

Self-Advocacy in the Neuroexceptional Relationship

Understanding Each Other's World

A Discussion Led by

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and
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- 1. What is a Neuroexceptional Couple, and what challenges does this bring?**
- 2. What does it mean to be Neuroexceptional?**
- 3. Examples of Topics that are Concerns of the Neuroexceptional Couple**
- 4. How can the Neuroexceptional Partner Self-Advocate while also respecting the needs of both partners?**

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What is a Neuroexceptional Couple, and what challenges does this bring?

- One or both partners *not* neurotypical
- Typically, a heterosexual couple; woman = neurotypical, man = Asperger's
 - clinical diagnosis
 - self-diagnosis
 - wife-diagnosis
- Sometimes, both are autistic; some are same-gender relationships
- Neurotypical partner = “spouse”
- Spouse alienated and lonely; disconnected, socially isolated
- Communication often difficult; frequent misunderstandings
- Neuroexceptional partner; mood swings, meltdowns, pessimism, paranoia, defensiveness, rigidity; overblown sense of correctness; need for perfection
- Spouse often experiences a lack of empathy from their partner, who has difficulty experiencing or expressing emotions (called *alexithymia*)

What does it mean to be Neuroexceptional?

- Two types of brains
 - (1) Typical (**neurotypical**)
 - (2) Atypical (**neuroexceptional**) including but not limited to:
 - Autism
 - Dyslexia
 - Severe Depression
 - Bipolar
 - Schizophrenia
- Communication between Neurotypical & Neuroexceptional people = "Ships passing in the night..."
- Differences include
 - Literal thinking
 - Social cognition: awareness, comfort, involvement
 - Sensory integration
 - Cognitive styles (language versus concepts) and pattern recognition
 - Speed of processing (e.g. auditory processing, working memory)
- *Caveat!* Not universal, dangerous to overgeneralize

How can the Neuroexceptional Partner Self-Advocate while also respecting the needs of both partners?

- **Prerequisites:**
 - Self-awareness (“Know Yourself”)
 - Self-acceptance
 - Desire for pragmatic change

- **Mindfulness**

- **Mirroring**

- **Meditation**

- **Emotional Regulation**

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy** and other neurally-inspired therapeutic approaches that address conscious behavioral adaptations.

- **Support Groups – sponsored by AANE and Community Resources**
 - **Easthampton** (Western Mass, Connecticut, New York) Contact **Trish Huff**: trishaane@comcast.net or 413-219-3464
 - **Watertown** (Greater Boston Area) Contact **Eva Mendes** or **Grace Myhill, LICSW**: gmyhill@gmail.com www.gmyhill.com 617-504-3116

Examples of Topics that are Concerns of the Neuroexceptional Couple

- Social/Family Interaction
- Not feeling connected (Spouse); How to Connect (Partner)
- What can and should be changed? And what must simply be accepted?
 - Eye Contact
 - Sensory Overload
 - Monologuing
- Improving pragmatic communication?
- Sharing emotional experiences (in both directions)
 - Receptive Empathy
 - Expressive Empathy
- Balancing mutual versus individual activities
- What hope is there for change in the neuroexceptional person?
 - Neuroplasticity

Bonus Trivia Quiz: Who Was This Person?

"I am slow to learn and slow to forget that which I have learned. My mind is like a piece of steel; very hard to scratch anything on it and almost impossible after you get it there to rub it out."

"...possessed extraordinary empathy - the gift or curse of putting himself in the place of another, to experience what they were feeling, to understand their motives and desires."

"Although a profound analyzer of the laws of human nature he could form no just construction of the motives of the particular individual."

