidance now. One of the things that I mentioned a moment ago is the concept of help. It's one of the key components of friendship and Carol and I were looking at writing a social story on this, and this is the one we wrote. This were an American child. Uh, sometimes children help me. They do this to be friendly. Yesterday I missed three math problems. Now Amy put her arm around me and said it's OK Juanita. She was trying to help me feel better now. Hang on, think autistic. You made three maths errors and then Amy comes around and squeezes you. How does squeezing you help you get better? Mass results? Why are you squeezing me in that situation? She was trying to help me feel better because for Amy, having a hug makes her feel better. So she thinks that will make you feel better now. On my first day at school, Billy showed me my desk. That was helpful. Children have helped me in other ways. Here's my list and I will try to say thank you when children help me. And in many ways for non autistic child you don't need to do this. They know they go. Go. We know this, but for Autism you may have to explain the conventions.

Now this is on hugs. This is from one of Carol's recent ones. Sometimes two people hug one another. It's a two person hug when both people hug at the same time. Now a two person hug often means hello or goodbye. Sometimes people use two person hugs to share their feelings. These hugs may mean I

love you. We are both happy or we are both sad. Now when two people hug each other at the same time, they often stand close, facing each other. Wrap one or two arms around the other person. Squeeze a little, but not a lot. And the hug ends when either person begins to relax their arms. So it's really understanding a lot of the social gestures and so on that are. I was in Italy a few years ago and I was talking to a group of autistic adults and I said, OK, guys, what's it like being autistic in Italy? And they said, AH, we hate it. I said, why it's such a beautiful country, your foods? Absolutely. Our tomatoes are fantastic, they said. No, we hate it because when people come up to greet us, they go umm 3 kisses and they keep hugging you and touching you. And as they're talking, they're going. All others, they said. We all want to move to Japan, cause in Japan you greet each other by bowing and that's it. And you don't touch each other. It would be a lot simpler if we all lived in Japan and part of autism is trying to find a culture where you belong. So it's trying to understand in many ways the social and affectionate behavior of other people which are garnered to my colleague, and I have actually written a program on love and affection from like to love and why non autistic people are obsessed. We've been told their loved every day and they have to be hugged every day. It's amazing, but do you have to feel sorry for them? Because non autistic people are such fragile flowers and they need to be touched and hugged every day. Otherwise, they're very miserable. And just to say that you love your mum will make her extremely happy. Yes, I know you said it five years ago, but you do need to say it more than once every five years. OK.

Now stage two in friendship and is 6 to 9 years old of non autistic individuals. The previous stage, three to six, is what you'd expect. Descriptions in a non autistic child. Here we often find that an autistic child is about at least two years behind their age peers in terms of social and friendship, understanding, and part of that is reading social signals. Now I sometimes describe autistic individuals as a Italian drivers. They don't see the signals. When I was in Italy, I was in a taxi. We're coming up to a traffic lights and the traffic lights went from green to amber and for me that indicates amberlite slow down. Nope. In Italy, it means accelerate, go faster to rush right? So that's all going on Sunday, taxi driver expected an extra tip for the number of red lights that he'd run. So it's sometimes not reading the signals. Now we've developed our social codes like traffic codes as a traffic codes prevent traffic accidents, traffic lights. Then we have Social codes to prevent Social accidents and faces our traffic lights. I can't see anyone at the moment. All I can see is my face I have. You can all be fast asleep. You could have popped out

for a coffee. I far as I know, but what I find useful in a true presentation with an audience there that I can see is I can read their faces and for me their faces are traffic lights. If you smile green light, I keep talking. If you turn to the person action. Amber light slowed down and explained. You burst into tears. I'd stop so the child may not realize the no tailgating signs and invade your personal body space. They don't interrupt signs and so on. So you're having to teach the child a lot of social signals, and I often use the metaphor metaphors. Very good in autism, because metaphor is a visualization. And in Autism, visualization is a powerful way of understanding and learning. So what we may have is to learn the social conventions and signals.

And the diagnostic assessment of a primary school children, I may show the child this picture and I'll say I'm going to show you a picture and have a look at the picture. And can you tell me the story that goes with this picture? Charlie, up to you. But can you tell the story story about what's happening in the picture? And we may well find that the autistic child may say, uh, she she's got a hand on the jar and her brother's got his hand on her shoulder. Ohh and there are some planets crawling down the wall. Ohh and in the bookcase there's some magazines. I wonder if there's any train magazines there that's not wrong, but it's not picking up the social cues and facial expressions to bring together for a higher level understanding. It's called weak central coherence. It's seeing the world in fragments, not drawing it all together because of typical kid, non autistic child will say she's trying to stay up. Discussion doesn't want to get caught. Her friend is on guard. If an adult looks, he'll squeeze her shoulder. She'll drop the biscuit and they won't get caught, but if she gets the biscuit he wants half the biscuit cause he helped her out in that process. So it's looking at the thoughts, feelings, intentions rather than the objects.

Another picture that I would go through. OK, looking at this picture, what's the story that's happening here? An autistic child may say he's giving her the ball. OK, he's being friendly, He's sharing the ball - great. OK, the little girl. How's she feeling? Happy. Why is she happy? Because he's giving her the ball, whereas a non autistic child, might say "Oh, Oh dear. They broken the window and they just realised what mum and dad are going to do to them when they find out they broken the window. So they're gonna pack a bag and go to grandmas, cause they'll be safe there." Now it's again reading the faces accurately. Looking at the intentions either, but non autistic kids may say she can't understand why her brother is giving her the ball, but he's trying to get her in trouble because he's broken the window. She

can't see that and she can't understand why he's doing it. But I had a an autistic child. Look at that. I've had several do this and say now it's a fake. It's a fake. No, there's no way a ball that size would make a hole that's small. No, it would just take the whole window out. No, it's a fake photo. So it's looking at events and actions, et cetera, rather than thoughts and feelings for the people there.

