

Introduction

You Are Not Alone

The roller coaster ride

Parenting with a partner or spouse who has Asperger Syndrome is easier said than done. So, too, has been writing on the subject. The chapters for *Out of Mind - Out of Sight* came together like a roller coaster ride, full of twists and dives. It was much like the experience of a neurotypical (NT)¹ co-parenting with an Aspie. (Aspie is an affectionate term used to describe those who have Asperger Syndrome or AS.) In this book, there are poignant stories of deep despair along with thrilling vignettes of discovery. Just like a roller coaster ride, the topics slam you to attention. You'll recognize: that sinking feeling as you plunge into a rapid descent; the sudden jerk that comes with swinging abruptly around a corner; and the thrill/fear of anticipation as you make a slow, grinding ascent, followed by another sheer drop.

I just couldn't find any other way to write this book. I don't believe we need one more quirky, upbeat human interest story on Asperger Syndrome, similar to those in the press these days. Instead, I focus on the harsh realities that an NT faces when co-parenting with an Aspie. I discuss the anguish, fears and losses of the NT parent. I also give you hope and ideas on how to co-parent more successfully. It's important to recognize that revealing the dark side of these relationships enables us to search for solutions to the all-too-real problems of the AS/NT family. The last thing I want to do is leave NT parents feeling that

¹ Neurotypical, or NT, is a popular term used to describe those who are not on the autism spectrum. NTs have good empathy skills and are sensitive to the contexts that surround their relationships. Those with Asperger Syndrome, or Aspies, are defined by their lack of empathy and *context blindness*. This distinction will become clear as you progress through the book.

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they are alone. Erasing that *aloneness* is the first step toward parenting successfully with an Aspie co-parent.

Out of Mind - Out of Sight has been difficult to write for a very personal reason. I am an NT parent of an Asperger Syndrome child. Writing has been a healing process for me. I worked the outline over again and again, never quite satisfied. I wrote and re-wrote chapters. I scrapped concepts and resurrected them. I took breaks and worked on other things only to be drawn back to finishing this book. Why? As I wrote, I discovered new things about myself and my family, just like peeling away the layers of the proverbial onion. Still, there are many things for me to learn. I certainly hope so, or why be on this remarkable journey on Planet Earth?

One of the differences you will notice between *Out of Mind - Out of Sight* and my previous book, *Going Over the Edge?* is much more of me in these pages. Chapter One, "Helicopter Mother," describes part of my journey with Bianca, my AS daughter. I thought I could remain Dr. Marshack in this book. Try as I might, my professional objectivity kept being infused with my personal experiences. I hope you don't mind. I used my clinical skills, and I researched theories to support my conclusions. Frankly, most of this book was guided by the intuition of a mom who has been there and is there still. I want you to know that you are not alone.

Asperger Syndrome or Autism Spectrum Disorder

Since I first published on the subject of Asperger Syndrome in 2009, there have been many exciting discoveries. This is especially true in the areas of genetics and neuroscience and how they interact with psychology and social learning. I use these discoveries to help

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make sense of the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of the parents, and children, described in this book. Knowledge is power. The more you know about Asperger Syndrome, the better able you are to parent, co-parent, co-exist and even thrive within your AS/NT family.

As a direct result of integrating science with clinical practice, a professional movement developed to change the name of Asperger Syndrome, or to drop the category entirely. In the 2013 edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V)*, leading researchers in the field of autism studies define a new and all encompassing diagnosis, Autism Spectrum Disorder, or *ASD*. The intellectual reasoning for this shift: No two autistic people are the same because of the myriad of unique genetic, personality and environmental factors that come together in one person. With ASD we now have one diagnostic label that encompasses the whole range of what is considered autistic. The concept of a spectrum implies that the diagnosis is varied and multi-dimensional.

What will not change is the basic nature of Autism Spectrum Disorders. ASD is defined as a triad of impairment. Those on the spectrum have difficulties with: (1) social interaction; (2) social communication; and (3) social imitation. However, the depth and breadth of these disabilities is immensely different across the ASD population. Each Aspie defined under the new diagnosis is as unique as each human being.

