

# Puberty, dating and healthy sexuality for individuals with ASD & Asperger's Syndrome

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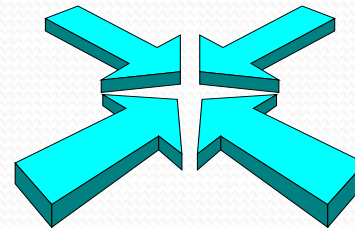
Montreal, Canada

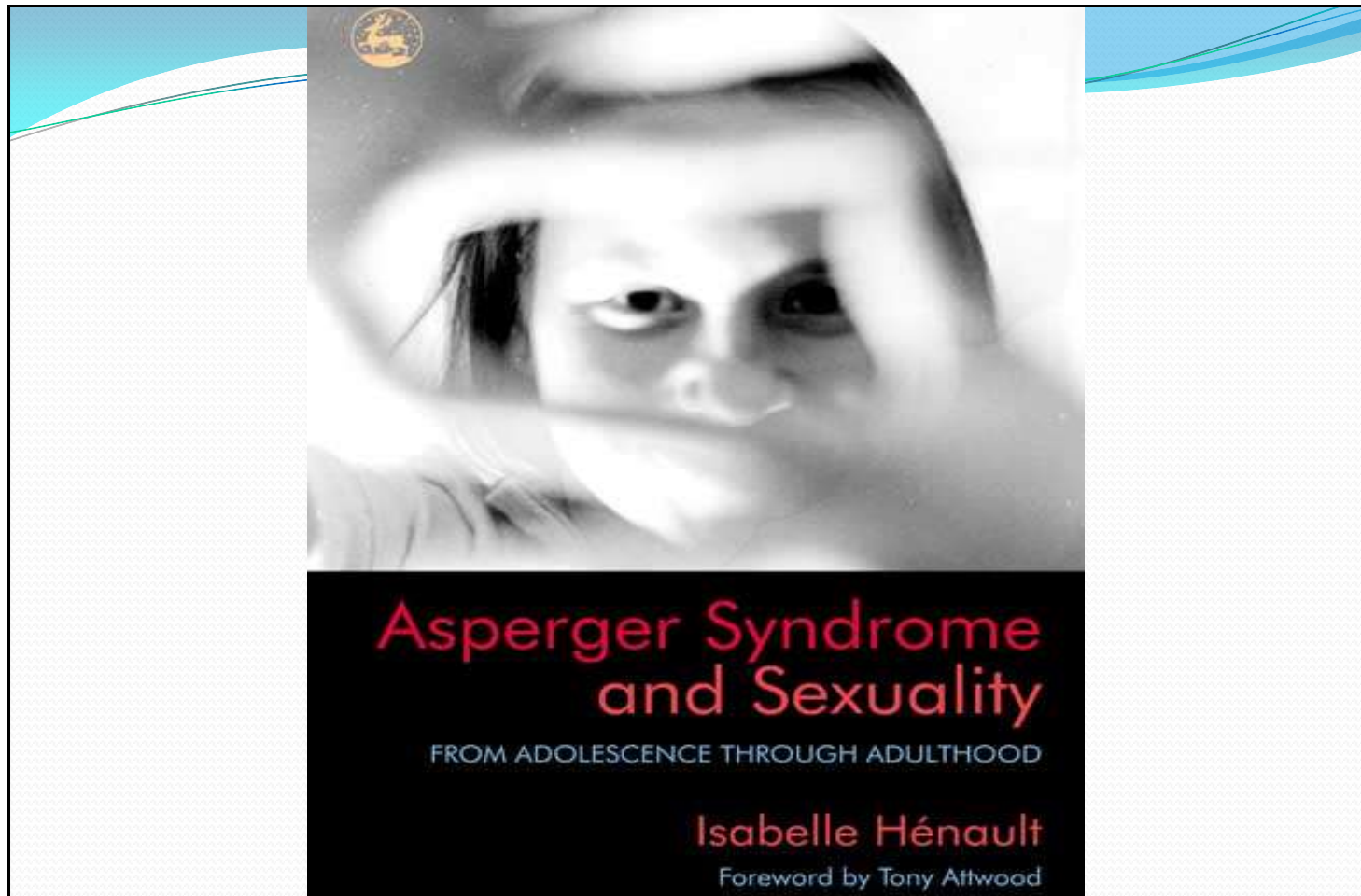
in coll. With Pr. Tony Attwood, Ph.D.

Brisbane, Australia

# Definition of relationship & sexuality

- Few research & clinical attention
- Normal part of development and life
- Complexity





## ASD profile

- Social skills: free of social rules
- Communication abilities: verbal and non verbal
- Theory of Mind: different ways of thinking?
- Emotions: detecting, reading, expressing
- Sensory issues

## ASD profile

- Socio-sexual development: self-stimulation, exploring sexuality, lack of experience and guidance
- Frustrations and inappropriate behaviours
- Gender identity & role definition: « My way »
  - flexibility, conflict, confusion
  - cross-dressing, transsexualism
- Social imitation: context, consent

## ASD profile

- Interpretation of emotions: black & white!
- Interpersonal relationships: couples, empathy, intimacy. Confusion & anxiety
  - Less experience, fear of rejection
- Sexual drive, desire, curiosity
- Accepting the diagnosis

# Factors influencing social and sexual development

(Ginevra & Stokes, 2013; Griffiths, 1999; Hénault, 2010)

- Information
  - Basic knowledge
  - Experiences
  - Social support
- Limitations of the environment
  - Gender segregation
  - Social network
  - Rules
  - Sex education

# Factors influencing social and sexual development

- Intimacy
  - Interests and limits: steps in a relationship
  - Private and public setting
  - Quality time
- Medication
  - Secondary effects
  - Synergic effects



