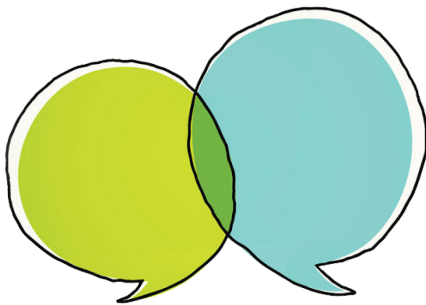




## TREAT

### Skill-Building Tools for Enhancing Emotional Connection



Q-AAA: Question • Answer • Answer • Answer  
(Switch, Repeat)

© Grace Myhill, MSW

### Question-Answer-Answer-Answer (Q-AAA)

#### Connecting with a Partner through a Structured Conversation

Many neurodiverse couples don't have reciprocal conversations with each other due to their different communications styles and different expectations of what communication is for. Developed by Grace Myhill, MSW, Q-AAA will help both partners build the skill of dialoguing with each other to build a connection with each other.

*Here's how to use Q-AAA with your couple:*

One partner asks a question to the other partner. The other partner answers in 3 sentences, no more and no less, and then asks a question back. Repeat this step for 5 rounds, taking turns.

Practice the Q-AAA exercise with the couple in your office first to make sure they both understand not only the purpose of Q-AAA, but how to effectively use it with each couple and their particular issues.

(You may have noticed how, even without asking them to, the couple will more often than not face each other and look at each other to execute Q-AAA.)

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By using this structure that requires exactly 3 sentences for the answer, it helps those who usually give no answer, or a one-word answer, the chance to say more, so that the conversation keeps going.

It also helps those who talk at length the chance to say less so that they can keep their partner's attention. The structure of taking turns gets both partners equally asking questions of each other. This helps those who don't usually ask questions the chance to show their interest in their partner and their partner's life, thoughts, or feelings.

*Benefits of having this kind of back and forth reciprocal dialogue include:*

- Couples can keep the pace of their communication slowed down, which can help keep arguments from escalating.
- It ensures that both partners' ideas will be heard, which is helpful for problem-solving together.
- Speaking this way, even for a few minutes each day, can feel connecting for both partners.

# COUPLE CODES

## Couples Codes (Verbal or Nonverbal)

### Building a Common Language through Codes and Silent Gestures

Help the couple come up with either a word, a phrase, gesture, touch, or an object to use to signal a lot of information instantly. The idea is that using the code reminds the couple that something different from their usual pattern needs to happen and that this is to improve their relationship.

Because the couple came up with the word together, this puts them on the “same team” against the issue, instead of the partners feeling like they are fighting against each other. The code can bring the couple back to the moment when they made up the code, and that will remind them not only of the meaning of the code but also of their good intentions and motivations to work on their relationship.

## Three Sentence Formula

### Don't Blame or Accuse Your Partner

In any intimate relationship, it is important to be able to give each other feedback without making one's partner feel blamed and attacked by saying “You did... ” or “You are ...”

To avoid sounding critical, state three neutral, non-blaming sentences: 1. Describe the current situation 2. Describe the desired situation, 3. Share why you are asking for the change.

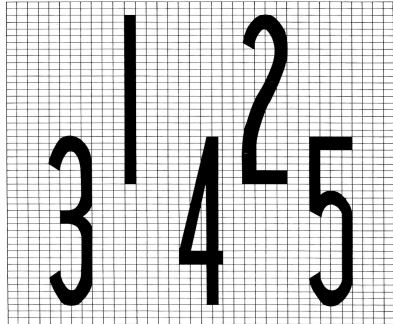
*Here is an example:*

1. “We don't greet each other when we first see each other at the end of the day.”
2. “Let's find each other in the house and say hello and give each other a hug instead.”
3. “This would make me feel acknowledged and more cared about.”

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### 1 - 5 SCALE

#### Communicate About Anger or Other Emotions

#### Ask for Adjustments for Volume, Tone, and Touch

Partners with an Asperger profile often have difficulty identifying and talking about their feelings. Using the 1 - 5 scale provides couples a common language to facilitate this.