The label is changing to incorporate a holistic view of the human condition. In order to bring social science professionals up to speed, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services launched, in January 2012, an online genetics course for social and behavioral scientists. It's designed to provide education in genetics, so that the scientists can engage in interdisciplinary research with genetics researchers. According to the NIH website, [http://www.nih.gov/news/health/jan2012/od-](http://www.nih.gov/news/health/jan2012/od-03.htm)

[03.htm](http://www.nih.gov/news/health/jan2012/od-03.htm):

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Increasingly, scientific outcomes are not fully explained by genetic, environmental, or social factors alone or as independent contributors. Instead, public health advances and scientific breakthroughs tend to rely on transdisciplinary teams of social scientists and genetic researchers. This creates a greater need among social and behavioral scientists for an understanding of the complexity of the genetic contribution to health, disease and behaviors.

In *Out of Mind - Out of Sight*, I use the term Asperger Syndrome, or AS, or the colloquial word, "Aspie," because we are familiar with this jargon. Occasionally I will refer to the "spectrum" or "Autism Spectrum Disorder" or even "ASD" to move us along in that direction. I do very much appreciate the more holistic and systemic approach to bringing understanding and healing to the world of AS/NT relationships.

Austen's disconnect

The following anecdote brings out this holistic interplay as I, the psychologist, use knowledge gained from research to guide a young man with ASD toward connecting with his mother.

I first met Austen in the summer before his senior year in high school when he was 17. His parents were frantic: They felt he had only one more school year to become prepared for adult or college life. Austen had been to see lots of psychotherapists over the years. He currently had a very supportive psychiatrist, who managed his medications. Most of Austen's past psychotherapy had consisted of a safe place to talk and feel supported; yet nothing had changed in his behavior. He'd become more and more withdrawn, angry and self-destructive as he approached age 18.

Things were different this visit. I had previously introduced Austen to Neuro-Emotional Technique (NET), a mind-body therapy developed by chiropractor Scott Walker (see: <http://www.netmindbody.com/for-patients/an-explanation-of-net>). Like hypnosis

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and some other more holistic therapeutic approaches, NET allows people to bypass conscious, or talk, analysis and get to the heart of their problems. NET enables change without a good explanation for the change. Talk therapy is powerful, of course, but people with Asperger Syndrome often struggle to explain what is going on in their hearts and minds. It is much less stressful for Aspies to use an approach that links talk therapy to change at an unconscious level. Austen is one of those Aspies who benefits from this approach.

Austen arrived one day, ready and eager to share a problem he wanted help with. He said, "I have a problem with my mother. She wants me to clean my bathroom. She even took my laptop away until I clean it."

"Well," I said with a wry smile, "How important is your laptop to you?" I was nudging him to get practical and mind his mom.

"Of course it is vital" Austen quipped, because he knows that I know his world is the Internet. "But that's not the problem I want help with. It's bigger than that."

"Well help me understand the bigger issue Austen. It sort of sounds like a typical power struggle between a teenager and his parent. I mean, I presume your bathroom is a pit" I offered jokingly.

"Oh yes. That is true," Austen agreed. "My bathroom does need to be cleaned for sure! The problem is that I don't do it. It's the 'not doing it' part that stumps me." Austen was describing a complex behavior that could only be defined by Asperger Syndrome. The issue of cleaning his bathroom was indeed more than a childish power struggle.

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The light bulb turned on in my mind. "So let me try to understand this Austen. Your bathroom needs cleaning, right? And you would like to get your laptop back, right? But there is this in-between step that is missing for you—the 'not doing it' part. Am I getting your drift?"

"Yes that's it," said Austen, and he perked up. "Of course I want my laptop back, but Mother's taking it away won't make me clean my bathroom. Her actions make no sense to me. I know my bathroom needs cleaning. In fact I want it clean. What's that have to do with my laptop?" Very Aspie logic.

"And do you know how to clean your bathroom? I mean some teenage boys don't know how," I offered while I searched for the missing element.

"No really that's not it. I know how to clean my bathroom, but I don't. It's the 'not doing it' part I need help with." Austen was trying to explain the missing element when he didn't have a word for it.