# Puberty

- Physiological changes
  - Hormones levels (testosterone, oestrogen)
  - Body changes: body hair, sexual function, reactions, periods, etc.
- Psychological changes
  - Emotions (mood changes, stronger, cycle)
  - Independence
  - Curiosity
  - Interests

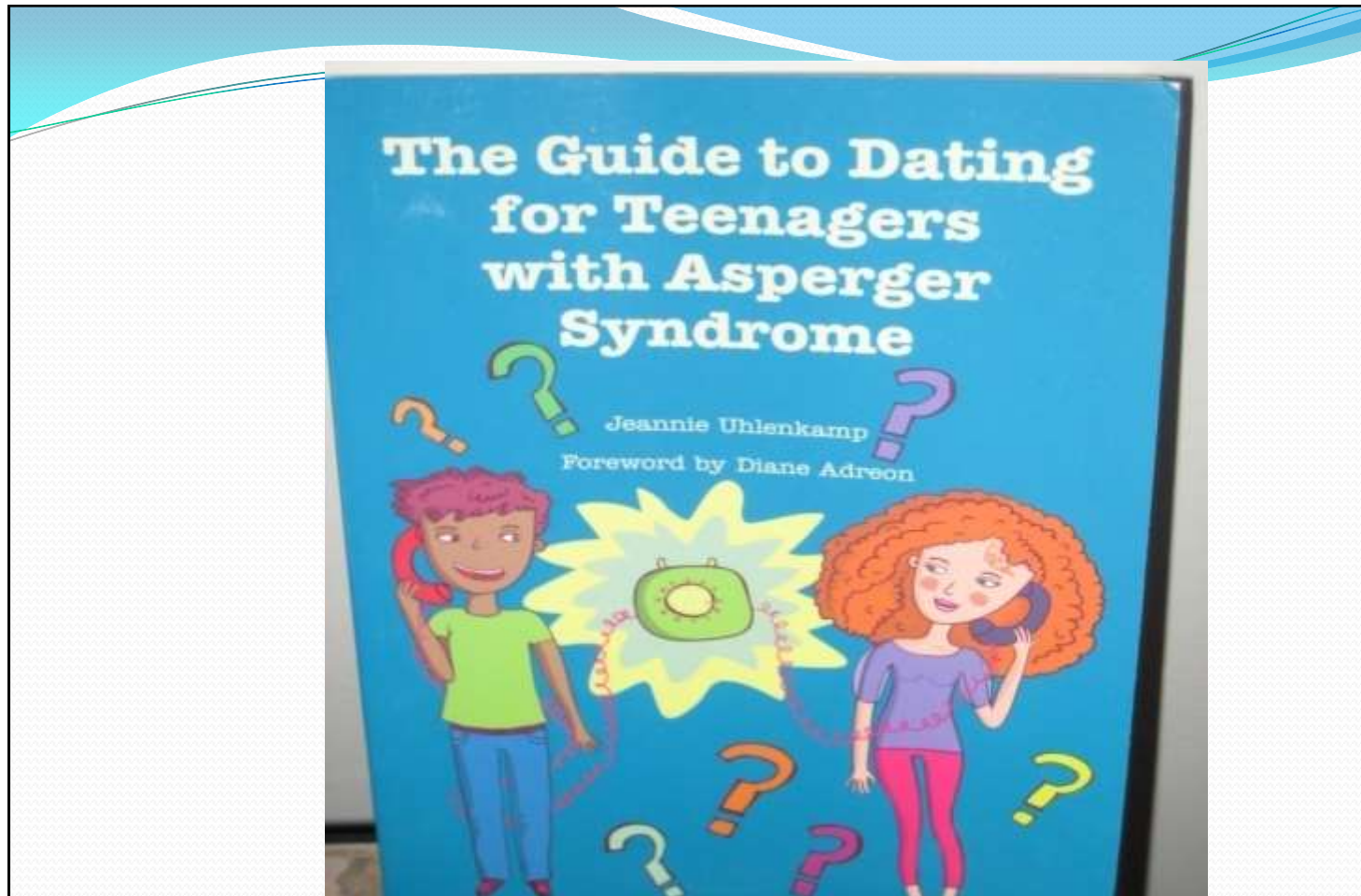
# Puberty

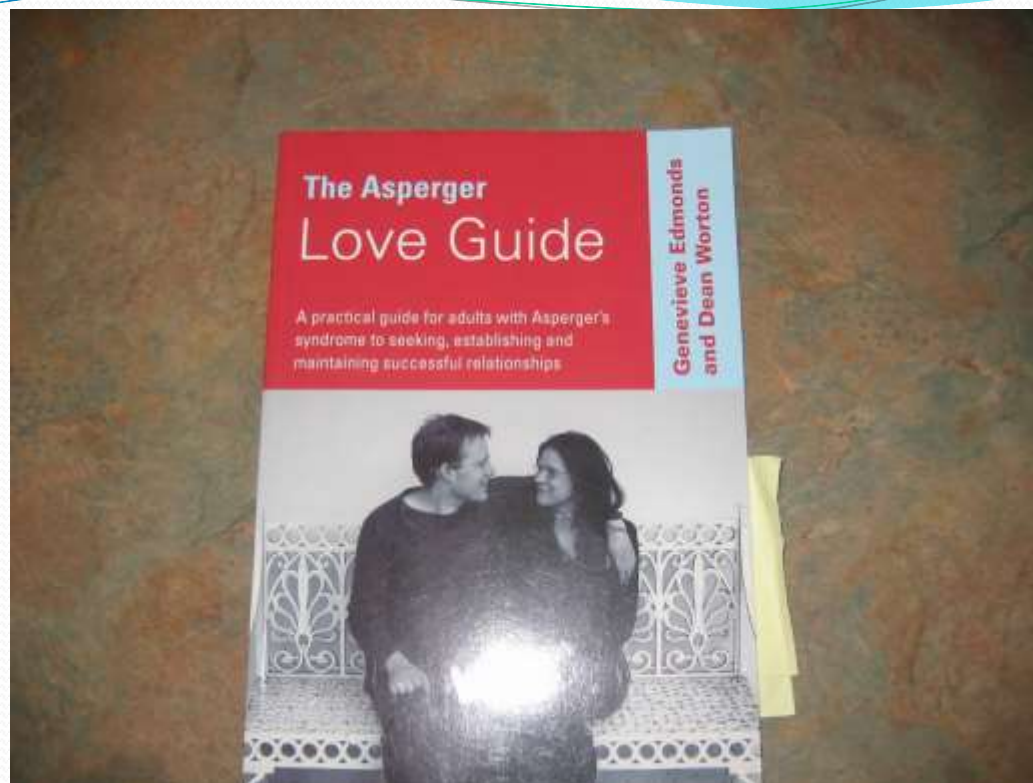
- Friendship & social skills
- Skills: communication: verbal & non verbal, social interactions, sharing
- Intensity of relationship
  - Appropriate: finding a balance
  - Inappropriate
  - Love & friendship, intimacy