What's happening here, and I've had one or two autistic individuals say. They're having a staring competition. Uh, well, they're deciding what to play on the Hifi. That's an old Hifi. All that's got a a, a record deck, etcetera. Whereas non autistic kids will often say ohh the little boys in trouble, I can tell by the look in dad's eyes. So for an autistic individual, it's seeing the world through different eyes. It's not prioritizing and processing social information, and this is a role, particularly for parents, to be able to explain the social cues, what they mean and how to respond for a non autistic chart. You don't have to do this. They know, but here for the autistic child, they're missing the cues, the signals, the context and needs to be explained.

Now, for friendship opportunities, there may be a chance to develop friendships through special interest. It can be clubs at school like robotics and so on, lunch and after school clubs based on, for example, movie trivia, computer games. But we now have a knowledge of how popular Lego is with autistic individuals, and I strongly suspect Lego comes from Denmark. A lot of the wealth of Denmark comes from parents of autistic children who have bought their autistic kids lots of Lego bits. One of the major sources of income export in in Denmark, but there is a a range of programs now on Lego based therapy to use the interest in Lego to be A-Team and work together and to be constructive in that team. Also, Minecraft is a very important should we say computer game of interest to many autistic individuals and the person who developed Minecraft has been suggested as being autistic, as was the person who developed Pokémon. And so this is a program both published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, which can use the interest in Lego or Minecraft as a way of teaching social abilities and so on. So it's capturing the interest and motivation and then using that to learn social skills now, OK, if we take the next slide now, stage three in friendship is about 9 to 13 years old. And what we tend to find for an autistic student is the social ability gap with their peers. Increases with each grade, so when they're very young preschool, the differences may not be that significant. But as they go through the grades, the gap becomes wider and the autistic child recognizes that. But friendships, social situations become far more

complex. There are greater expectations, but many autistic individuals say who's guiding me socially because at school you have the academic curriculum. But what's needed is the Social curriculum, but often that's not occurring for an autistic individual, and they feel that they're often criticized for making Social errors. But nobody seems to recognize when they do something right? So this is my encouragement to parents is when you're autistic, son or daughter. Listens helps, cares, shares, helps, compliments all the friendship components. If they demonstrate that, please tell them that you noticed that that was a friendly thing to do. They need positive feedback of what they do successfully, otherwise the only feedback they get is when they did it wrong. And it's being less able to rely on intuition, have to rely more on cognitive abilities to process social situations. So the autistic child is exhausted at the end of the school day. So when a mum or dad receives the child, when they get home and and they say how was school today, sometimes the autistic kid is. I don't wanna go there. I'm tired. I'm exhausted. I just want to be alone. I want to process it. I want to work out what was happening. Why did they say that? Did I do something wrong? So there can be a lot of, so should we say, a social autopsy, of how the day went. And sometimes that's done as a solitary, not a shared experience. So the child may be absolutely exhausted because they've worked twice as hard as any other kid in that school with the academic and the social curriculum, and they find peer interactions confusing, overwhelming and sometimes aversive because of bullying, teasing, rejection and humiliation, not bullying. We recognize I saw today a man 70 for diagnostic assessment for autism, which was confirmed, but he had horrendous bullying when he was a a kid at school. It was a part of life that was couldn't understand. Why me? I'm a nice guy. I why would somebody enjoy hurting me? And because they can't understand the motives of others, they can't have closure because they can't understand why keep ruminating on what's occurred. So the wound never heals. Teasing. Yes, that can be horrendous too, but also experiencing rejection, which is incredibly powerful and humiliation. And it's the rejection and humiliation that may actually have very profound psychological effects. But the difficulty is when somebody's mean to them or humiliates them and so on. If a non autistic child was experiencing that then the chances are they would have a friend who would be able to repair or refute derogatory comments and restore a sense of trust. But for the autistic individual, there may be nobody who comes to their rescue at the time or repairs the damage done by the predator. Now this means that sometimes when I'm dealing with teenagers and adults, their sense of self has been created by the derogatory and rejection, derogatory comments and rejection, bullying and teasing of their peer group. And they're self understanding is

incredibly negative and I think where did you get this from? You didn't get it from your parents. You didn't get it from the teachers. You got it from the peer group, but they said it so frequently and consistently that you started to believe it. So they're sense of self is built on the criticisms and rejection of their peers, not the compliments and inclusion. So bullying and teasing is a major problem, but for parents, it's a problem of getting the child to school because it's sending them to a war zone and bullying and teasing is a major reason for school refusal and school suspension. If they retaliate, so bullying and teasing is a concern. Often the school isn't aware because most acts of bullying are covert, but parents may know what's going on and I take this very seriously because it's got horrendous psychological consequences, especially for contributory factor for depression. So also in observing, analyzing and imitating camouflaging which occurs both with boys and girls. Although we first identified it with girls, girls seemed to be more inclined to do it. But it is not exclusive for girls, but if you have had a process of observing and analyzing social interactions and copying it, how do you cope with friendship situations not seen before or rehearsed? So new situations can be totally bewildering. I've no script of what to do and also unfortunately criticized by their peers for making a simple social faux pas or error. And I don't know if this is how happening in Welsh schools, but certainly in Australian schools as students become more aware of autism and the social challenges of an autistic person, I'm it has now become a derogatory term. So if anyone makes a social faux pas, the reaction from the peer group is like, oh, what's the matter with you? Are you autistic or something? And then they Child starts to realize that there's something inherently wrong with me. And if they are teenagers who are diagnosed for the first time may reject the diagnosis. Not because they don't agree with it, but they're terrified of what their peer group have done to autistic individuals in the past could be done to them, so they may be criticized for a simple error. Are you autistic or something? So it then is associated with a sense of negativity, not understanding and support from their peer group.