A second light bulb lit up for me, even brighter than the first. "Austen, I think I got it this time. Let me try to see if this fits. Here are some words for what you are describing. First, you are *motivated* to clean your bathroom because it does need it. You can even understand your mother's demand that you clean it, because it is a pit! And it is your *responsibility*, right?" Austen nods approval. "And you feel a sense of *urgency* to get your laptop back, too. Right?" Austen nods in the affirmative again. "In fact, you would do almost anything to get your laptop back. Right?" One more time Austen is tracking my logic. "It's just that you can't connect cleaning your bathroom and getting the laptop back, because they aren't related. Right?"

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"Sure," Austen says. "It is so obvious that these things aren't related, and Mother is always trying this stuff. It never works, so why does she bother?"

I smile with Austen's realization. "Actually, this type of approach is used by lots of parents, and it seldom works with teenagers. We parents think that if we withhold a privilege or a favorite item, we'll get our kids to mind and do things like clean a bathroom. It doesn't work, and all that happens is a power struggle. But let's give Mom some slack here and work out your dilemma."

Austen is ready. I explain, "I think the problem is that we need to connect up your *motivation* to clean your bathroom to your *responsibility* to clean your bathroom with a *call to action* to actually clean your bathroom. That will satisfy the *urgency* you feel to get back your laptop. You'll get a clean bathroom. You can please your mother. She will be motivated to give you back your laptop even though the laptop has nothing to do with a clean bathroom. This is a win-win solution Austen. You already have *motivation*, a sense of *responsibility*, and a feeling of *urgency*. The only thing that is missing for you is a *call to action*. That's the missing piece you keep calling the "not doing it" part. Are you ready to connect the dots?"

Austen's eyes widen, and he smiles. "Yes that's it!" he says. "I am missing the *call to action* part." He raises his arm to begin the process of NET. NET incorporates the concept of Applied Kinesiology, and the meridian system of Chinese medicine. Using acupuncture points on the wrist and testing for congruence between mind and body, the patient releases emotional blocks. It's complicated but suffice it to say that Austen is ready to communicate with his unconscious through NET. Once Austen and I had identified the missing piece, we could use the NET approach to integrate the elements he needed to clean the bathroom.

Austen got his laptop back the next day.

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Out of mind - out of sight

If you go back and re-read the dialogue between Austen and myself, you may notice that Austen is not motivated by his mother's displeasure with his dirty bathroom. Nor is he motivated by the withholding of his laptop. These are emotional appeals that would require Austen to have an empathically reciprocal relationship with his mother.

In other words,
Austen would want to
because he cares about
When she withheld the
he would connect that she
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In other words, if the empathy process is not wired into Austen's brain, he can't "see" what to do next. Without empathy, Austen was stymied about how to accomplish something he was powerfully motivated to do.

Mom hoped that
clean his bathroom
her opinion of him.
laptop, she'd hoped
cared about the
much as he cared

about his laptop. These appeals failed, because Austen does not use empathy to make decisions. While he loves his mother, her opinion of him is irrelevant to cleaning the bathroom. He may care about getting his laptop back, but to do so because his mother has feelings about the bathroom literally makes no sense to Austen.

Austen was troubled about why he was not cleaning the bathroom. He was aware a piece of his logic was missing. It's hard for Aspies to discuss what's missing when that piece has never existed for them. I contend that the missing piece in Aspie problem solving is empathy. Out of mind - out of sight. In other words, if the empathy process is not wired into Austen's brain, he can't "see" what to do next. Without empathy, Austen was stymied about how to accomplish something he was powerfully motivated to do.

Empathy is part intuition and part taking action. It is the ability that NTs take for granted when they "just know" what is going on with another person. NTs can take action to

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“just say” or “just do” the right thing to move a relationship toward mutual understanding and mutual success. Empathy is not really a skill. It is not an object either. Empathy is the art of connecting to another person, then back to yourself. By connecting to others, we come to know ourselves, our motives and how we all relate—father to mother, parent to child, brother to sister, friend to friend, neighbor to neighbor, employer to employee. Empathy is so much more than the sum of its parts.