# Puberty

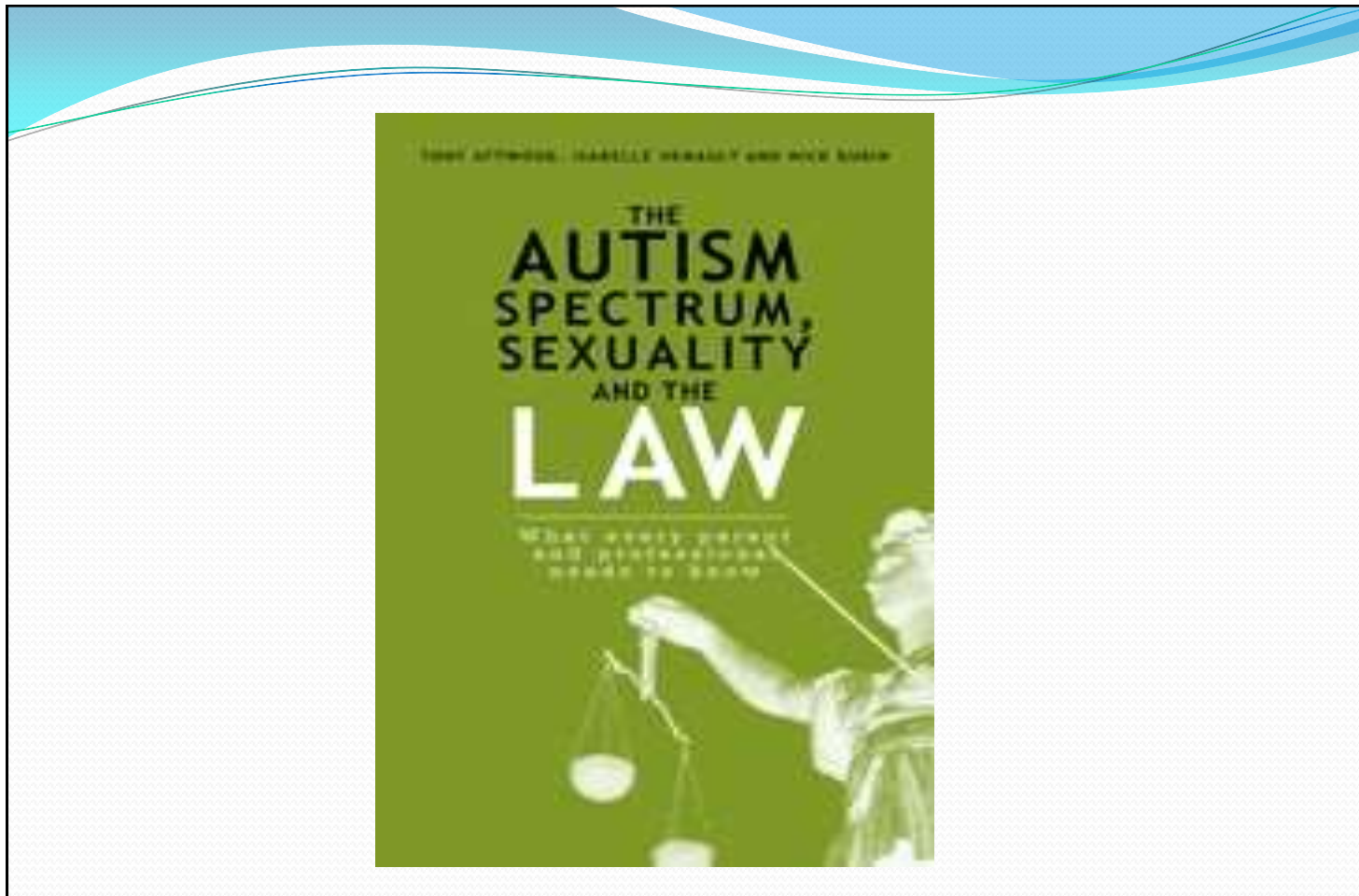
- Self esteem: image
- Self confidence: positive experiences
- Social network
- Finding identity (group, norms, person, sexual)
- Isolation
- Depression, anxiety, arrogant AS (15% god mode)
- Aggressive behaviors, self-abusing behaviors





# Safety

- Recognition of abusive/unfriendly relationship
- Dangerous relationship
- Reading people's intention: ToFM
- Qualities of a healthy relationship
  - Sharing, Communication
  - Pleasure, interest
  - Respect, communication and much more...
  - Making Wave Program FREE:  
<http://partnersforyouth.ca/making-waves>



# Safety on Internet

## Attwood, Hénault & Dubin, 2014

- Sharing personal information
- Pictures and files
- Social Medias(Facebook, etc.)
- Predators on the NET
- Pornography
- Safety steps when meeting someone



# Safety on Internet

## Attwood, Hénault & Dubin, 2014

- **Some appropriate messages and news include:**
- general pictures from holidays or news from a trip or vacation;
- invitations to special events or activities; and
- general news about school or work.

