

# Children of a parent with autism spectrum/AS

What can be the effect on a child if a parent has autism spectrum?

That question should ideally be answered by the child, including adult children.

The issue of AS parenting affects thousands of children's well-being alone in this country.

And that affects millions of children's well-being worldwide. Still, there is limited information available on the subject.

The concerns of a normal mother or father of a child when the other parent has AS / ASD will raise a number of key questions, such as:

## **What will be the emotional/social/intellectual outcome for the child when the AS-parent...**

- cannot read the child's emotional state and needs, including an infant who does not yet have a language?
- cannot give an appropriate emotional response?
- cannot switch instantly from one situation to another and respond immediately to the child's needs?
- has difficulty in appropriate physical contact?
- has sensory difficulties with sounds and noise from playing children and their peers?
- cannot distinguish or check whether the child is in danger, sad, tired, scared, lonely, happy, in crisis?
- cannot foresee contexts and overviews in a situation, but only the details?
- does not have adult impulse control over themselves, including over their own anxiety and meltdowns?
- has difficulty organizing time, planning and carrying out practical tasks?
- cannot do several things at once?
- is extremely preoccupied with their own interests?
- has limited imagination?
- cannot participate in mutual conversations?
- cannot give a response to analytical/emotionally based higher order questions ("why", "how")?

By definition of the disorder, those parents on the autism spectrum may obviously have limitations in parenting skills

Asperger's expert and psychologist Tony Attwood mentions briefly in his book "The complete guide to Asperger's Syndrome" a number of serious limitations on the parenting skills of those with autism spectrum. [1]

Attwood thus mentions the following phenomena:

- The emotional atmosphere at home is characterized by the Asperger's parent's negativity and irritability.

Asperger's puts a damper on the other family members' enthusiasm.

- Spouse and children living on tiptoe so as not to trigger tantrums and mood swings in Asperger-parent.

The family lives in fear of the strong reactions, an outbreak can cause.

- Spouse and children must adapt Asperger-parent's inflexible routines and their inflexible expectations of others' behavior.

- Spouse and children are forced to adapt to Asperger-parent's intolerance to noise, spontaneity, playmates and guests, and they must endure Asperger's black and white perception of others.
- General children's needs and behavior is not understood by Asperger-parent.
- Children and spouses rarely receive positive confirmation from the Asperger-parent.
- Asperger parent does not show much interest in what has emotional significance for the other family members and often criticizes.
- Praise from an Asperger parent is rare.
- The parent who does not have AS, experiences the reality of effectively being a single parent with sole responsibility for children, home and family.

Tony Attwood also describes how normal children may react to the parenting style by feeling:

- not loved and not accepted,
- feeling invisible,
- learning not to show emotion nor expect mutual sympathy in joy and sorrow,
- not permitted to show sadness
- learning that to attempt conversation with their AS-parent results in a monologue about the adult's own problems
- their parent has no real interest in them and their lives,
- may find that peers are not welcome in the home.

Tony Attwood writes that a father or mother with Asperger's syndrome can learn to be a good parent. However, a precondition for this is that the AS-parent recognizes their need for ongoing guidance.

### **The neuro-typical parent's central role**

Professor Tony Attwood does not mention in his book the important role that the normal (neuro-typical) parent has in their children's emotional, social and intellectual development.

He also does not mention the importance of the psychological and educational efforts, the normal (neuro-typical) parent performs to train and motivate the Asperger-parent to function optimally in parenting.

Finally, he does not mention the special problems that arise around the kids, if the adult relationship is dissolved by separation and divorce.

[1] The complete guide to Asperger's Syndrome, chapter 13. Tony Attwood, 2007

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