



A Lucky Duck Book

The Asperger Social Guide

How to relate with confidence to anyone
in any social situation as an adult with
Asperger's syndrome

**Genevieve Edmonds
and Dean Worton**



Professional Development



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as an adult with Asperger's syndrome**

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About the authors

Genevieve Edmonds is a 25 year old with 'residual' Asperger's syndrome, which she views as a significant gift. She works as an associate of the Missing Link Support Service Ltd. in Lancashire supporting those 'disabled by society' including individuals with ASD. She speaks and writes frequently in the field of Autism, along with giving training, workshops and soon counselling. She aims to empower those with ASD, carers and professionals in the understanding of Asperger's syndrome as a difference rather than an impairment. She lives and works in a solution-focused way and is based in north-west England.

Dean Worton is a 33 year old high functioning individual with a very positive expression of Asperger syndrome. He runs a very successful UK-based website for adults with Asperger's syndrome and hosts real life meet-ups around the UK for its members. His key interest is in encouraging adults to live positively and successfully with the gifts that Asperger's syndrome provides. He also works in administration and resides in north-west England.

Dedications

Genevieve: To my sister, Fiona, for your individuality and eccentricity. Also for being a great supporter.

Dean: To members of Aspie Village for your loyalty.

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Luke Beardon, again, for your pertinent foreword and just for being you.

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Foreword

The second in a series of three, *The Asperger's Social Guide* follows on from *The Asperger's Love Guide* and precedes *The Asperger's Personal Guide*. While I have yet to read the third guide I can confidently recommend *The Asperger's Social Guide* to all people with autism/Asperger's syndrome as an insightful and potentially hugely beneficial text to support everyday life.

It constantly amazes me just how much the NT person takes for granted: the innate ability to social chit-chat; the ease with which we communicate with one another; the way in which we can enter a social situation and within seconds have a good understanding of how we should behave. However, any people with Asperger's syndrome find the social world a chaotic maze without a handy map supplied to help guide their way. Far too often people with AS are left without even a rudimentary set of directions, let alone a detailed map. What Gen and Dean have supplied goes some way towards rectifying that situation, and it is with great pleasure and a sense of privilege that I am introducing *The Asperger's Social Guide*.

There are abundant texts on autism and AS written by individuals, parents, and 'professionals'. The insight that both Gen and Dean have into their own autism, combined with their genuine personalities and willingness and abilities to support other people with AS, means that *The Asperger's Social Guide* is not only useful for people with autism, but for everyone who is involved in the field. It provides hugely supportive suggestions for how people with AS can develop their skills, as well as a superb insight into the lives of people with autism. It is for these reasons that I would recommend it not only for people with autism/AS, but to anyone who wants to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of people on the autistic spectrum.

I was chatting to a young woman the other day who was very bright and articulate, and she had a fantastic way of expressing herself. She told me that socially it feels as though she is dragging around a ball and chain – but it is invisible so no one else knows it's there. It seems to me a wonderful way of explaining how problematic life can be for someone with AS, and yet the problems are often so invisible that support is not readily available, and is often lacking altogether. At present support mechanisms around social support are generally woeful, to the detriment of people with AS. Such lack of support should never be taken lightly – it can easily lead to major problems for the individual. With *The Asperger's Social Guide*, the authors

have provided a detailed social map, while acknowledging that all social situations are potentially problematic and the world is not an ideal place. It is a considerable accomplishment that they have tackled such a complex issue, and produced such a readable, insightful and beneficial guide.

I have huge admiration for Gen and Dean as individuals, and great envy at their ability to present such an excellent publication. I would like to thank them for allowing me the opportunity to write this foreword, and to allow me to be a part of their lives.

Luke Beardon

Senior Lecturer in Autism, Sheffield Hallam university

Introduction

'I have a degree from the university of Life.' This is a phrase which is often said jokingly, however for many people with AS it might be less of a joke. A degree from the university of Life might be well received by many people with AS! Often for individuals with AS the academic side of life is relatively straightforward – it is the everyday social world that is the great struggle. Wouldn't it be nice if there were a degree available in 'the everyday social world'? Sadly it would be virtually impossible to put together such a course.