# Safety on Internet

## Attwood, Hénault & Dubin, 2014

- **Definitely inappropriate messages and information include:**
  - personal details such as address or contact details;
  - intimate pictures and information (about relationship, partner);
  - any sexual content that includes messages, pictures or videos that are sent or requested;

# Safety on Internet

## Attwood, Hénault & Dubin, 2014

- threats of any kind about school, work, an organization or an individual;
- asking intimate or sexual details of someone;
- downloading pictures or videos of child or juvenile pornography; and
- sending or sharing files, pictures or videos of child or juvenile pornography.

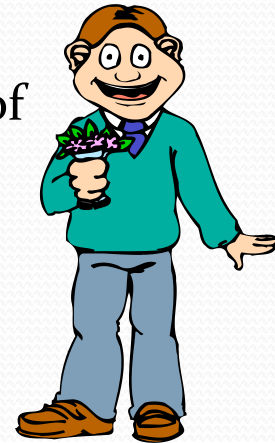
# Support and strategies

- Goals
  - Improve self-esteem and interpersonal exchanges
  - Decrease isolation and depression
  - Establish friendships and intimacy
  - Provide knowledge and positive experiences
  - Consultations: individual couples & groups
  - Healthy sexuality = Quality of life

# Typical History of Relationships

(Tony Attwood)

- Late developer in social/emotional maturity.
- Not sexist, ageist or culturally biased in choice of friends and partner.
- Wanting to be a friend and lover but with little intuitive knowledge and experience of how to do either.



## What Attracted You to Your Partner?

- The silent handsome stranger.
- Admiration of intellect or abilities.
- Compassion for his/her limited social skills.
- Belief his or her character was due to childhood circumstances and the person will change in a new relationship.

## What Attracted You to Your Partner?

- Shared interests (hobbies, animals).
- The degree of adulation.
- Fidelity in relationships.

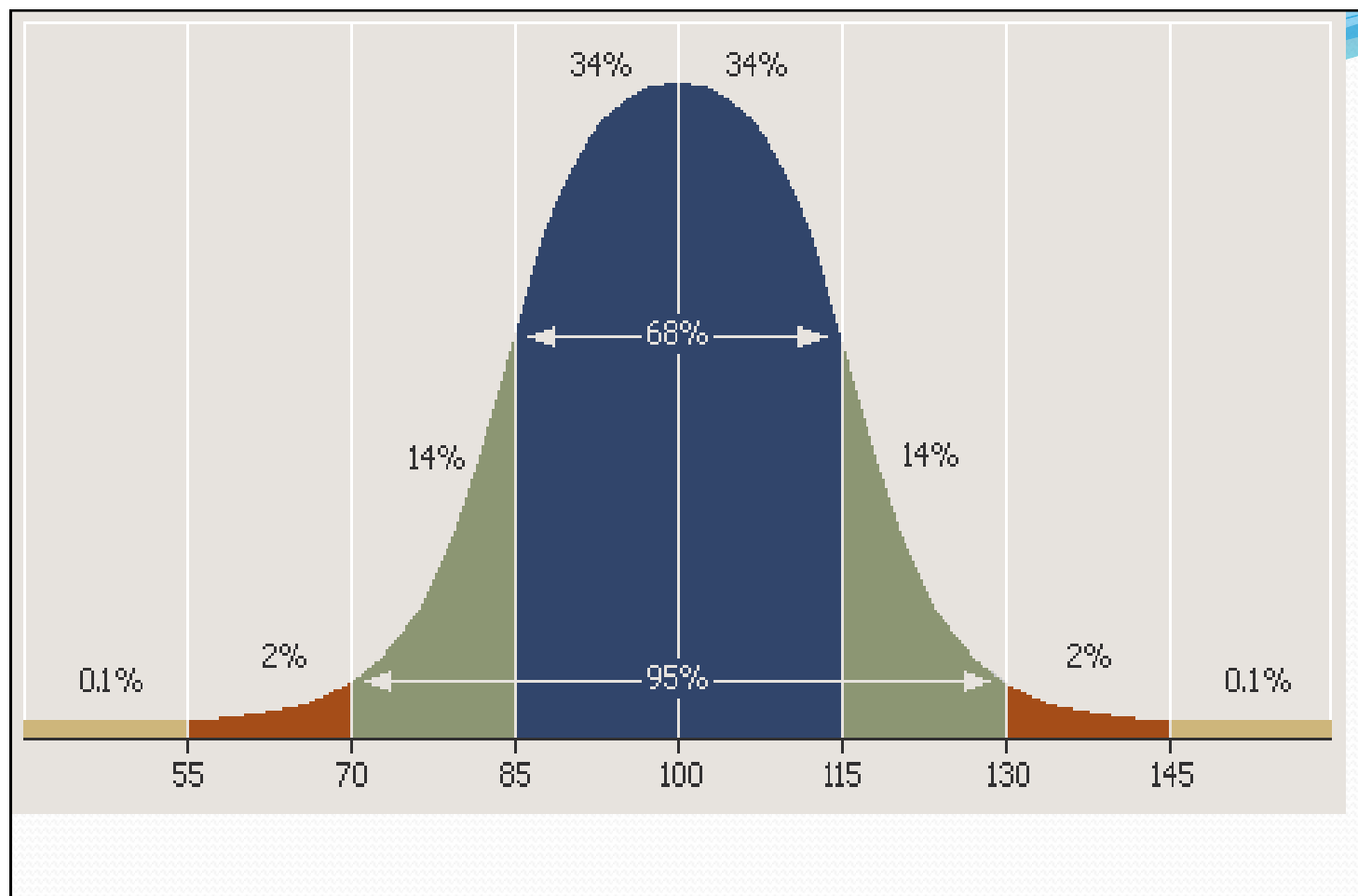
## What Attracted You to Your Partner?