But there's also animals as friends. Animals are great, great effect because they accept you for who you are. They don't try to change you. They're not mean or set you up or all those sorts of things. They're just pleased to see you, want to play with you and no matter how bad your day, they're just glad you're there. And so it may well be that animals become your best friends, and they do personify the best qualities of a friendship, of acceptance, nonjudgmental acceptance, and so on. So an autistic individual may have problems relating to people, yeah, but not necessarily animals. And there can be

a bond with animals. That's really quite extreme. Maybe a career being with animals and so on, so animals may be friends, but also Internet friends. Now we had a while ago the concept of Internet gaming. Was violent games and it was usually one person versus the machine. Now it's often a gaming involves a team and that can include an autistic individual who's had a lot of practice at computer gaming and they are an expert at it, which is valued. It's the currency of friendship as to be good at those games, and so it may well be that there's a difficulty in making and maintaining friendships at secondary school. But on the Internet then you can show your abilities, your wisdom. They want to be with you because when you're part of the team, we win the game and the games are now becoming much more constructive and imaginative and I have a number of autistic individuals who are games champions, thinking of a career in designing computer games and what I've said to them is please, could you design computer games that can teach friendship, emotion regulation and so on to autistic individuals because they may find it easier to learn via a computer than face to face. So there is the positive quality of a Internet friends, and that game is something that you enjoy but makes you popular.

Now, stage 4, friendships are 13 plus and the autistic individual now is recognizing that they're not popular, and they're not likely to be popular, and these are some quotes "I wasn't rejected but didn't feel completely included" "I was supported and tolerated but not liked" They may blame themselves or something wrong with me, or being autistic for peer rejection, and this is going to affect self esteem, self identity, mood and the perception of autism. Especially concept of self identity and this in autism can be a time of deep personal reflection to become a philosopher in a way of existentialism. What is the meaning of life? Where do I fit in in life? To a much deeper level, as a solitary analysis of the concept of self that may lead to a very negative view of who you are.

So what also occurs at this stage He's very anxious about making a social mistake, a social faux pas if characteristic of autism is a fear of making a mistake, and sometimes you don't try something academic activities cause there's a possibility of making a mistake. And I I don't like mistakes. It's something like a phobia for mistakes. It's a very strong emotional reaction when they make a mistake or they see an imperfection. Now it means that in social situations, if they make a social mistake, there's app performance anxiety about how am I going to interact with people and then ruminating before you fall asleep at night, shall we say, doing a social autopsy of what occurred socially during the day "I live

in constant fear of performance anxiety over day to day social encounters.” One of the problems is teenagers in general will pride themselves on being open minded and so on. However, they can have a very narrow tolerance of anyone who doesn't have their particular interests, beliefs and so on. It can actually be very critical of anyone who's different. In fact, one of the major reasons of bullying and teasing and rejection is someone who's different. By definition, an autistic person is conspicuously different to the peer group because the peer group are natural child psychologists and they have an internal schema of what someone might age should do, think, relate, etcetera. And when this person doesn't, then they can be all sorts of consequences of being a target for ridicule and rejection. So before falling asleep, reviewing the social experiences at school, ruminating on social performance, and conscious retreat into solitude, this is a very powerful quote. I'd rather just be alone, but I can't handle the loneliness and quite a few autistic individuals will say I just want one friend. I don't need to be popular. I don't want to be the most popular kid in the class, but I just like a friend. Just one friend and having one friend, not necessarily all the way through school, but at least having blonde friend is incredibly valuable and uplifting for an autistic person.

So there's a yearning for a sense of connection. Want to be part of the group's parents are past their use by date? You know what you say really doesn't matter because your parents, but it's what the peer group says. Compliment from a parent is worth one point compliment from a peer member is worth 100 points. The sense of self is being determined by how you are included, connected, accepted by your peer group. Now what they experience is rejection from popular friendship groups that are poor in the currency a friendship. But if you want to connect, who do you connect with? And there's a possibility of being accepted by and seeking and having inclusion with marginalized teenagers that engage in activities and interests that cause concern for parents can be alcohol and drug use. And for this autistic individual I want friends. I want to be part of the group and they may move towards a group that has a very broad definition of connection in that group and we are involved in the same goal, which may be to acquire and consume alcohol, marijuana and so on. And with the autistic anxiety and ADHD that can occur, then there is a strong risk of addiction and one in four of addicted adults are autistic and society needs to recognize the vulnerability of autistic individuals for addiction, often for to engage or disengage from life. So alcohol and drug use or eating disorder, you may be autistic. You may have had issues with the texture of food. Food has been somewhat of a I don't like it. I don't like variety and so on.

Textures are very difficult to cope with, but there's also issues of anxiety and control, and we now recognize that round about one in three of teenagers with an eating disorder are autistic. So you can see the sorts of issues that can be developing and what happens is the group adopt the autistic teenager who now has a new interest in finding out about drugs, for example, or eating calories, weight gain and so on of information value by the group they become the research assistant for the group. They go on the Internet, they find the information, so they are valued by the group or the information they know.