NT children start to develop the art of empathy by age 6: It’s not so with Aspies. NT children are wired for this connecting ability called empathy. It naturally unfolds during normal child development. Aspie children, on the other hand, are wired differently: They have to be explicitly and painstakingly taught the traits or parts of empathy—just as I taught Austen about the missing “*call to action*” piece. Learning how to be empathetic does not equate to the reciprocal connecting and relating to others that comes naturally for neurotypicals.

Theorists Simon Baron-Cohen, Adam Smith, Klaus Riegel and Peter Vermeulen are showing us the way toward understanding the differences in the way Aspies and NTs think. Baron-Cohen describes the interpersonal problem for Aspies as zero degrees of empathy. Vermeulen explains further that without empathy Aspies have *context blindness*, or the inability to make meaning of the circumstances and events that form the environment of relationships. Riegel’s Dialectical² theory, that we are all in a dialogue with others in life, proposes that without empathy there is no way to know yourself in relation to others; or to give others the experience that you know them.

² Dialectical Psychology was first introduced by Klaus Riegel. It is the only theory of psychology that comes close to explaining the AS/NT relationship since it focuses on the concept that human beings are defined by their relationships. The term “dialectical” refers to this relationship or the ongoing dialogue between people. All rights reserved. No part or whole of this document may be copied or reprinted without the express written permission of the author, Kathy J. Marshack, Ph.D., P.S., www.kmarshack.com.

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Imagine why co-parenting with an Asperger Syndrome mate can be such a challenge for an NT. How is an NT parent supposed to share the multi-dimensional work of parenting with a spouse who has no concept of the empathic glue that holds the parent/child relationship (and the parent/parent relationship) together?

Hopefully the answer to this question is illustrated in this book. I have written *Out of Mind - Out of Sight* primarily for the NT member of the parenting dyad; however, I expect AS parents and even adult children of Aspies to find benefit in this read. Aspies from around the world have sent me emails regarding my first book, *Going Over the Edge?* These readers say that the book has provided them with important perspective on their NT partner or spouse. One AS husband wrote me the following very powerful e-mail (I have excerpted parts.):

I guess your heart probably sinks just a little when you get a message from an AS man. However, I've just read your book and I'd like to thank you for its honesty and indeed bravery.

I've been with my NT partner . . . for 25 years and have inflicted many distressing incidents on her similar to those you describe. But I can honestly say that none of them were ever designed to hurt. This feeling has probably made things much worse [for her]! I doubt I would have become so angry and defensive if I didn't believe myself to be 'innocent' of the crime of intention. Hopefully I am coming to realise that I need to do more than just not intend to do harm. . .

. . . Reading your book I think I see parallels here between my fear of being overwhelmed in social or conflict situations. But I also see similarities to those feelings when my partner expresses her frustrations and needs - to admit to her point of view seems sometimes like I would be 'destroyed.' I mention this because I get the strong feeling that you equate spirituality and loving relationships. I feel that between myself and . . . there is something very important to us both, beyond companionship. For me there seems to have been a chance given that I would never believed I would have had.

..

. . . Recently we have come to the position where we both acknowledge that possibly a split might be the only answer for us. . . In my own literal AS way, I don't think there is much I would not do for . . . if that need was not clouded by the conflict and resentment. I really hope we don't split up.

I hope this makes some sort of sense.

Many thanks once again,

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I hope this man’s sentiments hold true for other Aspies who want to improve their marriage and co-parenting skills. As far as I am concerned, the key to success is finding a way to communicate loving intent even if the art of empathy is out of mind for Aspies.

Summary of what’s to come

This book has four parts. In the first three chapters I introduce you to the daily life of AS/NT co-parenting. Like the start of any roller coaster ride, the first few hills are thrilling and gut-wrenching, but they are only a taste of what is to come. In “Helicopter Mother,” “Not-So-Ordinary Moments,” and “What’s an NT Dad Supposed to Do?” you meet NTs and Aspies in the context of their lives—as they live them. There is no analysis, just raw emotional experience.

By the second part of the book you have a feel for the ride. You think that nothing will surprise you, but you secretly hope there is more—and there is. Be prepared to shed your preconceived notions as I introduce you to the science behind these troubling relationships. Because I believe that knowledge is power, I spend three chapters delivering the state of the art theories on Asperger Syndrome. After reading the chapters, “Empathy Imbalance,” “Out of Brain - Out of Mind,” and “The Rules of Engagement,” your entire view of these AS/NT relationships will have changed.

