

# The Changing Face Of Autism

By Dr. Wendy Lawson MAPS

2010

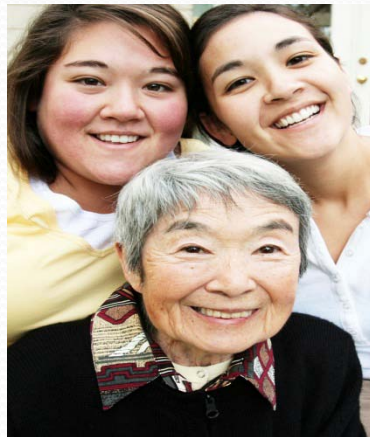
# What to expect from this talk

- An explanation of what being AS means
- The definition of social demand?
- Ideas that might help in situations of social demand

# This is what AS looks like

- Someone who is single minded
- Someone who is good with things that interest them
- Someone who prefers structure, routine and knowing what to expect, rather than surprises.
- Someone who might not like change.

# So, AS might look like?



# you or me!

- The difference between Typical and AS is the way our brains are configured
- Typical 's have a differently connected sensory, attention and interest system to AS, leading to a particular sensory-motor loop that includes social interaction as part of their default setting.

# Can we see this difference?

- Yes, but only in behaviour not in physical appearance or character.
- The main difference is in how we cope with social demand.
- This might be demand to join a conversation, answer a question, respond to an invitation or make a choice.

# Typicals & social demand

- It seems so normal to join in conversation; choose what you would like to order, eat, drink or where you want to go.
- Even giving up what you would like, to accommodate another is seen as being sociable, amiable, polite and appropriate.

# Appropriate for who?

- It's taken for granted that what seems appropriate generally (typically) is a 'given' and all should understand this.
- However, AS culture & Typical culture are different. This will apply to all kinds of social expectation and social demand.

# Therefore,

- What might seem appropriate typically might not be seen as appropriate by Aspie or autie individuals.
- This makes it difficult to relate to one another. But, it is not impossible!



# What do we need to do?

- We need to understand & accept our differences.
- We need to find a vehicle that we all can use to drive communication and bring us together so that social interaction isn't painful and difficult.



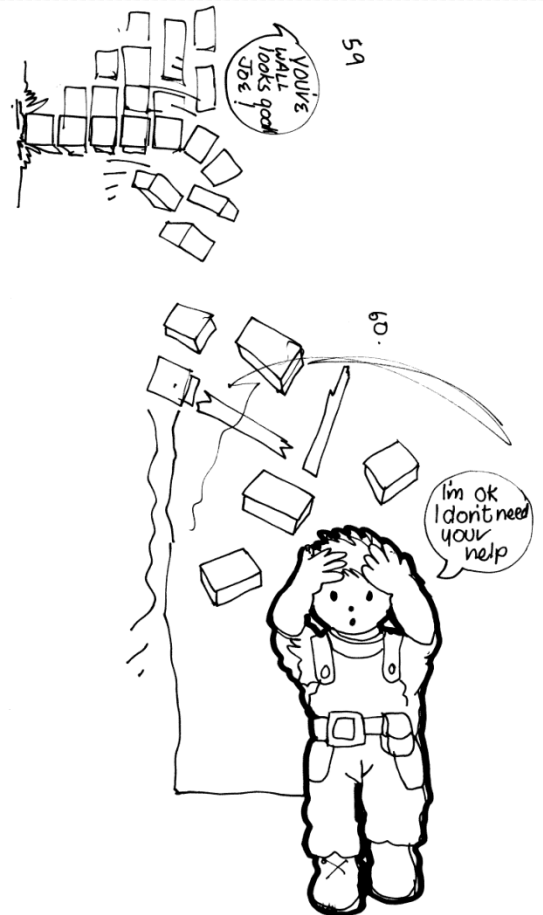
# What might that vehicle be?

Something not  
overwhelming.

Something I  
enjoy....

Something we  
can share  
together....

Something  
leading to  
success....



# Social success or social disaster?

- I need to succeed in small things or I won't try anything else.
- Typical individuals are able to divide attention and have lots of different interests.
- Those of us with AS are very good at single attention and single interest but not good at dividing our attention or at having lots of interests at the same time.

