

CHAPTER 8

OTHER ISSUES OF AUTISTICS

CODEPENDENCY

The conventional way of viewing Autism would lead most to believe that it is impossible for Autistics to become Codependent. The conventional way of thinking about Autism is wrong, period. Rejection and abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual, etc.) create a breeding ground for codependency. Autistics crave approval just as much as any non-Autistic, and will suffer the same long term emotional consequence as anyone else who is subjected to the same rejection and abuse that is typical of Autistics. Those who deny they have such needs do so as a means of protecting themselves from the pain they always feel when they have failed to have these needs met. The angrier they are when denying these needs, the more they desperately want these needs to be met that they have been led to believe to be unfulfillable. There are two main aspects of Codependency:

1. **The Enabler:** Getting one's self-worth by rescuing, meddling in other people's lives in order to fix them, trying to meet the needs of everyone around you and make everything perfect at the expense and often as an alternative to addressing our own problems; always giving; but never receiving.
2. **The Love Addiction:** Getting one's self-worth by getting everyone's attention, sympathy and pity in order to meet needs. Always receiving; but never giving.

The common root of these two aspects: Having your identity and self-worth rest in other people.

I have heard several different terms for cycles of codependency I have gone through. I prefer, the "Hero" and the "wounded puppy." I loved to "help" (that is rescue or fix) everybody, especially those who did not want me to. In November 1989, I started to run out of people to "help". My obsession to be needed went unmet. My self-esteem crumbled and my "love addiction" surfaced. I set up unspoken standards for determining whether or not a friend was a true friend. I wanted for them to be so tuned in to my needs that they would meet them without me having to ask. Looking back I can see that I wanted to be the center of their attention. At the time I did not see it that way; but that is exactly what I was looking for.

SUICIDE

I began contemplating suicide at the age of 11, which is a late start by Autistic standards. I know Autistics who were as young as 9 when they started contemplating, and one that was 12 when she attempted for the first time. I can only give you guesstimate that the rate is at least 25%, but I cannot verify this unless I can get Autistics to agree to take a survey that would provide me with solid documentation as to what the rate actually is.

RELATIONSHIPS: GENERAL

Although it is well known that Autistics have social struggles, it is a misnomer that we struggle in ALL social situations. I have been told that I cannot possibly be Autistic by those who only know me in support group and/or church meeting settings. After all, I am so adept in how to interact in such settings that they are completely comfortable to me. When the meeting is over and we go out to a restaurant or the fellowship hall to have a post meeting social, I fade into the background. My level of involvement during the meetings and projects can be affected by:

- ❖ My role, or lack thereof, in the proceedings.
- ❖ My knowledge, or lack thereof, of the subject matter.
- ❖ My passion, or lack thereof, for the subject matter.
- ❖ The number of people in the environment.
- ❖ The number of people who are contributing to the discussion.
- ❖ The number of strong personalities dominating the discussion.
- ❖ How close I am seated to the speaker/group leader/project coordinator/focal point of the meeting/project, etc. This could be especially when the Autistic is in an academic setting.

RELATIONSHIPS: PLATONIC INTER-GENDER (AN AUTISTIC MALE'S VIEWPOINT)

Contrary to popular misperception, the separate genders do not have an absolute set of social rules in which both rigidly follow. Although social expectations and disposition may have a role in how we interact with each other; every human being has their own personality and temperament that also affects how they interact socially. Telling Autistics, who have a heightened dependency on rigid protocols and procedures, that such absolute rules do exist and must be rigidly followed is a recipe for disaster.

Many of those who are scarred from previous relationship(s), especially women, are scared of getting drawn into another relationship. Any act of kindness or social interaction may provoke reactions ranging from cold to hostile. These reactions may be...

1. ...completely missed by the Autistic, resulting in increased hostility by the other person.
2. ...viewed by the Autistic as a continuation of the rejection that they have endured all of their lives.

RELATIONSHIPS: ROMANTIC (AN AUTISTIC MALE'S VIEWPOINT)

First, review the sections, "*The Perceived Lack Empathy, Desire for Affection, etc. of Autistics*" and "*The 5 Possible Factors at Play when Non-Autistics Believe that Autistics are Showing a Lack of Empathy, Desire for Affection, etc.*", from Chapter 7. The review, "*Relationships: 'Platonic' Inter-gender (An Autistic Male's Viewpoint)*", from above. The bulk of why Autistic males tend to struggle when initiating and maintaining a romantic relationship can be found there.

The only other issue for this subject that needs to be brought to light, the difficulty of many Autistic males to fulfill societal expectations that they are supposed initiate the relationship. Speaking from an Autistic male's point of view, it is perfectly acceptable for girls in our culture to be shy and withdrawn, or outgoing and taking charge. However, if boy is shy or withdrawn, then there must be something wrong with him. If he lacks the ability to initiate a relationship by asking a girl out, then he must have some major psychological issues that would make him a poor choice for a boyfriend/husband. You can say that my perspective is jaded, and maybe you are right, but that is how I honestly feel about the subject.

ACADEMIC ISSUES

This is the first of two issues that I saved for last because they are a culmination of all of the above struggles that Autistics face. I can only theorize about how things could have been done differently in order that I may have done better in school had my parents, teachers and myself knew what we know today about myself. These suggestions may help some Autistics, but I can make no guarantees until such time as I can find a school that would be willing to experiment with it.

1. **In the classroom:** You may be able to reduce the amount of visual stimuli that may be a distraction to them by:
 - a. If feasible, arrange desks into smaller clusters of perhaps 4-6 each. This may also create a smaller, and therefore manageable, social environment for them. Of course you should think carefully about which classmates to put into this externally created social environment.
 - b. Have the Autistic sit in, or at least near, the front row. Putting them closer to the focal point of the classroom, or other large assembly, may make it easier for them to become engaged in the proceedings.
2. **Homework:** The conventional wisdom of sending a child into seclusion in order for them to focus on their homework, which is actually the perfect environment for many Autistics' minds to wander. I believe that I may have done better if I did my homework in a common area. If my parents noticed me spacing out, then they would instruct me to read out loud because verbalizing my thoughts helps me to maintain better focus on them. Once I obtained focus, I could resume reading silently. If I lost focus again, I would be instructed to resume reading.

EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

This is the other issue that I saved for last because the employment struggles that Autistics face really are also a culmination of all of the above. These really are basically the same issues that they deal with in their personal life, but occur in an environment that could care less about them. The primary function of

work is not self-improvement or to meet your needs for socialization, but making money for your boss, who will in turn pay you a pre-agreed amount of money that you are to use to support yourself. If the boss believes that your inadequacies are costing him/her more money than you are worth, you're going to lose your job. An Autistic, or anyone else for that matter, can only have success in the area of employment if they understand their strengths and weaknesses.

1. If you can explain why you are struggling to your boss, and can propose a solution that is mutually beneficial, then most bosses will be willing to give it a try rather than bringing in someone new who they have to start training from the beginning.
2. If you know what your strengths and weaknesses are, and have an accurate understanding of how the job requirements relate to them, then you can find a job that caters more to your strengths and where your weaknesses are less relevant.