With this new perspective you will have a way to experience the next four chapters with more wisdom. Instead of just responding emotionally to dramatic anecdotes, you can read between the lines. You will find yourself generating solutions for the people in these and following chapters, because you now have the tools. Be prepared to take notes.

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While reading "Hapa Aspie," "Bullied or Bully," "Are You Invisible?" and "Can You Teach Love?" you ride the roller coaster toward the end of the book. You're filled with satisfaction and hope for change in your AS/NT parenting partnership.

Like any exciting roller coaster ride there is a little surprise at the end. In the fourth part of the book, I decided on more than the traditional summary and conclusion. I provide a chapter with some specific parenting techniques to help you implement the changes you want and need to make. Consider the chapter, "The Power of Intention," as a short version of the parenting manual you wish you'd had when you started your AS/NT family journey.

Part One

Chapter One, "Helicopter Mother." Without hesitation I plunge the reader into my world, the world of being an NT mother of an AS child. I'm not just a psychologist who has professional expertise on the subject of parenting with a partner who has Asperger Syndrome. I parented an Aspie child, and that has changed my life profoundly. Can you imagine what it is like for a psychologist to be clueless about AS when she discovers it in her own family? I had my master's degree in social work and my doctoral degree in psychology long before the AS diagnosis became official in the United States. My daughter was born eight years before anyone could have diagnosed her with Asperger Syndrome. By the time Bianca was officially diagnosed, at age 14, I had been a helicopter mother for years. In this chapter you will learn if you are a helicopter mother (or helicopter father) and what can you do about it.

Chapter Two, "Not-So-Ordinary Moments." While "Helicopter Mother" is an intense and painful exploration of how one AS child and one NT mother learn about each other, this chapter is about all the small stuff that creates emotional knots in AS/NT families. When

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you live with Aspies, it is the seemingly ordinary things that grind life to a halt. Ordinary things, such as getting enough sleep; or asking your spouse to pick up a child from soccer practice; or having a little family chitchat at the dining table. When co-parenting with an Aspie, these kinds of things can strain relationships and quickly turn into not-so-ordinary moments. Nothing you say or do works. Interaction over the simplest of things can turn unnerving and tense. And that can leave you too drained to engage fully in life.

I reintroduce you to Helen, Grant and their children, who were in my first book, *Going Over the Edge?* Helen learns how to build in stress relief for these “not-so-ordinary moments.” Follow this and other families as well as mine while you learn to take back your life and create a healthier parenting style.

Chapter Three, “What’s an NT Dad Supposed to Do?” When the NT parent is the dad, the parenting paradigm shifts to another dimension. These fathers, like their female NT counterparts, long for affection and meaningful communication with their Aspie spouse. As with NT moms, NT dads are startled by the inability of their AS spouse to nurture their children. Often these men are in the dark as to what is going on, because they are dealing with an undiagnosed spouse. (Aspie women are vastly under-diagnosed.) But their reaction is the same as that of many an NT mom. The NT dads are angry and hurt. They see their wives as neglectful of and abusive to their children. It feels much worse for the dads since they expect women to be the more nurturing parent. This chapter takes a look at how to resolve the gender-specific problems of being an NT dad married to an Aspie mom.

Part Two

Chapter Four, “Empathy Imbalance.” In the first three chapters you were introduced to the personal experiences of some parents struggling within an AS/NT family.

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Starting with this chapter on Adam Smith's "Empathy = Imbalance Hypothesis" of autism,³ the next three chapters diverge from anecdotal reports. They provide you with a theoretical foundation. Empathy has long been a controversial subject in the field of AS/NT relationships. Not only is it tough for Aspies to ascertain the minds of others and to empathize, but they frequently struggle to understand their own inner workings. Smith's research takes Baron-Cohen's "theory of mind" a step further. Through the "Empathy Imbalance Hypothesis" of autism we come to understand why so many Aspies seem to be deeply moved by life experiences and yet are unable to relate well to others.