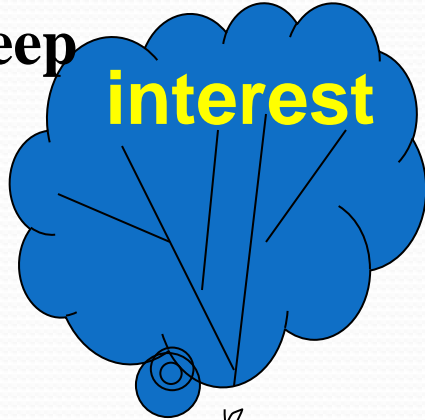
# Interest: common denominator

- Join AS interest and we are more likely to join yours.
- This is the vehicle that drives us toward understanding.
- This is how we communicate ... We don't have a brain that can easily switch attention so we may not notice the things you want us to.

# Why should I have to join you?

- Because it's the vehicle that enables transport of understanding between us.
- The AS Diff-Ability lies in this difference between us.
- I'm not designed to multi-task , outside areas of interest and attention.
- I'm an Aspie or an autie not a typical like you.

**ASD  
(attention)  
Narrow and  
Deep**



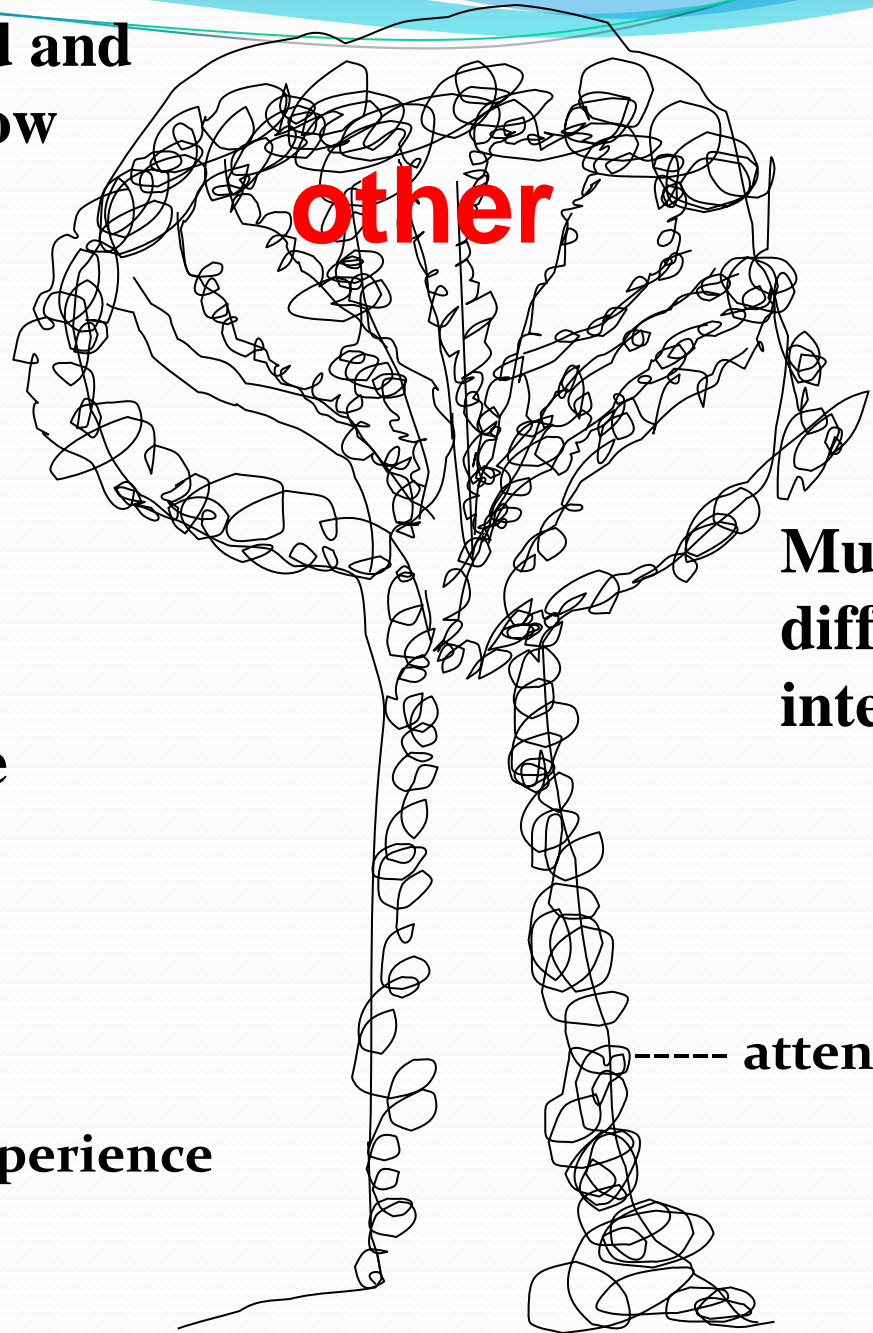
**interest**

**Highly  
focused  