So in terms of friendship encouragement, one of the things that we're recognizing more and more is trying to encourage an autistic friend. It's someone who thinks like you likes the same things as you do. Is somebody who you can resonate with because you've had similar experiences. So we do a little bit of social engineering if we can now, they may find each other on the periphery of social activities, they're going around it. But yours is in Pokémon. You're still into that? Yeah, I'm in still in Pokémon that nobody else likes it because they say it's favorite. Night and and so on. So you may get 2 autistic individuals who meet and can then be sometimes life long friends. Similar interests such as robotics, computer programming, science project, playing music together, singing together, quite a few autistic individuals sing in perfect pitch, or have an ability and talent in the arts. That's really quite extraordinary. We tend to think of career in autism has to be computers and so on, and accountancy and so on. Well, yes. But it's also in the arts and it is the ability to convey your thoughts and feelings, not through speech, but by writing fiction. It may be it by fine art, it may be dancing, it can be writing literature and so on. Also, in your observation and analysis of people, it leads you to a career as a Psychologist, yes, and quite a few of my very well regarded colleagues, fellow Psychologists, are autistic and it's great because they've been studying people since they were about four years old. So they had an honorary degree in the observing and analyzing the people when they were about 10 years old. Now in autism, the concept of friendship may be different. It's not necessarily socializing, and so you may get too autistic. Girls who just sit beside each other, drawing, they're not gossiping, they're not entertaining each other with rude jokes or things like that. They just sit together and draw on at the end of that period, they look at each other's drawings like a comment, a compliment about them. But there was a bond between them as they sat next to each other, which didn't have to be conversation. It's also meeting like minded individuals that comic book and cosplay and fan conventions, so we do a little bit if we can of encouraging those friendship characteristics, There's the last one on friendship, but it's important for

parents what may occur as the autistic teenager comes home from school and there have been social issues you eventually find out that not fitting in. Confused, overwhelmed and so on. But also not having a friend to talk to about the issues and seek guidance and knowing that you can't talk to people at the time about the problems that you're facing. But it may be appropriate at home to play the game when they get home from secondary school. Not immediately, because they need time to decompress. But when they're ready, they say, OK, it's a game called puzzling peers. Was there any time today when your peer group were a real puzzle? Why did they say that? Why did they do that? What am I supposed to do in that situation? A face that they couldn't read, or a social expectation which was beyond them in understanding what's going on. What am I supposed to do? So you may go through, OK, where were you? Who were you with? What were you doing now? You saw that person's face that you don't know what it meant. You look in the mirror, create that face. I can see that face and maybe I can translate what it means now. These are the examples we've had when we've done the game of puzzling peers with parents. This actually these are two from autistic teenage girls, peers congregating and talking about nothing of substance or about boys. OK, that's your teenage autistic girl. That someone talking about her experiences and opinions and thinking that I and others would be interested or could situations like you walk into class late and everyone turns to look at you and a friend says I'm so fat and looks at you for a comment, probably anticipating a white lie. And those are sort of interpersonal issues that an autistic teenager is going to face but may need guidance from a parent if they can't get it from a peer,

Now, emotions and emotion regulations, part of Autism, not in the diagnostic criteria, but a crucial part at home is how do you manage a meltdown? They're these may start occurring when the child is two or three years old and they've just lost it. They're in the supermarket, overwhelmed by social sensory they become incredibly distressed. Can't be distracted. Affection, consoling compassion may not work. Sometimes Parents wait. I just gotta wait until the energy has all gone and then we can move on and I better go shopping. Either first thing in the morning when there's no one there, or as they're closing, so there are less social and sometimes sensory experiences in shopping list. But there are two types of meltdown. There's the outwardly directed blind rage you strike out. It's an explosion of energy, but also for teenage autistic individuals. It can be inward directed. It's despondent. And what we call a depression attack, an implosion. This is an intense explosion or implosion of energy that either explodes and is

destructive or implodes. And it can involve suicide lithiation and almost suicidal actions, self harm and so. But it is intense despair rather than intense anger.

What I often do with an autistic individual with the parents get a big piece of paper, split into columns and say, OK, when you lose it, when you have a belt down, let's get a plan, OK? What do you want your parents to do or not do when you have a meltdown? These are the common themes that we've got. Many of the autistic individuals say mum and dad stay calm and that means that if they become agitated, it only adds fuel to the fire and makes the autistic person worse. So please stay calm. The second thing is affirm and validate the child's emotions, but basically say I I see your upset because if you say ah, you're very angry. I'm not angry. I'm sad and sometimes you may misinterpret the emotion that's driving the behavior. So use a neutral term. I see you're very upset. You're very stressed and so on, but it may be just of farming and validating the emotion. OK, whatever they're upset about, you may say. I I can see your point. You may not agree with that point, but at this stage you have a point there. You've got a point now, one person dealing with the situation, because you've got lots of people around. There's lots of confusion and being overwhelmed. So decide who's gonna deal with this particular event, but you're also confirming that the feeling will go. Don't know when, but it'll go and when it goes, we'll do something nice, but we'll wait. And it will go keep other people away because that's going to actually make things worse. Minimal speech. More on that in the next column, but don't talk too much. Sometimes the special interest, the passion is an off switch. It allows that individual to become so engrossed and account of balanced to the despair or the anger is to be engaged in your interest. It can be the off switch. It's not rewarding inappropriate behaviour, it's the off switch, but also seeking a safe place for solitude and sometimes the best way of calming down is on your own. Now, many of the kids have said when we say, what do you want your parents not to do? Don't interrogate me. Don't ask me what's the problem. Don't ask me where this came from and as far as this kid is concerned. What? What you got is extreme agitation. They are extremely upset and if you say what's the matter? Where did this come from? What you're asking them to do is to go back in time and give a logical, sequential, coherent explanation of why they're upset. They can't do that in that say they need to move out of it to go back to where it began. You can't get a person in that degree vegetation to explain it successfully. Now you may need to know why what happened, but when they're calm and it can be much easier to explain the story. Also focusing on punishment and consequences going to add more confusion and what's the