Chapter Five, "Out of Brain - Out of Mind." Slowly Helen and NTs like her are coming to understand how their Asperger Syndrome loved ones think. But Helen also wants to know WHY her Aspies act the way they do. NTs repeatedly ask, "Why can't she SEE what I am saying?" Or they ask, "Why can't he CONNECT with my feelings?" It is not hard to see the pattern in these "why" questions. NTs repeatedly try to bring together a mutually satisfying solution. It's the one-sided, unempathic model their Aspie loved one prefers that gets in the way.

Helen got some answers to her questions when she learned about Smith's "Empathy Imbalance Hypothesis," described in Chapter Four, but she still wants to know WHY she and her AS spouse can't connect. In this chapter you are introduced to the latest neuroscience research discussed in Baron-Cohen's exciting new book, *The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Evil*.⁴ He describes a more complex spectrum of inter-connecting empathy

³ Smith, Adam. "The Empathy Imbalance Hypothesis of Autism: A Theoretical Approach to Cognitive and Emotional Empathy in Autistic Development," *Psychological Record* (2009), 489-510.

⁴ Baron-Cohen, Simon. (2011). *The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Evil*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

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circuits. Through the lives of the people in this chapter—Adrienne and Stefan, Jeremy and Lorri-Jane, Joe and Katrina, Marilyn and Eddie, and Marvin—you learn why Aspies struggle with empathy and connection.

Chapter Six, “The Rules of Engagement.” In this third chapter on theory, I introduce the reader to *context blindness*⁵ because it is important to first understand the parts of the mind/brain that are integral to how the mind creates meaning from context. Concepts proposed by Smith and Baron-Cohen are: cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, theory of mind, the spectrum of empathy, empathy circuits, and zero degrees of empathy. All are part of the holographic array of empathy systems that help us to create meaning from context. It is the skillful use of context that can make or break a relationship. Those who have social radar create *true empathy*. Those with empathy disorders create chaotic and sometimes destructive meaning from the context.

Celebrated family therapist Virginia Satir (a pioneer in the development of family therapy) describes parenting as “people making.”⁶ This brings me to one more theory that I describe in this chapter, Dialectical Psychology.⁷ It wraps all of the other theories together into a cohesive context of why people-making, or parenting, is so important to a child’s development. Please don’t worry about the academic sound of all this. My goal is to help you use these theories in a practical way with your Aspie loved ones. Thus I have liberally sprinkled the chapter with examples from real life. I suggest one way to accommodate the problem of *context blindness* is to teach the Rules of Engagement, a template for how to relate without *true empathy*.

⁵ Vermeulen, Peter. (2009). *Autism as Context Blindness*. Translated from the Dutch, *Autisme als contextblindheid*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

⁶ Satir, Virginia (1972). *People Making*. Out of print.

⁷ Riegel, Klaus. (1979). *Foundations of Dialectical Psychology*. New York: Academic Press.

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Part Three

Chapter Seven, “Hapa Aspie.” Parenting children in a home with an Aspie parent is very complex, particularly if you have both Aspie and NT children. In the first three chapters, I described the chaos of these families, and the ensuing distress that NTs feel in this environment. In the second three chapters I outlined theories to help you better understand why Aspies do what they do. I demonstrated how to change the negative outcome by using the Rules of Engagement. In the next four chapters, I delve into answering specific questions about how to resolve more complex and unique parenting problems. We do need more than the Rules of Engagement to address these problems.

When interacting with a context-blind Aspie partner, the context-sensitive NT spouse has to switch back and forth between the worlds of his or her Aspie partner, Aspie children and NT children. NT children also need to keep switching. Their world is a very confusing mix. At school or with friends, they can engage in NT dialogue and reasoning that reinforces their perception of reality. But at home, they get mixed signals. As hard as it is for adults to maneuver the unusual world of Aspie/NT family life, consider how hard this is for NT children. In Chapter Seven, I discuss how NT children respond to these mixed signals. Often they develop an odd mixture of NT and AS traits that I call, “Hapa Aspie.” It’s a term I derived from the Hawaiian slang word, “hapa,” meaning half. In this chapter, you learn how two Hapa Aspies, (Helen’s son, Jason, and I) work to keep our self esteem intact.