For example:

"On a scale of 1 - 5, with 1 being the most positive and 5 being the most negative, where are you?" "I am a 2." "Ok, let's talk."

"I am a 4 right now." "Ok, take some time to yourself and we can talk later instead."

When people get excited or upset, they tend to get louder without even realizing it. This is especially true for partners with an Asperger profile, though some partners with an Asperger profile get very quiet. Either way can be difficult for the partner, and a simple acknowledgment and adjustment can keep their communication productive.

Help the couple create a 5 point scale for decibel level. Have them agree on the volume of a 1, a 2, a 3, a 4, and a 5, the loudest. Have them each practice so they experience both how to give the feedback neutrally and also have the experience making the adjustment.

This same idea can be used for touch, tone or even word choice.

*Here are some examples:*

"That volume was a 5. I need a 3 instead."

"That touch was a 1. Please do a 3 instead."

"That tone was a 4. Please say it as a 1."

"That choice of words was a 5. Please say it as a 2."

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#### Understanding Each Other's Perspective (Theory Of Mind)

Difficulty with perspective taking, also referred to as lack of theory of mind, is a common Asperger trait and a major contributor to issues for neurodiverse couples. Partners with an Asperger profile often don't realize that there is another perspective. They tend to think that others think the way they do, so it is foreign to them to think that there can be a way of thinking about something differently from the way they do, and that it can be equally "right" or valued.

Often partners with an Asperger profile will have a paradigm shift when they realize that there can be 2 perspectives. There are different ways of getting this concept across, and depending on if the partner with an Asperger profile is a visual thinker or more mathematical, artistic, literary, or literal, try to first get them to understand the general concept of 2 perspectives that are both right.

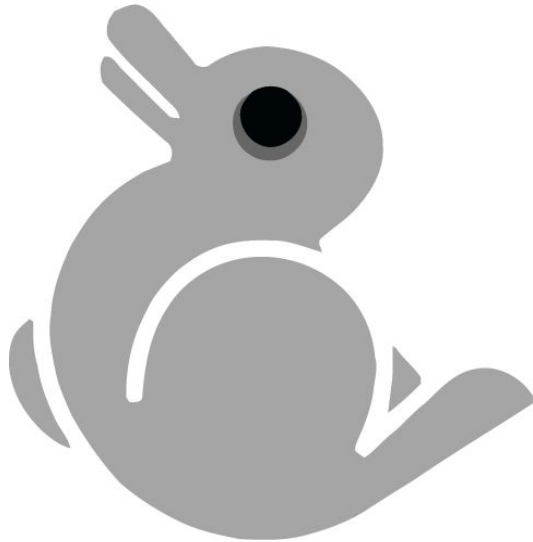
The following tools can be used to first teach and then to remind your couples that there are times when they each need to acknowledge that their partner may be seeing something a different way than they are, and they may also be right.

For many neurodiverse couples, each partner is seeing something differently than the other. Both are right, but from their vantage point, what they see is different.

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#### Seeing That Your Partner Has Their Own Valid Perspective

#### Perspective-taking: BUNNY OR DUCK

*What to Do:*

Show your couple an image of the duck/bunny illustration.

Ask each of them which animal they see first.

Ask if they both see that there are actually two animals there, both a duck and a bunny.

Share with them that most people see one animal first. This animal, i.e. this perspective, is always the one that is going to be easier for them to see.

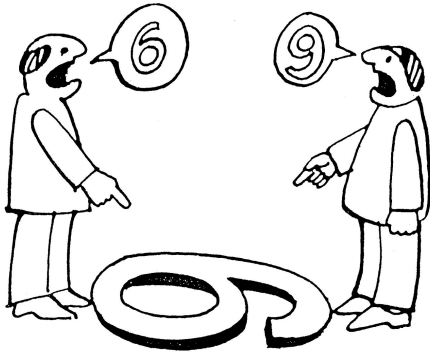
But by focusing on trying to see the other animal, it is possible to see it, i.e. seeing and then understanding that their partner has a different, but valid, way of seeing things.