point. And there may be consequences. Absolutely that you've agreed to, but there's a time and place to actually mention those consequences. And sometimes in the middle of a meltdown, that's not the time to do that. Threats of what consequences are going to be, ah, this is Maria gonna calm the person down. And there's a lovely quote or two quotes here "when I'm upset the last thing I want to do is talk to someone that's non autistic to solve your problems by talking." It's not necessarily the autistic way I can hear, but my brain can't process what people say. So in that level of agitation, a lot of brain processes aren't working successfully. Also, don't try to jolly up or use comfort and affection. It's not a hug, it's a squeeze. And why you squeezing me? And how does squeezing me solve the problem? And as much as an autistic individual can be infected by negative mood in others, unfortunately may not be infected by positive mood. So trying to jolly up and so on may not work successfully, only makes the person really confused and may not be able to resonate with and absorb your positive emotions in that situation as a solution to their own despair. And when it comes to affection, as one teenager said, human comfort has always been a mystery. So it's finding out what works for that individual. Now if we take the next slide. Umm, the special interests and passions. It's part of autism. It's something that I have enjoyed through the years of exploring why and and learning a lot. Why do special interests or passions occur? I think I prefer the word passions rather than special interest one. It's a thought blocker for anxiety. You become so engaged in your passionate interest. No negative thoughts intrudes on the fixation and your focus it's a very good way of suppressing anxiety. The problem is computer games will help you block your anxiety, but when parents insist it switched off the degree of agitation may not be what you switched off my phone. It's more of how a nurse than I now going to cope with this deluge of anxiety that is now being released that was held back by the computer game. I don't know any other way of coping with it. Sometimes it's a passion or knowledge to overcome fear. Liliana feared spiders and when she saw a spider, she ran not to her mother for comfort, but to the bookshelves to read about spiders. Because in an autistic way, knowledge overcomes fear. The more I know about spiders, the less I will fear them. So she read about spiders to, she say, remove her arachnophobia, but the more she read about spiders, the more she admired them. She found them absolutely fascinating, and she started to collect them. And so arachnophobia became arachnophilia, she became an expert on spiders. It's a source of pleasure is the passion, and it may be a superior form of pleasure to interpersonal experiences. The risk is like computer gaming, it can become an addiction for that individual. It gives you a sense of well being and pleasure that you don't get in interpersonal situations

and it's hard to live without that. It's also a means of relaxation. It's often calming for the individual as they go through their routines and cataloguing and so on. You can also be a source of friendship with those who share the same interests, but also sometimes the passion can be a way of exploring emotions and experiences. So maybe watching movies with a related theme. For example, if a person is bullied and teased, they may have difficulty explaining and disclosing what's going on into personally, so they try and explore what's going on and how to cope with it and respond by watching Hollywood retribution movies where the hero has been bullied horrendously, all the family has and it's the story of their reaction to that means that they are exploring something that they may not do in conversation, but by avidly watching films of a particular thing.

Sometimes it's an attempt to achieve coherence. It's cataloguing. It's putting things in order. It's categorizing and you want everything to be symmetrical, and you've got all your butterflies in a line and they're all set up in a particular way. And that is soothing and calming it, cataloguing all your Beatles and Beach Boys records and so on. It's also trying to understand the physical world, the science and the natural world, but also the Psychological trying to understand people. And so you may pursue a career in psychology. It's also comforting to have the certainty of facts and information, not feelings, which are difficult to understand and express them process. But facts and information are comforting, but it's also to create an alternative world. Dinosaurs. No school, no people. Science fiction and fantasy world to find a world where you belong, where you feel. But how if I am not accepted and valued in this world, I'll find another world in history, in geology, in astronomy, another planet, science fiction, other worlds. And so you're looking for somewhere that you feel at home and understood. But it also gives you a sense of identity. The interest defines who you are and being proud of your achievements and a sense of identity of identifying your own heroes like Harry Potter for example. I'm a great fan of Harry Potter, but Harry is bullied and teased. He faced terrible adversity, but friendship and love brings him through all that adversity. So you identify with a superhero, so your passion is a person, fiction, or reality that allows you to have a sense of that's the person I want to be.

Stages of autism through the lifespan, puberty and adolescence. Ohh dear, puberty is a time where the brain is reconfigured. I call the brain is closed for renovation and it is. It's basically the brain is rewired. The frontal lobes, in particular what we tend to find, is with the onset of puberty, when there's the

rewiring and the new hormones and endocrinology dimensions that are occurring, that for some autistic individuals they may have been a bit of a worrier up to the arrival of puberty. But anxiety now doesn't come in with puberty as a wave coming in. It comes in as a tsunami. It is a horrendous level of anxiety and we find a lot of uh behaviours associated with Autism routines or rituals, interests and so on, are due to high levels of anxiety and they're coping mechanisms for high levels of anxiety. So we may find that that teenager is now of clinical concern for the development of an anxiety disorder from generalized anxiety to obsessive compulsive disorder and so on. So anxiety also depression. Feeling despondent - I don't fit in and despair. It can be an eating disorder of starting in the teenage years, it can be. What we call situational mutism, and it's due to anxiety. Fight flight freeze. You're so anxious in this situation, you literally can't talk. It's not selective. You don't choose to do it, you just can't talk in that situation. It's a sign of high levels of anxiety and stress can also be self harm, can be a high level of self harm. It can be cutting. It can be all sorts of things that occur, but it may become a particular concern in the teenage years, maybe looking at the profile, many autistic girls are confused with borderline personality disorder. And actually, many of the diagnostic criteria of BPD, borderline personality disorder, have many links to autistic characteristics. So sometimes diagnosis of borderline personality and sometimes issue of gender dysphoria. I don't like my gender. I want to change gender so these are some of the issues that an autistic teenager may develop during the teenage years.