Chapter Eight, “Bullied or Bully.” Many parents of AS children have grieved over the bullying their child receives at the hands of other children. In fact, many AS adults tell me that it took them decades to heal from this type of abuse and develop a modicum of self-respect. Think about the child who is a daily target on the playground. Children can be cruel. But there is another side to the bullying that is often overlooked unless you observe

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Practical Steps to Saving You and Your Family”**

By Kathy J. Marshack, Ph.D.

an AS/NT family. Those with AS engage in bullying, too. It is often directed only at those in their home; hence when NT adults or children complain about abuse in their home, they often are not believed. Until empathy disorders, the symptoms of mind blindness, context blindness and zero degrees of empathy are understood, it is very difficult for outsiders to comprehend the chaos and abuse of which Aspies are capable. In this chapter we see how the Rules of Engagement can be applied to help Aspies regulate their emotional outbursts.

Chapter Nine, “Are You Invisible?” One very striking result of growing up Hapa Aspie is to develop a sense of psychological invisibility. I have heard many NT partners complain of this phenomenon, too. What they mean by invisibility is that they feel ignored, unappreciated, and unloved. That’s because their context-blind Aspie family members are so poor at empathic reciprocity. As we have learned, we come to know ourselves in relation to others. This doesn’t just apply when children are developing self-esteem. Throughout our lifespan, we continue to weave and re-weave the context of our lives, based on the interactions we have with our friends, coworkers, neighbors and loved ones.

This is why it is so important for an NT parent/partner to get feedback from their spouse. A smile, a hug, a kind word, a note of encouragement: These are messages that reinforce the NT’s self-esteem and contribute to a healthy reciprocity in the relationship. Without these daily reminders from their loved ones, NTs can develop some odd defense mechanisms. One is to become psychologically invisible to others and even to themselves. In this chapter, the NT spouse learns how to take back his or her life and stop being invisible to others. This knowledge may help you help your children avoid feeling invisible, too.

Chapter Ten, “Can You Teach Love?” This question from Helen brings up the most important element in parenting—the art of loving your child, so that he or she grows up confident with a strong sense of self. But what does Helen do when her AS daughter,
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Jasmine, tells her mother that she isn't sure what love is? In this chapter you learn that a basic human experience, such as giving and receiving love, is not so easy when raising children in AS/NT families. Love is more than feeling it (i.e. emotional empathy). Love is more than talking about it (i.e. cognitive empathy). Love is more than systemizing a moral code to live by (as many Aspies do to compensate for their empathy disorder). Love is more than practicing the Rules of Engagement (although politeness helps).

The answer to Helen's question is worth exploring in a real and deep and heartfelt way. In this chapter, we move beyond the theories and science of empathy and social learning to see how Helen, Vivian and Todd, Anne Marie and Tony work through the dilemmas of teaching and experiencing love with their children and each other. This is the most profound work a parent can do.

Part Four

Chapter Eleven, "The Power of Intention." In Chapter Six, I introduced you to the rules of engagement where Dialectical Psychology was the foundation. In this chapter, I help you understand how to expand these rules in order to understand the intent of your AS/NT parenting partner. I show you how to express your good intentions in creative and healthy ways. These examples are not meant to be an exhaustive parenting manual. Rather, they demonstrate the power of intention. You'll see that when your intent comes from a loving heart and an open mind, communicating transcends verbal interaction. The verbal part is where so many AS/NT couples get locked down.

Chapter Twelve, "Conclusion: A New Agenda." Too many AS/NT couples and families struggle to the point of the family falling apart, because they have no help to

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unravel the mystery of the strange dialectic of Asperger/neurotypical relationships. By this last chapter, I hope you’ve learned that you are not alone, and that there is hope.

I hope that your ride on the roller coaster of *Out of Mind - Out of Sight* stirs up more than grief over the lost years with your loved ones. I hope that you are inspired to create a new agenda for parenting with your AS spouse/partner. I hope this agenda includes being true to yourself, speaking out about what you believe in, and protecting yourself and your children from abuse. Most of all, I hope your new agenda helps you find creative ways to express loving intentions no matter what the level of context blindness in your family.

Now enough standing in line! It’s time to climb aboard the roller coaster and see where the ride takes us. I know the ride will be thrilling. I also hope you find it inspirational.

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