



Reviewed by Autism Society of Michigan

**TITLE:** Connecting with Your Asperger Partner: Negotiating the Maze of Intimacy

**AUTHOR:** Weston, Louise

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As more and adults with Asperger syndrome enter into the community and the workplace, the more they are likely to date and to marry, primarily people who aren't on the autism spectrum, as so many more males have AS than females. But as this is such a new frontier, not much is known or understood about the dynamics of marriage between AS and NT partners. Louise Weston, a nurse in Australia, married a guy from church who was divorced and who knocked her socks off with beautiful, heartfelt poetry and quaint courtship behavior that included abstaining from kissing and other forms of sexual behavior until the wedding day. Little did she realize that that was part of having AS, since she was his Special Interest that he pursued to the nth degree. When they married, there were difficulties with communication, emotional intimacy, and frustration on his part. This book explains the nuts and bolts of living intimately with someone who has AS, because the dynamics are often very different-there often is not the same level of deep emotional intimacy and affection one would find in NT/NT partnerships. Weston starts out by asking the reader to let go of expectations-expecting the "perfect" relationship if unrealistic in any relationship. No matter how wonderful a marriage is, there are always some wrinkles to iron out, as relationships are so complex. Then, she describes the Energy Cup-an imaginary vessel that one can fill up with positive energy, to help one get through the difficulties inherent in living with a person with AS-the meltdowns, to lack of affection, the sensory processing issues, etc. She describes things one can do, to fill up one's Energy Cup, such as engaging in favorite hobbies, taking a walk or doing some other form of exercise, getting together with friends. These are activities she suggests for the NT partner, who often has to do most of the work in the relationship. Weston strongly emphasizes the importance of getting enough sleep, as that helps to weather difficulties such as the spouse's frequent meltdowns and breakdowns in communication. The book presents detailed communication strategies, which often involve stating things very concretely, as so many people with AS or "Aspies," as Weston calls them, are so concrete and literal in

their thinking and usually can only process small bits of information at a time, otherwise, they experience overload. This is discussed in the chapter on meltdowns and why they occur and how to handle them. The NT partner is advised to walk away from the situation and leave the partner alone until he calms down. Then, she can better communicate with him again. Other areas that the author discusses include helping the NT partner regain her own identity and she is advised time and time again, to engage in her own life, with her own separate interests and group of friends-while this is helpful for all partnerships, it's especially true for partnerships where one spouse has AS, because their needs are so different and because it is often so difficult for an "Aspie" to navigate subtle social cues, signals of distress and sadness by the NT partner and because sensory processing difficulties often make sexual intimacy less frequent and less comfortable for the person with AS. This book made a lot of sense to me and I loved the overwhelmingly positive tone. I also strongly agreed with the author about the importance of getting a diagnosis, so that the partner can really be motivated to work around his AS and the obstacles it often presents in a relationship. My big concern is that it is often the NT partner that does most of the work in the relationship, which can make it a lonely business for many years, until things can be worked out. My hope for the future is for more research into adult ASD and how those on the spectrum can have happy and healthy relationships, which I think is possible, but extremely difficult, until more is understood about how to help adults with AS navigate the world, in general. This book is a step forward.