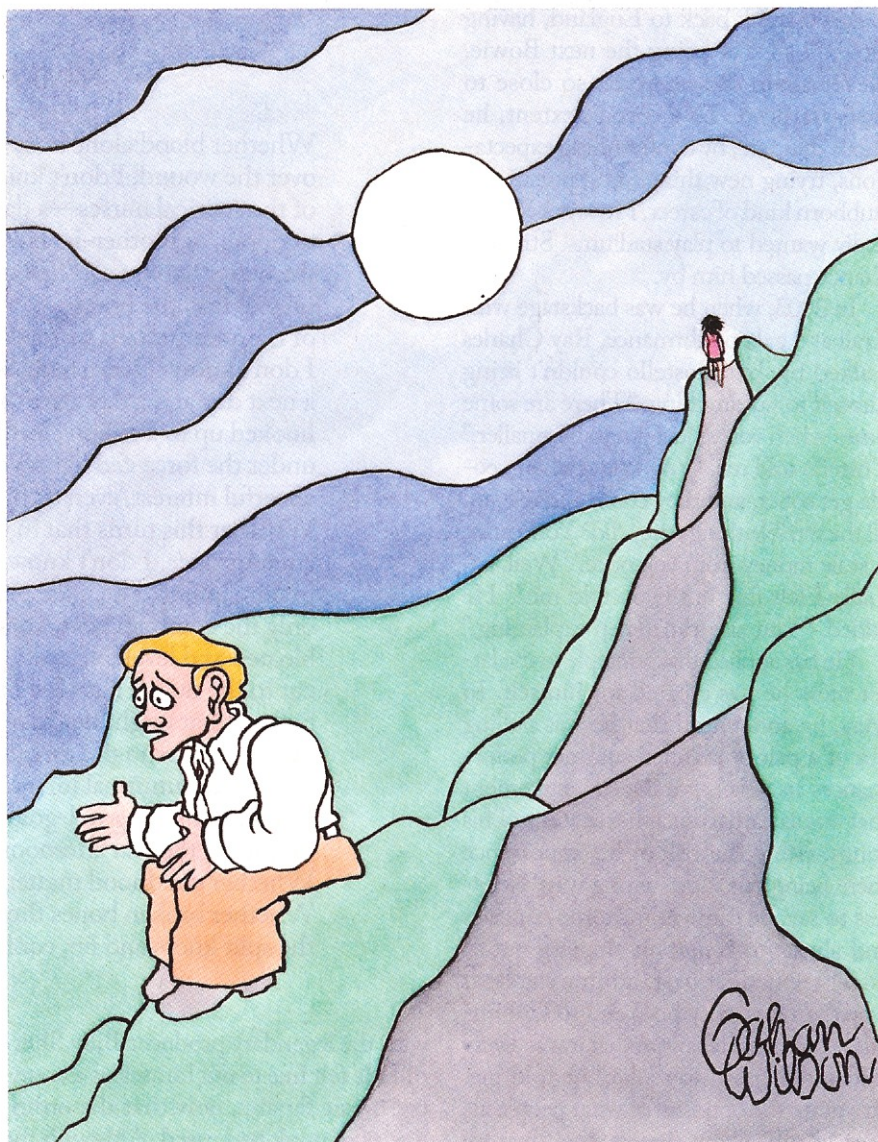
"He could not distinguish between the paleness of anger and the crimson tint of modesty. In determining what each play of the features indicated he was pitiably weak."



"Boy, I hope we never end up like this."



"I'm tired of talking about me. Why don't you talk about me for awhile."



"But that's enough about my problems."

• •





"For one million dollars, what have I been talking about for the past ten minutes: the upcoming election, my mother, my job, or an article in the Home section about kitchen makeovers?"