But if we take the next slide, Maya Toudal, more on her next time I do a presentation for you in in Wales, she developed the energy accounting. So the next session I'm doing in a few weeks time is on really autistic burnout and how energy accounting can help. But Maya, she's autistic. She's a clinical psychologist based in Copenhagen, and she recently did a survey on the Internet because she's very much involved with social media of asking autistic adults. What is your definition of wellbeing and these were the answers which I found absolutely fascinating - to not be disturbed. In other words, not to be interrupted. Which is ironic, because many autistic individuals interrupt others all the time. The person hates being interrupted once they're set on that track. They don't want to be interrupted. They've gotta have closure to the end. Not having to act a certain way just because it is supposedly normal or private. Now adults can achieve this more readily than teenagers who are very aware of the social expectations of their peer group. But it reaches a point in the adult years where you say I really don't care what people think of me. I'm going to be true to my authentic self sooner, the better. Really, having my own

place to hide in Autism, you need your sanctuary. You've shared your to, say, retreat somewhere. You can go to keep away from people. You're not interrupted. It allows you that sense of isolation. It's being alone, but not necessarily lonely. Being able to excel at what you love to do, the sense of identity is not my social network is not my personality. It's what I achieve on what I do.

It's also space to pursue your interests and hobbies. Yes, you want to be able to do that, your source of pleasure. Daily engagement with that, it's also freedom from excess sensory or pain disturbance. It's something that non autistic individuals don't really appreciate how painful some sensory experiences are, and many autistic individuals say how do you cope with that? What's wrong with me that that is absolutely unbearable for you? You hardly noticed it, and it's freedom from sensory sensitivity. I wish we could provide that having a purpose in life, I sense of value and accepting my autism. I'm working with it to create harmony in my life. Instead of difficulties, I think that's lovely.

I was that one of the PhD supervisors for patinas research study. 10 mature autistic adults mean age 60 years. This may be the ultimate outcome of an autistic child in your family, but it may also be autistic individuals of previous generations that never had the opportunity for autism to be confirmed. Now it mean age, middle 60s, intensive interviews. I know any 10, but the results were fascinating. Now, there were four themes: Autistic identity; Emotion regulation; social instinct and having a positive outlook.

Now in terms of emotion regulation, anxiety and depression was high, but 85% of autistic adults have daily problems with anxiety. What this area? An anxiety disorder but tend to be worriers about 70%, can have low mood. Not necessarily clinical depression, but low mood. Now their view was in their 60s. Recovery from depression was slow and lengthy. They experienced a lot of mental health problems since their teenage years, but not understanding what they were going through. Other people didn't really seem to understand, and with alexithymia difficulty converting, thought in emotion to speech, difficulty disclosing to people how you really feel. Now 7 out of 10 reported that as they had grown older, they had an experience and improvement in their mental health. And as we'll go through later on, not from mental health services, but from things they discovered themselves also a lot of stress at work.

For example, working for a boss who has no ethics because ethics is very important in autism and not being able to cope with unethical bosses.

OK, being stressed and overwhelmed by relationship difficulties, that is knowing my partner has needs, but I don't necessarily see the signals of when she needs something and I don't know if I'm good enough. I'm not sure that I'm meeting my partner's needs & including perceived failures to meet the emotional needs of their partners aware of it, but I'm not sure what to do. I don't want to be criticized. I don't want to do the wrong thing. It's easier to do nothing. Uh distrust and disdain for most forms of treatment and health professionals, especially medical doctors. Yeah, who may not really make accommodations for autism, especially in general hospitals felt that they were not listened to or understood unfairly, judged, or misinterpreted by health professionals. There were not interested in me. They're interested in the drugs. They couldn't sell, but also an aversion to medication. With autism being associated with the greater vulnerability for the side effects of most medications, if we take the next slide, but really coming up with strategies themselves. For mental health issues through reading and experimentation rather than advice from health professionals, many autistic individuals don't take advice easily. It's Frank Sinatra's My Way. Exercise was very valuable. Self taught. You can manage this. In other words, they were kinder to themselves rather than being very self critical and very self judgment, or they were actually, no, you did a good job there and that took some time to be achieved. Also, mindfulness meditation. Spiritual physical activities such as gardening for emotion regulation enjoyed as solitary pursuit and a sense of stoicism, toughness and a lack of self pity. We take the next one, which is Social instinct, feeling drained by socializing. In other words, I can do it. It's great. Yeah, I can. I can be there, I can socialize, but the cost is horrendous. I'm exhausted afterwards, so delighting remained effortful. Remained a lifelong problem and awkward social interactions. Fraught relationships and solitariness and so on seem to be a theme, but improving skills of time when by under greater acceptance not being different.

I can have a positive outlook. I can look back now and cut myself a bit of slack. Being comfortable with who they are, I've become more accepting of myself. New rewarding activities. These are of retirement age, volunteer work, community groups, work schedules that suit them without concern for negative judgement. No pressure to conform to society standards. We all go through this at this time, but I don't

care what people think. But in Autism, that can be very important. Focus on activities that bring pleasure and a sense of fulfilment, and what we found that one of the most important factors of successful outcome was a sense of humour that occurs for all of us in a way. But in autism is also very true.

What about the situation that you have several autistic children in the family and there's some families I know with five or six autistic children in the family, each one will have different levels and profiles of autism, even identical twins. One as I got it, twins may have different expressions of autism. Now the compatibility is of concern because I say in Autism, it's like each autistic person is a magnet, and those magnets either attract within the family or repel within the family. You think because you come from the same thinking experiences, etcetera, you think you get on not automatic within a family and a friendship can be yes. So, like magnets that attract or repel between those siblings all needing personal space. It's almost as though everyone needs their own bedroom to retreat to, but Parents doing crisis management, putting out the fires and disagreements and arguments between the autistic kids, leading very much to parental exhaustion, but also the effect of having several autistic children in the family on the non autistic child. If there is one of realizing that they have missed out on some of the connections with parents who are putting out all the fires dealing with the autistic things and they feel in some ways they have to be extra good. And when I say we you've got this problem, they say no, I can't tell Mom and Dad. Mom and Dad have got enough problems. I don't want to add to their problem though. They need to know. No, I don't want to upset them.