- 'Pillar' of the community.
- Child like quality, a 'Peter Pan'.
- Creative in his/her work and good career prospects.
- Similar characteristics to a parent (learned the language and culture in childhood).



## What Attracted You to Your Partner?

- A challenge to get to know.
- I was his first serious relationship.
- Not 'macho'.



# Choice of Partner

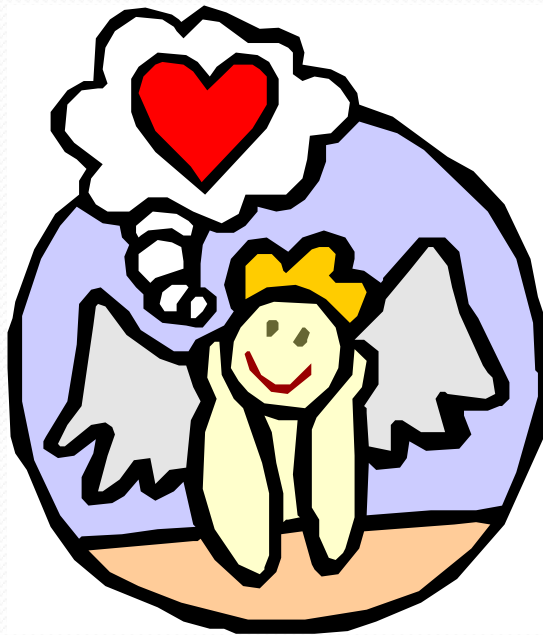
(Goldsworthy & Stokes, 2011)

- Women with AS may prefer a relationship with a man with As.
- Extreme neurotypicals more likely to fall in love with an Aspie.
- Adults with High Functioning Autism less likely to seek a partner.

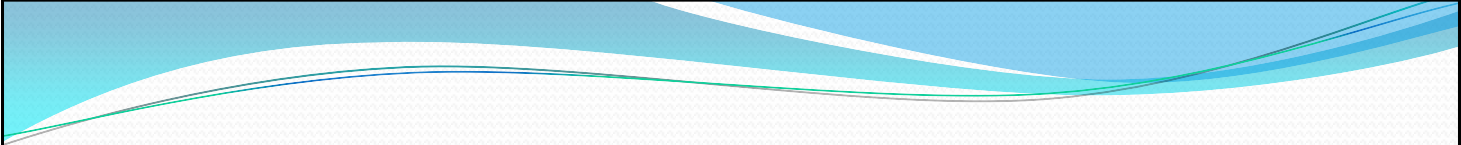
## The development of the relationship

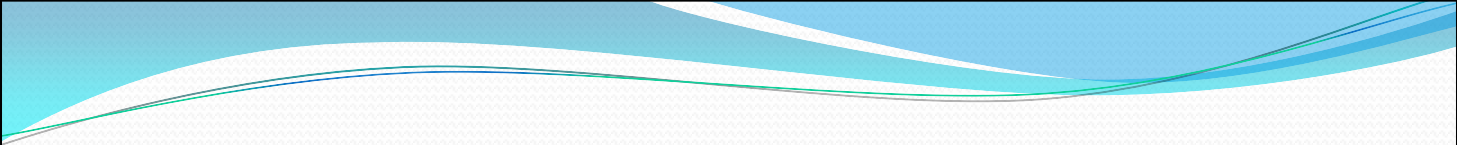
- An initial extremely deep love for the partner with ASD-AS.
- In the early years of the relationship, not expecting the partner with ASD-AS to know what the person is thinking or needs.
- The extreme neurotypical can imagine the ASD-AS perspective but the partner with ASD-AS can have great difficulty imagining the NT perspective.

## Individual Activity: List the characteristics of love



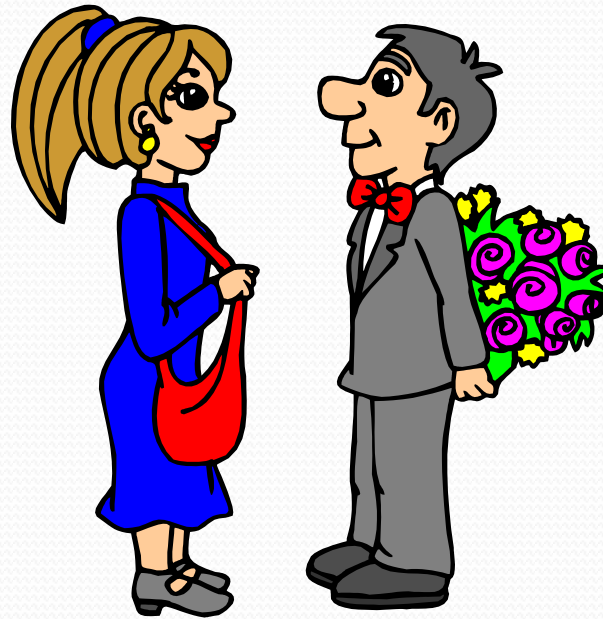
- **Love is:** *Tolerance, non-judgemental, supportive.*
- **Love is:** *A complex of beliefs that tap into our childhood languages and experiences; it is inspired when you meet someone that has a quality that maybe you admire, or do not have (admiration and respect) – or that they (someone you admire) reflects back to your ideal self – which is what you want to be or see yourself as.*

- 
- **Love is:** *Passion, acceptance, affection, reassurance, mutual enjoyment.*
  - **Love is:** *What I feel for myself when I am with another person.*