This is similar to how someone in a relationship can work on seeing their partner's perspective: It may not be apparent at first, but if you want to see it, and if you put your focus on seeing it, you can see it. Just like in this image in which the duck and the bunny are both always there, two perspectives are always in your relationship, too, and both are equally valid.

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### Perspective-taking: 6 OR 9

This tool is to show each partner that what may be obvious and clear to them, i.e., a 6, may be equally and obvious but different to their partner, a 9, because they are each viewing the situation from a different vantage point. Simply showing a couple this graphic, or a 6 or 9 and asking them what they see, and then asking what their partner sees, can build awareness of another perspective.

### Perspective-taking: One Pizza vs. Slices of Pie For Logical, Concrete Thinkers

This is a good tool if the partner with an Asperger profile is a logical, literal, concrete, math-oriented person.

Ask if  $1 + 1$  can ever equal anything besides 2.

Tell your client that you will show that  $1 + 1$  can equal 7, if viewed from a different perspective.

Draw a picture of a rectangle and a large circle and ask how many items there are.

Then divide the circle into 6 sections.

Label the rectangle *napkin* and the circle *6 slices of pizza*.

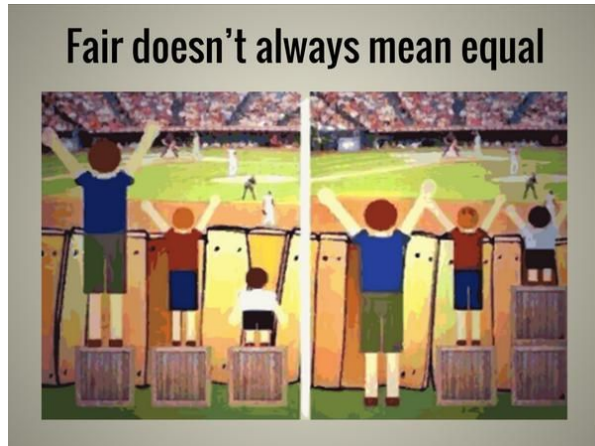
Ask the client, "Now how many items are there?"

If they resist seeing this as 7 items, remind them that the idea is not to prove this wrong and ask them if they could see how someone else might possibly see this as 7 items.

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### Perspective-taking: **FAIR NOT EQUAL**

For Rigid or Literal Thinkers

Fairness and equality are two concepts that can cause issues with neurodiverse couples. Many partners with an Asperger profile are particularly sensitive to feeling that things are not fair, especially if they have rigid all or nothing thinking that makes it hard to see that they are not "always being blamed" or "always being asked to apologize". If they are literal, they may

feel that something isn't equal if all aspects are not cut down the line 50/50.

Help them understand that in some situations, fair is not the same as equal, and in fact, sometimes it takes doing something unequal to make it fair.

Share this scenario/drawing with them as an example:

"Two people are trying to look over a tall fence. One can see but the other is too short. Is that fair? How can we make it fair so both people can see over the fence equally?" Try to get the couple to see that this could be achieved if the short person was given a box to stand on.



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### Saying I'm Sorry

#### 3 R's of Apologizing - Regret, Responsibility, Remedy

Many people with an Asperger profile do not apologize. This can be because they don't have the same need for apologies as their partners do, so they don't think about offering them. Another reason is that they have past experiences of apologizing that have not gone well. They may have said, "I am sorry but..." or have used apologies as a way of explaining their side of the argument again.

To help couples understand how to apologize in a productive reconnecting way, teach them to include 3 R's: Regret, Responsibility, and Remedy.

*For example:*

"I am sorry that I hurt your feelings when I rolled my eyes as you were talking. I will try to remember not to do this but if I slip up, please let me know I have done it so I can get better at realizing when I am doing it."