Now what about maintaining the relationship for parents and autistic child? This was a study just a little while ago, entitled we are in this together. What are the things that are important, the dimensions to maintain and help the relationship, shared beliefs, mutual acceptance? Now mum and dad may or two months or two dads may need to be at the same level of acceptance, but it may be a bit delayed for one of the parents. It's also focusing on the positives of the autistic person, and it's a sense of existential meaning of a broadening that this is a part of life we we accept it. It's not that. What did we do wrong that we are being punished by this particular outcome of an autistic child?

It's teamwork. Very, very important to be successful in being a parent of an autistic child. It's nurturing the family, it's nurturing the self and also nurturing the relationship. Sometimes you're so involved with

your autistic putting the fires out and dealing with it, you're not really recognizing the effects on the Family yourself and the relationship. Sometimes you need to step back and it may be somebody externally that recognizes that that allows you to refresh, to reenergize, to be able to cope. It's shared experiences. The effectiveness of good communication, it's also very important that both parents to have a good sense of humor and emotional support for each other. And sometimes it's just listening. It's not solving the problem, it's just listening and that can be incredibly valuable.

What about divorce rate. There's a study for over 10 years ago now, the media seemed to imply a divorce rate. If you have an autistic child or yeah, you're gonna end up in divorce suggesting your divorce rate of 8%. So they checked it out. Is that true? Let's Fact Check it. No, it's not true. There's no evidence to suggest a greater risk of divorce and symptoms severity. The depth of that was not a factor, but there was lower marital satisfaction.

There's also an exploration now of being an autistic mum. And as time goes by, I am more and more aware that when I see an autistic child, I may recognize characteristics of autism in the mum. Now this was a research study just a couple of years ago, nearly over 350 mums. One of the problems in autistic mom may experience is prenatal and postnatal depression. 60% had postpartum depression. We need to recognize that and provide the support feel the birth had not been adequately explained to them. The assumption is they will know and also actually finding that motherhood has been an isolating experience.

Feel that their parenting was being judged a lot. A lot of autistic individuals, autistic women in particular, and girls are very sensitive to judgment and not being good enough. But they felt that they were being judged more harshly than other mums may have been, but also feeling they were unable to ask for support when they needed to ask for help is a very non autistic social way of problem solving. Who can help me? Whereas an autism, it's what do I do to solve the problem rather than who can help? So there may be a reluctance to seek support from somebody and often reporting that they were not coping. In fact, from my own clinical experience, many were were coping well, but the problem was confidence in their abilities. They a lot of self doubt and but very concerned about multi tasking demands of parenting and domestic responsibilities, particularly if you got sensory sensitivity. Babies are full of sensory

experiences all over the place, and that, and they keep touching you and climbing all over you and you've got tactile defensiveness and all factories sensitivity. Having a child can be a bit of a challenge to an autistic mum.

Also issues of creating social opportunities for their child, this can be difficult for autistic mum, who may not have a rich social life. But realizing my kids need as I need to arrange play dates, part birthday parties, I've got to meet all the other mums as the kids come out of school. We have social chit chat. I hate social chit chat, but for the sake of my child, I am prepared to do that. Wow, great. Felt that they should be offered extra support because of their diagnosis, and they've got to communicating with professionals about their child's greater anxiety when needing to interact with professionals that I'm going to be judged fear that I'm going to be viewed as a bad mother and the children could be taken from me. It can happen and feel misunderstood by professionals, which could result in conflict but equally able to autistic and non autistic mums prioritize their child's needs above their own and to seek opportunities to boost their child's self confidence.

Also, one of the things that I do is I do groups for for many skills all ages and so on. And they do couples groups. And from that we decided to do a group for kids autistic and non autistic, where a parent has been confirmed as autistic. What's it like having an autistic parent? We got them all together in a group and we say what are the qualities? These are the qualities they said. Ohh, they're autistic parent, they said helping with homework, but pedantic and long winded I only wanted a a sentence but he gave me a whole lecture on the topic. OK, practical. And he helps us with fixing things, right? He's very good in emergency situations, great memory for facts and information. He took up windsurfing and practiced till he could sail perfectly. He's a great inventor, only he has ideas, but they don't go anywhere under a lot of compassion in that situation.

These are some of the issues of an autistic parent is understanding natural childhood abilities and behaviour because you may have been isolated from your peers. As just as a child because of the autism may not have really fully understand understood the various aspects of a non autistic child and their needs and their abilities. It's looking at the roles and responsibilities of being a parent and how do I know I'm doing a good job? I can't rely on my intuition. I just hope I am once the children's succeed,

but can be using criticism, not compliments, and there can be issues of discipline of two different approaches between parents in terms of consequences that may lead to marital conflict, but also not understanding why children need so many friends. Why do you have to have your friends around? Why do they want to come to the house? Your House should be your sanctuary to keep your own away from people. Why do they want so many kids around the house to play with?

And when you got siblings or some conflict resolution for the autistic child, when there is that conflict amongst the brothers and sisters, they have great difficulty understanding in other persons perspective, that's part of autism. Understanding somebody's perspective may not be automatically understood. Their own perspective may override. May, if they feel that the autistic child is having too much attention from their parents and getting away with things that they would never allow to, they may sabotage programs as a way of getting back at the autistic individual and sometimes provoking them, so they're going to get into trouble, could feel neglected, and having to be well behaved and not wanting to be a burden to a parent with their problems. As I alluded to before, and the autistic child's jealousy for the Social siblings that make friends so easily. But how on Earth do they do it? So in siblings, they're going to be all sorts of issues. What we tend to find is that in a family where there baby one parent with autistic characteristics and one parent with very good social skills, they are talented in social situations. Is that the children can be either autistic and find social situations very difficult, or they are naturally talented and above average abilities in friendships, which can cause the autistic child incredible jealousy that they just know how to make friends.