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- Emotional bonding
  - Sharing and support
  - Balance of independence and dependence and being comfortable with that person
  - Long term commitment

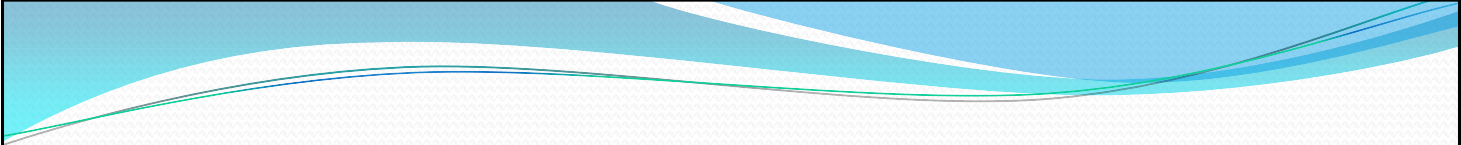


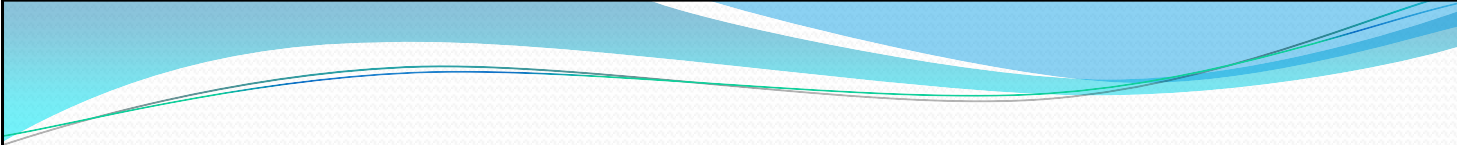
# ASD-AS Partner Definitions



## ASD-AS definitions

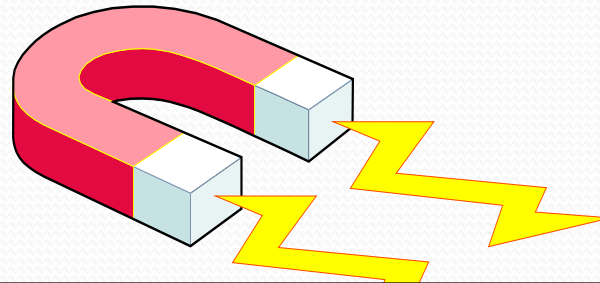
- *Love is: Helping and doing things for your lover.*
- *Love is: An attempt to connect to the other person's feelings and emotions.*
- *Love is: Companionship, someone to depend on to help you in the right direction.*
- *Love is: I have no idea what is involved.*
- *Love is: Tolerance, loyal, allows 'space'.*

- 
- Four aspects of love: everybody, friends, family, erotica.
  - Love cannot be observed.
  - Love is yet to be felt and experienced by myself.
  - What is Love? I don't know the correct answer.

- 
- Euphoric feeling without logic
  - A good roast meal
  - Understands needs and how you feel
  - Looks after the kids so I can pursue my special interest
  - Someone that will try to understand the Aspie way and still be there in the morning.

## Partners

- Two magnets - that either attract or repel each other.
- Adored or despised.
- *Attract*: Seek affection and approval.
- Seek a partner with a similar profile of abilities.



# Understanding Relationships

- Issues of relationships: two individuals or an entity?
- Sexuality and intimacy as a whole: much more than intercourse!
  - Communication, emotions, commitment
  - Personal history, experiences, sexuality & values, education, etc.
- Development and interest
- Isolation
- Conflicts



# Inappropriate Behaviors

- Organic factors (25% serious health problems) no complains...
- Psychologic/psychiatric condition: dual diagnosis
  - Depression, anxiety
  - PTSD-ADHD
  - Addictions
  - Phobia, OCD, etc.

# Relationships

## (What to expect in the couple?)

- Respect
  - Accepting the partner's imperfections
  - Constructive criticism
  - Developing the potential of the couple
  - Blaming AS
  - Balance in the couple
- Making time
  - Priority
  - Schedule management
  - Spending time together





# Relationships

- Insecurity
  - Taking responsibility
  - Making you feel good: commitment and trust
- Dealing with conflict
  - Compromise
  - Dividing tasks
  - Using qualities of each partner

# Relationships

- Expressing emotions
  - Gestures, non verbal communication
  - Decoding the feelings of the partner
  - Intensity of emotions
- Communication
  - Non verbal (? %)
  - Avoiding misinterpretations
  - Coherence
  - Priority

## Intimate communication

- Unresolved issues from the past
- Structure and focus: pedantic (always, each time..)
- Emotionnal: loosing track, overwhealming
- Delay in answer to respect
- Conflicts: agressive or withdrawn

# Intimate communication

- Logical, goal
- Asking a direct question
- Respecting different opinions
- Diffusing the tension
- Assertive

# Strategies to improve intimacy and sexual skills

- **Safety Issues**
- The first date:
  - Where & what to do
  - Conversation
  - Flirting
  - Safety
  - Maintening the relationship

# Strategies to improve intimacy and sexual skills

- Emotions
  - Reading facial emotions, Mind-Reading
  - Expressing emotions
  - Emotion management (intensity, anger, rigidity, empathy)  
CBT