Interests  
take  
precedence**

-----attention

**Tree of Life Experience**

**NT (attention)  
broad and  
shallow**

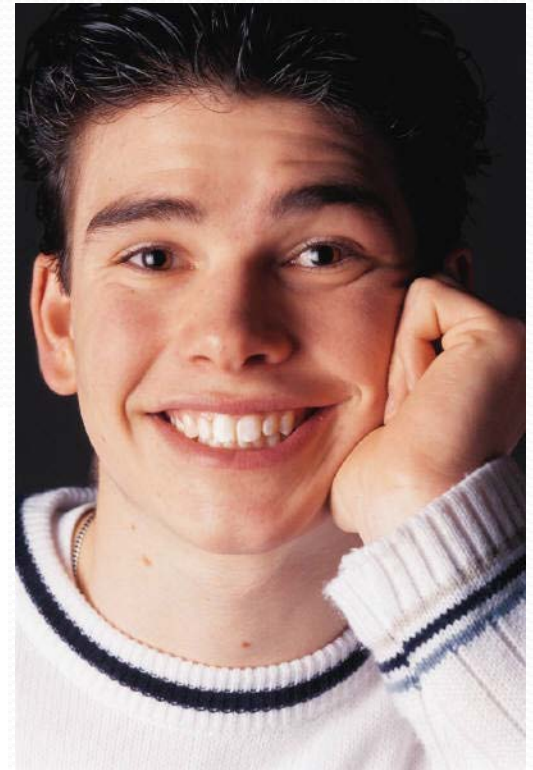
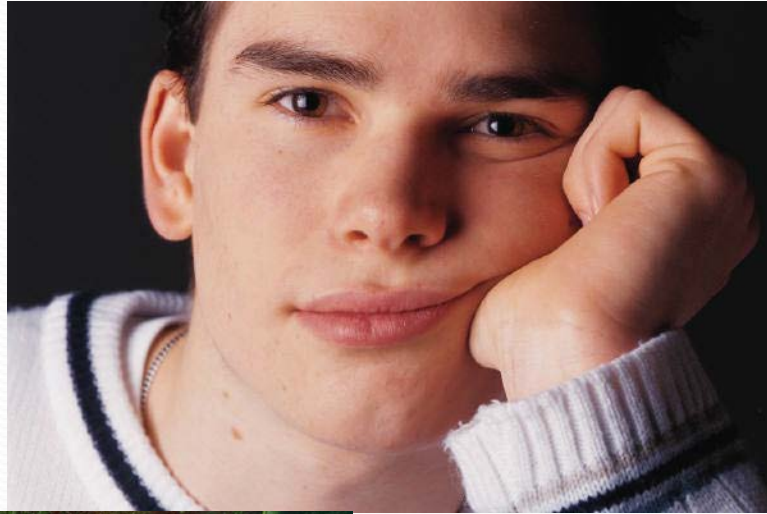


**other**

**Multiple  
diffuse  
interests**

-----attention

# Senses Inform Attention & Interest

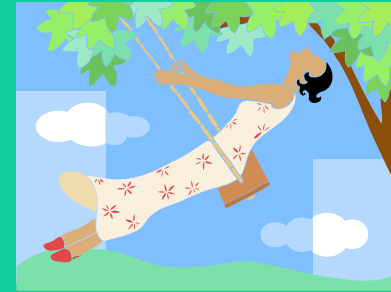


# Sensory Environment

- If an AS individual has sensory issues (hypo or hyper) they are not 'available' to listen.
- The sensory environment helps or hinders social interaction
- Addressing sensory needs are essential; ignoring them or hoping they will 'disappear' with time is not an option.
- Every AS individual deserves a sensory environment that does not cause them pain or discomfort.