If you go to attwoodandgarnettevents.com, we've got 25 online courses you can download for up to 60 days on a lot of things that I've alluded to today. If you want more information, friendships, emotions, relationships, autistic burnout. More on that next time I see you guys, autism and ADHD, PDA girls and women's employment. More information from attwoodandgarnettevents.com.

Question & Answer

Question: How do you support with socialising and friendship when you yourself are autistic and don't understand it yourself? Please write the guide for how to explain the social cues of autistic for autistic parents of autistic kids.

Answer: I think first of all, Carol Gray social stories are designed to explain the social conventions and so on. But if you have an autistic parent, they may be unsure or lack confidence in the ability to pass on that information, so it may well be that you need to get a coach, mentor, family member, somebody at school who can help. Sometimes it may be that you could use at secondary school drama classes with the drama teacher to go through an analysis of how do you respond when somebody bullies you? That's not put on Shakespearean place or to encourage camouflaging. It's more of how can you project your confidence, your assertiveness when bullied and teased and OK, let's have a look at the video. Well, your your posture really is not convincing. You need to be stronger and and more convincing in no this is not acceptable. It's a tricky one. There are a range of books on friendship. I mentioned a moment ago, at attwoodandgarnettevents.com, we've got 1/2 day on primary school friendships and 1/2 day on secondary school friendships and that provides explanations and strategies to go through what you can do. But what you're saying to your child is, look, I'm also not very good at so, but let's work on this together. We both have concerns. Let's see if we can have a project that can explore this. Who could we talk to? Who could we find out so that it's a shared issue? So there's a sense of identity.

Question: My child mimics other children, thinking she needs to be someone else other than who she is to be able to fit in. Any advice on how to handle this?

Question: How best to encourage their child to be themselves so?

Ohh it it's a tricky one because if you're not the true self it, there's all sorts of psychological consequences. What we would go through is an emphasis on what is good about you in terms, especially of personality and abilities of of who you are. These are your qualities in your personality of of kindness, sense of humour, compassion for people, friendliness and when it comes to friendship,

you are one of the best friends because you don't do bitchy or mean. You don't like telling gossip about people? Now I know all the other peers aren't telling gossip, and that's what they do. But you don't. That's much better. You have many qualities that are important of loyalty, honesty and trust, which are very important in long term relationships. It's not popular now, but your peer group are too immature to appreciate the qualities that you have and what we may do is go through what are your qualities. Sometimes we have we do it a bit more formally with easy old qualities of the bilities and we get a ring binder, blank pages and it may be honesty, it may be creativity. Trust, for example, and that goes at the top of the page, and it's like a diary that records any examples of honesty. Trust, sense of humor, creativity are written into that which is then opened as a tangible exploration of the person's personality. And their qualities. So it's really going through - Who are you? And then adult explaining that quality is one of the best long term qualities in terms of employment and relationship. But it's often not appreciated by your peer group. I'm sorry. You'll have to wait till they grow up. I get this when I'm talking to a teenage autistic boys. Uh, who want a girlfriend? And I say, look, can you wait because at the moment a lot of girls are interested in the rebels, the cute guys, the risk takers, and then they'll learn that they're not good for long term. What they want is honesty, integrity, loyalty, especially for bringing up kids. And you've got that you've got those qualities. So sometimes what we'll do is we will get a slightly older teenager, maybe a cousin or something like that to talk to the person about their qualities because they're not seeing the good bits. They're only seeing they're not good bits and they want to be part of the group, OK?

Question: How important is getting a diagnosis and is a label really going to help my child?

Answer: I can spend another couple of hours on this. When I talk to adults I say I don't call it a diagnosis, I call it a discovery. We've just discovered your autism. When would you like that discovery to be explained to you? They often say as early as possible, because then I wouldn't have felt mad, ad defective. Something wrong with me? All the negative or hiding those those characteristics. So we usually say that when the person knows that they're different, that's when they need an explanation and we go through what are the characteristics that you have. And we go through the qualities and difficulties sociated with autism. The qualities will include that you have a photographic memory, you draw in

photographic realism, you sing in perfect pitch. You won the Chess Championship and so on. So we go through how Autism explains some of your successes and qualities, but then that's to understand who you are and when mom and Dad are talking about you, Autism may be mentioned in the conversation. Now you know what it is. You'll see a report on you. You'll read it and it says that you're autistic. Now you know what autism is, and we go through Jessica Kingsley publishers. Quite a few books on heroes who are autistic, and there's been some fantastic autistic heroes over time, but we then talked to the autistic child of do you want other people to know? Who would you like to know? And how would you help them now? Sometimes if we are explaining autism in a classroom setting, we may not use the a word we say Jacob is the sort of person who may not be sure of the signals of can I join in? If you see him try around walking around where you're doing something and you think he might want to join it, say, do you want to join us and give clear signals of entry to be included? So we go through what are the the issues and the qualities if you want somebody to help with your math homework, he's gonna be great for it. But he's gonna be bullied. And teams, what you can do to help him in return, make sure that you tell the predators keep away from him. Ease, my friend. You don't do that, so we ask some kids will not accept it in the class. Some do and we then go through. OK, these are the problems that this particular child has. Again, not saying that it's Autism necessarily. How can you help them? And some kids will come up with some good ideas and they'll have ownership because the other kids will know this person is different. And they need an explanation of he's the sort of person who they may choose to use the term autism, which would be best if you could, to actually be honest and upfront. But the emphasis is explaining the quality. What we may have for the class is an activity, right? Primary school. Everyone in the class to do a story. Pure fiction, where the autistic person is the hero you know about autism. Create a story where the autistic person is the hero of the story. It's going through things like that.

End of Session