## The Understanding and Expression of Affection

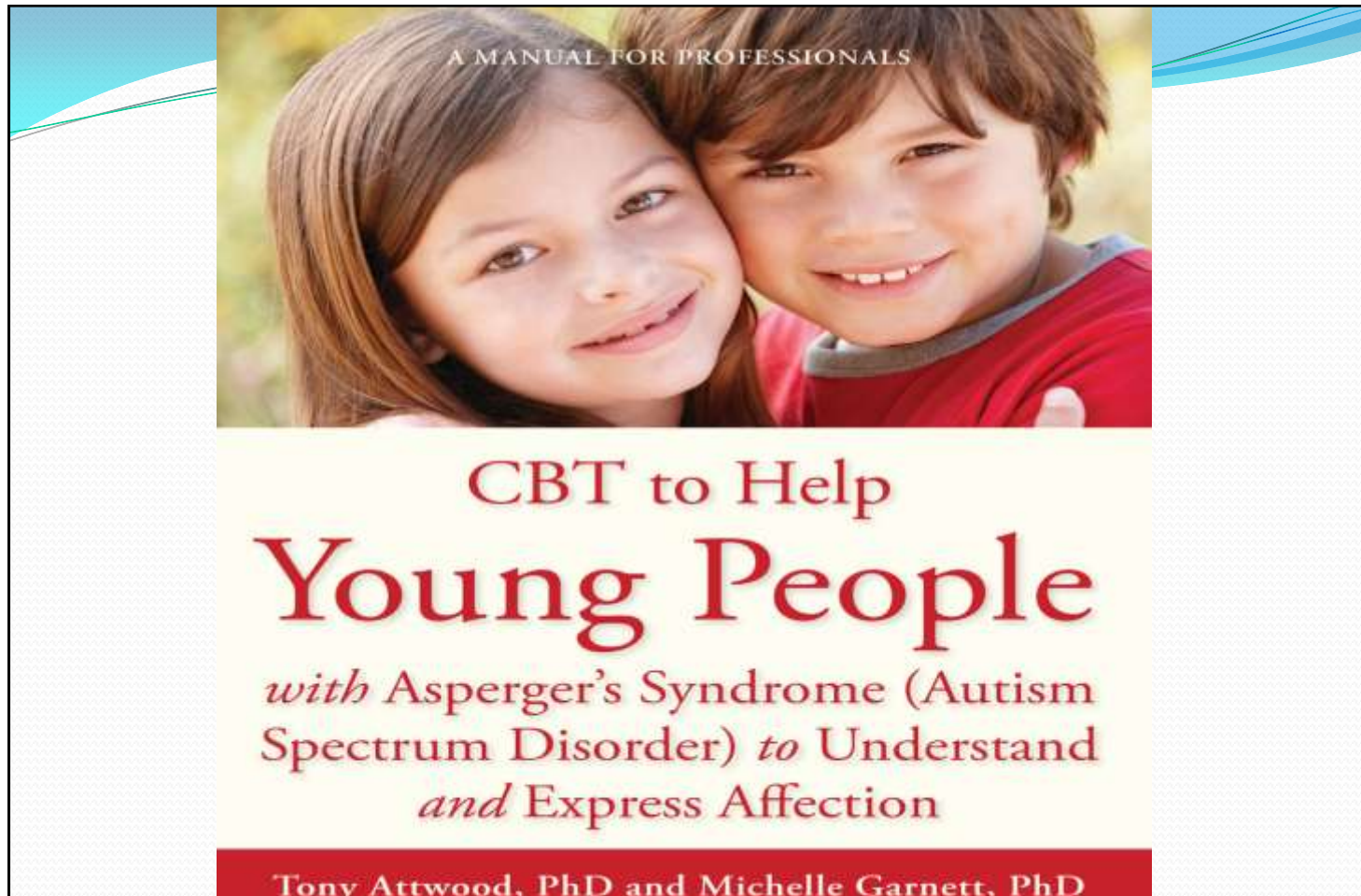
- Ability to read the signals when someone expects affection.
- Ability to express the appropriate level of affection.