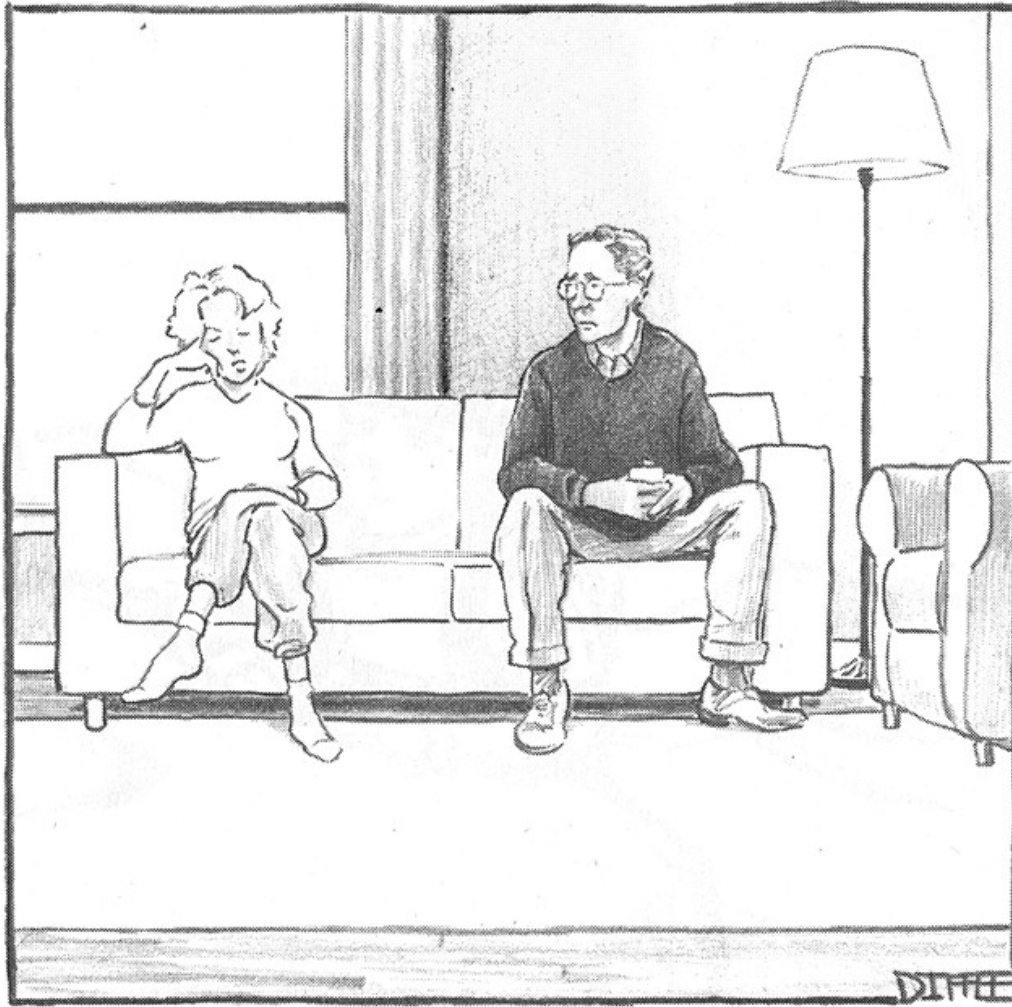
Victoria Roberts

*"O.K., I'll just buy what I want,
if you tell me what that is."*

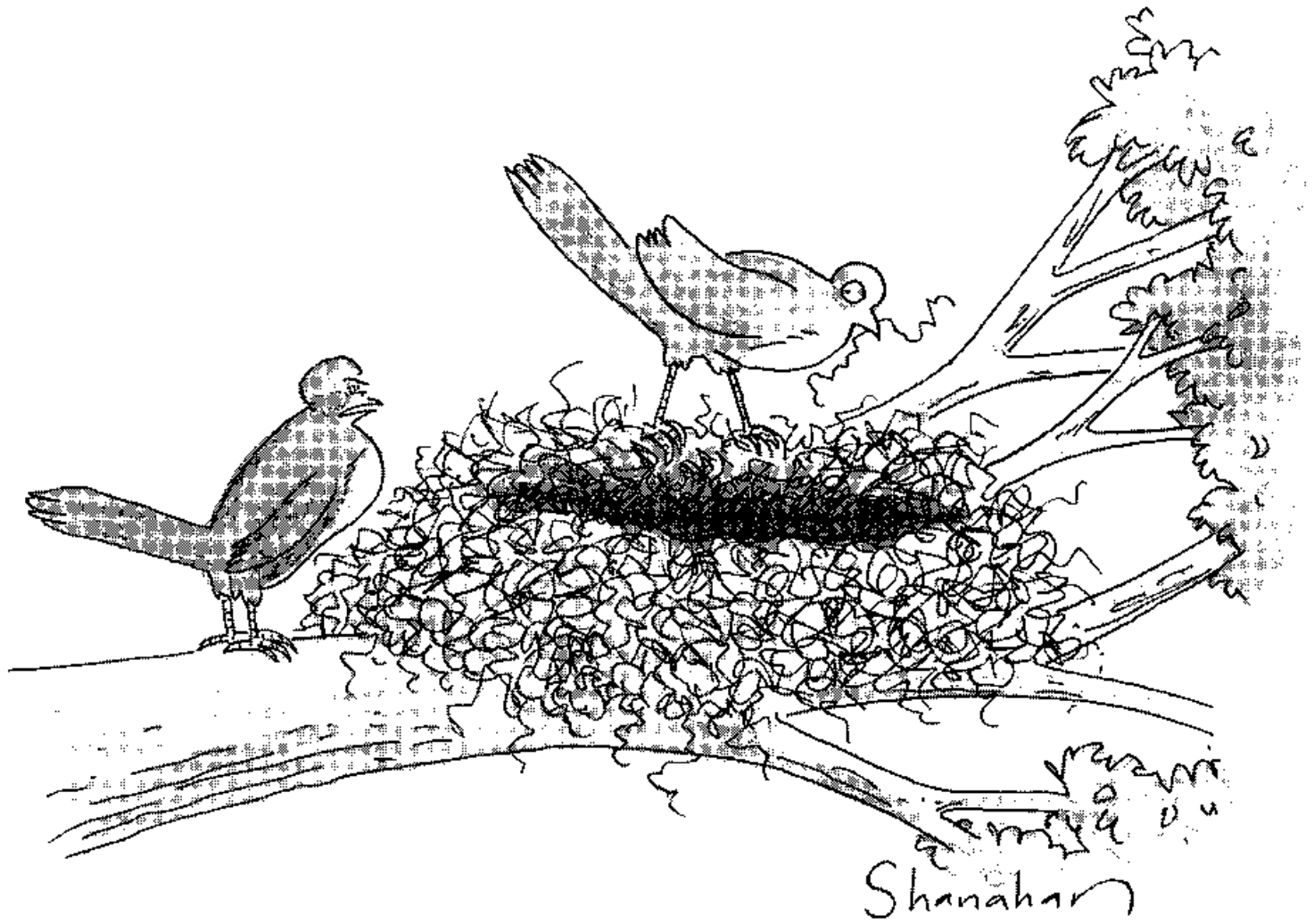


"I take the fun out of everything. What do you do?"

• •



*"It's like you haven't heard a
single thing I've thought."*



"You're not going to put that there, are you?"



“Any healthy relationship requires fundamental acting skills.”

• •



malin

“Hey—what do you say we get out of here and go back to our own places?”



"I finally feel I can accept the things I'm too lazy to change."

• •

Everyone is a
genius. But if you
judge a fish on its
ability to climb a
tree, it will live its
whole life believing
that it is stupid.

- A Einstein