More is now known about how Asperger's syndrome affects individuals than ever before. However, how does this knowledge translate into supporting the everyday social lives of the adult individuals with Asperger's syndrome? Individuals with Asperger's syndrome often struggle to make sense of, and relate to, the everyday world we all have to live in. Knowing how to relate in everyday life to the never-ending amount of social situations and many different people an individual comes across can be a minefield of utter confusion. However, getting by socially is the key to most things in life, and to survival. Even the most basic everyday situation is often complicated by social issues.

This guide aims to help with that. Written from the perspective of two high functioning Asperger's adults the guide covers many social situations in which those without autism take for granted in knowing what to do and how to behave. It is a practical pick-up-and-use guide for individuals with Asperger's syndrome (and other ASDs) to use in their daily lives to make their way in a very confusing social world (which they cannot easily opt out of) and to have a decent quality of life.

We have tried to put together tips and strategies for coping every day in the social world. In writing the guide it further emphasised for us just how hard it is to quantify and write down social rules. There are so many factors affecting these rules, such as context, time, culture, situation, mood, physical state, gender, race and so on. There are simply no 100% correct social rules. It would be impossible to ever make them as the social world is simply not logical or factual. In some ways, for an Aspie, this could be seen as a positive thing, in that since there is no one correct way to behave it is easier to be 'oneself'. However, sadly society expects certain conduct that is unwritten, yet this is changeable and not always definable. How unfair!

Despite this we still felt that writing the guide was a worthwhile exercise. It is a good starting point from which to think about social rules, their importance and how to meaningfully employ them to get by in everyday life. For some people with AS, some of the guide may appear very patronising or 'stating the obvious', yet for others it may be very welcome. Some of it may appear very simplistic, some of it more complicated. Of course, all Aspies are highly individual, so we tried to be as broad and basic as possible to cater for all levels and abilities. Our aim with the guide is to provide some basic pointers which in our experience have worked. This is a guide that can be picked up at times of high anxiety, or at times of over-analytical and over-complicating thought, when philosophising takes over, and basic rules that you knew all along are forgotten, or mistrusted! Naturally, a personal interpretation of the social world takes into account personal values. Therefore, it is open to interpretation and not to be taken as 'gospel'! We hope that individuals with AS or others ASDs will use it as a starting point from which they can make their own interpretation of the social world, to take as little or as much from the book as they find helpful. Although the title of this book states 'Asperger' individuals we feel it can be used by all individuals on the autistic spectrum with or without support.

Naturally we couldn't possibly have been able to cover every social situation or we would never have finished writing the guide! We have covered situations which we felt were very general. However, caution needs to be taken due to the fact that no one social situation is ever the same each time around! Context is always going to be very relevant, so always take this into account. The best way to learn socially is by experience. Everybody, not just people on the autistic spectrum, experiences social confusion and uncertainty over what society expects of them, so take heart! The difference with autistic people is that they may learn in a more concrete, direct and scientific way. This is OK too, but perhaps requires more effort in a social world, which isn't designed for autistic people.

In writing the guide we both learnt new social relating concepts from the other, refreshed our current knowledge, and complicated our previous social knowledge, so it has been a learning curve for both of us!

A note on terminology used in this guide

Aspie – This refers to an able high-functioning individual with Asperger's syndrome. However, the book can be used by lower functioning individuals on the autistic spectrum with support from a support worker, carer, parent or trusted friend.

NTs – a term used for the purposes of writing referring to mainstream neurologically 'normal' (neurotypical) individuals.

AS – short for Asperger's syndrome.

ASD – short for Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Autistic – covering people on the whole autistic spectrum including people with Asperger's syndrome, High Functioning Autism and Classic Autism.

Stims – Self-stimulatory behaviour: repetitive motor or vocal mannerism engaged in by people with ASDs. They are usually used to either calm or excite the nervous system and often as a response to strong emotion.