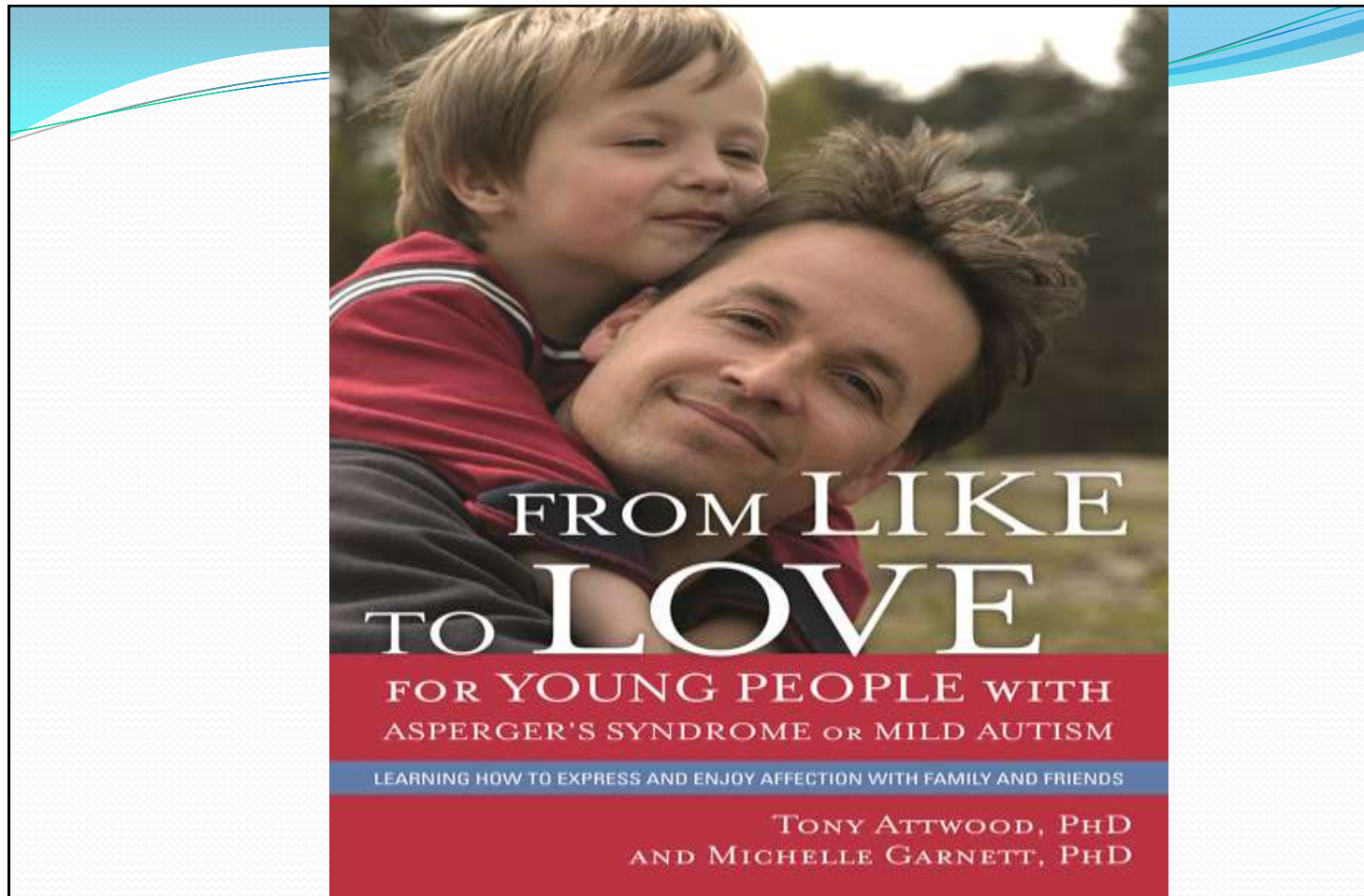


## The Understanding and Expression of Affection

- Affection to repair someone's feelings.
- An immature expression of affection.
- A limited vocabulary of expression that may not include subtle or age appropriate expressions.
- Sometimes needing frequent expressions of affection for reassurance.







## Evaluation Studies

- Sofronoff, K *et al* (2005) 'A randomised controlled trial of a CBT intervention for anxiety in children with Asperger syndrome.' *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 46, 1143-1151.
- Sofronoff, K *et al* (2007) 'A randomized controlled trial of a CBT intervention for anger management in children diagnosed with Asperger syndrome.' *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 37, (1203-1214).

## Evaluation Studies

- Sofronoff, Eloff, Sheffield & Attwood (2011) 'Increasing the Understanding and Demonstration of Appropriate Affection in Children with Asperger Syndrome: A Pilot Trial' . *Autism Research and Treatment* 20.
- Attwood & Garnett (2012) The Construction and Evaluation of Three Measures of Affectionate Behaviour for Children with Asperger's syndrome. *Autism*, 10-0105-RI.

# Strategies

- Social behaviors
  - Support groups
  - Different activities, interests
  - « Neuro-typical » friends, group, family



## Pleasure List Activity

- Quality time: for myself & as a couple
- Relaxing activities: reading, cooking, shopping
- Physical activities: walking, swimming, gym
- Social activities: coffee with a friend, support group, phone, meeting family
- On a weekly schedule: make it happen!

## CBT

- *Mind over Mood: How to change your mood by changing your thoughts.*
- Anxiety, depression, anger
- Describe situations, mood, intensity: 1-10
- Thought, situation, emotion
- Questions: does some of your activities have an impact on your mood, do you see a pattern in your emotions, etc.

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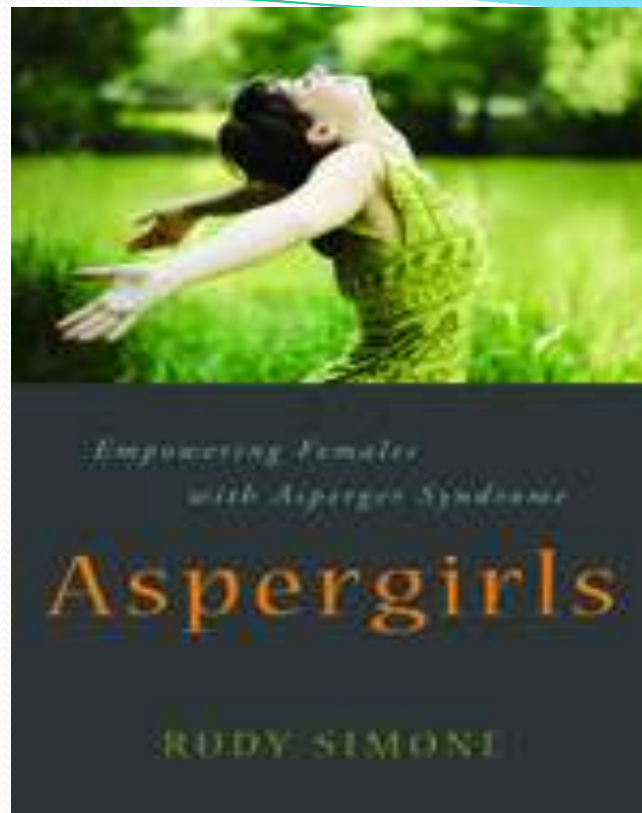
[www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com)

## More material.....

- 5 Safety Rules video [www.ait.net/catalog](http://www.ait.net/catalog)
- Relationship series-3 videos [www.yai.org](http://www.yai.org)
  - 1. Friendship
  - 2. Boyfriend-girlfriend
  - 3. Sexuality

# Videos

- Flirting or Stalking?
- Making New Friends
- Love or Abuse?
- [www. socialsignalled.com](http://www.socialsignalled.com)



## Outcomes....

- Better communication
- Quality time
- Intimacy (rich, diverse, needs)
- Improving sexuality
- Positive emotions
- Self esteem
- Understanding & acceptance of AS