# Typical Conversation

- Small talk
- Gossip
- Metaphor
- Dishonesty
- Body language
- Joking
- Teasing
- Masking
- Multi-interests
- Multi-task
- Multi-meaning



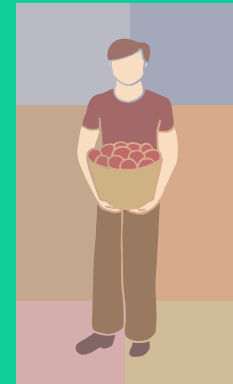
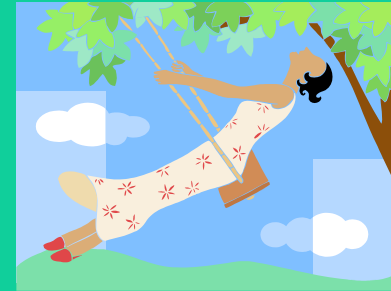
# AS Conversation

- No small talk
- Straight talk
- No interest in gossip
- Mean what we say and say what we mean.

Might not use

‘body language’

No interest = no attention



# ACCEPTANCE (Rights)

- Being accepted for who I am is the very best thing and sends me a message that I am valued.
- Part of that acceptance is understanding that I have interests that take over my attention.
- Using those interests constructively keeps me motivated and gives me a starting place to learn how to share with others in our every day lives.

# Recognising strengths

- Profiling and observation; great ways to recognise strengths.
- Often strengths come from interests. Interests don't have to be a distraction. They might be an asset.
- Highlighting my difficulties & all I cannot do might not be constructive.
- I don't need others to focus on these, as much as I need them to focus upon my strengths.

# Valuing my disability/diffability

- **Appreciate strengths and use them to assist me in learning about life.**
- **E.g. Some individuals are good with maps. Mapping can help us plan, de-stress & predict.**
- **Some are good with numbers; counting, ordering, calendars, dates and figures; these might help build a structure that we hang can our day on.**

# Practical application

- Integrate interests into daily communication
- Allow individuals to teach interests to others
- Use interest to navigate unfamiliar or difficult concepts
- Use interest to help communicate through challenging moments... I might need space, ICT, TV, time, favored object or things written down, text or emailed rather than spoken.

# The tool of Technology

- **Environment: including other people**  
**Structured,**  
**predictable,**  
**stimuli-reduced**  
**Maximise the individual's control of**  
**controllable things and some of**  
**those that are not.**
- **Is in keeping with the way the rest of**  
**the world is going, so, it's**  
**fashionable!**

# Common interest - Shared fun

- Around the computer



# Developing in confidence and skill

- Through the medium of technology:
- Turn taking – games/ TV shows
- Listening
- Observing
- Sharing
- Valuing
- Appreciation of self and of other

# Developing confidence

- **If we feel confident and valued we are less likely to need to be stubborn, difficult and unfriendly.**
- **Social understanding needs to be the base for all social skill.... Social understanding will only develop as individuals make connections.**
- **We make connections via interest**

# Communication

- **ICT; Video games; Own picture book, story boards, augmented communication systems like PECS (Picture Exchange Communication Systems), sign language or Makaton, keyboards etc.**
- **If individual does not have the CONCEPT (symbol or picture) for an object or event, how is s/he expected to understand it?**

# Summary

- Awareness (YOURS AND OURS)
- What messages am I getting?
- Respect for achievement
- Reducing sensory overload
- As NT's being aware of own 'triad'
- Using my interest to set achievable goals
- Maintain understanding of each other's worlds
- Mutual respect

# The Future

Life on earth is but a moment caught within  
the crease of time,

The seasons come and go again,  
You have your life, and I have mine.  
The seed that's planted within the ground  
Cannot choose what to become.  
A potato, an apple or a rose for some.  
However, for it to be the very best,  
It needs rich soil, not poor.  
The sun and the rains must come,  
To open that seeds door.

# The Future

I may be born to nourish others,  
I may delight the senses.  
I may grow tall,  
I may grow small,  
I may stay stunted beneath wire fences.

My future may not depend on my stock,  
So much as it does upon sources.  
Sources of warmth, sources of care  
I depend on the nurture to be for me  
there.

# The Future

**Then I can blossom and sing with the birds,**

**Then I can grow my potential.**

**So plant me in goodness and all that is fine,**

**Please keep the intruders away.**

**Give me a chance to develop, in time,**

**To become who I am, in life's future, one  
day!**

## Resources

**Web pages: [www.mugsy.org/wendy](http://www.mugsy.org/wendy)**

- [www.autismandcomputing.com](http://www.autismandcomputing.com)
- [www.autistics.org](http://www.autistics.org)
- **Getting The Truth Out**
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc> (In my language)
- [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (Posautive)
- **Wendy's BOOKS & other resources:**
- **National or local Autism Support Group**