

# **You, Me & AuDHD**

**Relationship Tools for Adults with  
Autism and ADHD**

by Lili Castille

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## Meet the Author

Dr. Lili Castille is a distinguished neurodiverse psychologist specializing in adult relationships with Autism and ADHD. Her expertise in relationships, conflict resolution, and health science allows her to offer compassionate and informed insights, making her a trusted authority in her field. With a diverse background that spans multiple countries, she has developed innovative strategies to enhance communication and relationship building across cultures. Holding advanced degrees in psychology, dispute resolution, and health sciences, Dr. Lili combines her multidisciplinary knowledge with personal neurodiverse experiences to deliver clear, engaging, and empathetic guidance. Through her writing, she empowers individuals to appreciate the beauty of neurodiversity, offering tools that foster understanding and empathy among couples. Her ongoing mission is to advocate for and support inclusive communities where everyone can thrive.

## **Welcome, Neurospecial Friends!**

Welcome to "You, Me & AuDHD: Relationship Tools for Couples" a practical guide designed to support couples navigating the unique challenges and joys of neurospecial relationships. Whether you or your partner is on the spectrum, has ADHD, or both, along with co-occurring conditions, this book offers invaluable insights and activities tailored to enhance your connection, communication, and mutual understanding. Drawing on expert advice and real-life experiences, "You, Me & AuDHD" provides a wealth of strategies to strengthen your bond while celebrating the diversity that makes your relationship uniquely yours. From improving emotional communication to fostering social skills by participating in engaging activities, this book is your companion on the journey to building a fulfilling and harmonious partnership.

## Introduction

### **What is Autism?**

Autism is a way of thinking and experiencing the world that is different from the “typical” way. Every autistic person is unique, which is why it’s called a spectrum. Some autistic people may find it hard to pick up on social cues like facial expressions or gestures, or have back-and-forth conversations. Many have strong interests, like routines, or repeat certain actions. Some need a lot of support, while others live independently.

There are many misconceptions about autism. People might say autistic people don’t care about others or can’t feel emotions. This is not true. Autistic people can feel deeply—they may just show it differently. Autism is not just for children. Adults can be autistic too. Autism is not caused by vaccines or parenting. These misconceptions can make life harder because they create misunderstanding and stigma.



Understanding what autism really is, and what it isn't, helps everyone. It's important for couples to talk openly, find what works for them, and focus on their strengths. Support groups and online communities can be helpful places to share and learn from others.

### **What is ADHD?**

ADHD stands for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. People with ADHD may find it hard to focus, sit still, or control impulses. Some are easily distracted, lose things, or make careless mistakes. Others are very active, fidget a lot, or act without thinking. Everyone with ADHD is different; some struggle more with focus, others with being impulsive or overactive.

In relationships, ADHD can cause misunderstandings. For example, someone with ADHD may forget things, seem disorganized, or act on impulse. This can look like they don't care, but that's not true—it's part of how their brain works. It may also be hard for them to pay attention during conversations, which can feel hurtful to their partner.

Partners need to be patient and talk openly about what they each need. Checking in with each other regularly and being honest about what helps can make the relationship stronger.

This book is for couples where one or both partners have autism, ADHD, or both (AuDHD). You will find practical tips, real-life examples, and tools to help you communicate, solve problems, and support each other. Every relationship is different, and so is every neuro-special experience. Use what fits your needs, and remember: your way of connecting is just as valid as anyone else's.

Let's start by looking at how autism and ADHD can affect relationships—both the challenges and the unique strengths they bring.

## Chapter 1: Neurodiversity in Relationships

*"Neurodiversity may be the birthplace of some of humanity's greatest minds and most creative hearts." —*  
Dr. Thomas Armstrong

Neurodiversity isn't just a set of diagnoses—it's a way of experiencing, feeling, and connecting with the world. When one or both partners are neurospecial (autism, ADHD, or both—AuDHD), their love story is shaped by both unique strengths and challenges. Understanding how these neurotypes impact personality, intimacy, and communication is the first step toward building a relationship that honors both partners' needs.

### **Section 1: Misconceptions vs. Facts About Autism and ADHD in Love**

*Misconception 1: "People with autism or ADHD don't want relationships."*

**Fact:** Neurospecial people desire love, connection, and companionship just as much as anyone else. The ways they express or pursue relationships might differ, but the need for connection is universal.

*Misconception 2: “Neurospecial people can’t be empathetic or romantic.”*

**Fact:** Empathy and romance may be expressed differently—sometimes more subtly, directly, or thoughtfully—but they are absolutely present. Many neurospecial people are deeply caring, loyal, and creative in their expressions of love.

*Misconception 3: “Autism and ADHD make relationships impossible or doomed to fail.”*

**Fact:** While there can be unique challenges, neurodiverse relationships can be just as fulfilling, intimate, and lasting as any other. Success depends on mutual understanding, communication, and willingness to adapt.

*Misconception 4: “Neurospecial partners should just ‘try harder’ to be ‘normal’.”*

**Fact:** Authenticity and acceptance matter far more than masking or pretending. Growth comes from embracing neurodiversity and learning together, not from forcing conformity.

## **Section 2: How Neurodiversity Shapes Personality, Intimacy, and Communication**

### **Personality**

- Neurospecial people may have passionate interests, creative thinking, and unique senses of humor.
- Traits like honesty, loyalty, and directness are common strengths.
- Some may be more introverted or need extra downtime to recharge.

### **Intimacy**

- Sensory sensitivities can affect touch, affection, or physical intimacy (e.g., a preference for soft fabrics, certain types of hugs, or specific routines).
- Emotional intimacy may develop at a different pace, or be expressed through actions rather than words.
- Rituals, shared interests, and creative problem-solving can become central to connection.

## Communication

- Communication styles may be more direct, literal, or detailed.
- Nonverbal cues (like facial expressions or tone) may be harder to interpret or notice, leading to misunderstandings.
- Some people with ADHD may interrupt, change topics quickly, or need reminders to stay on track.
- Written, visual, or technology-supported communication (texts, shared notes, emojis) can be powerful tools.

## Mindfulness Log

- What are some ways that neurodiversity shows up in your relationship?
- Are there any misconceptions you've encountered or internalized? How might you challenge them?
- What's one strength your neurodiversity brings to your partnership?

Understanding neurodiversity is not just about overcoming challenges—it's about celebrating the unique ways you love, connect, and grow together. Embracing

your differences can unlock new levels of empathy, creativity, and joy in your relationship.

### **Sarah and Leo's Story**

Sarah and Leo have been together for three years. Sarah is autistic and has ADHD, while Leo is neurotypical. Early in their relationship, Leo sometimes misinterpreted Sarah's need for alone time as disinterest, and Sarah struggled with the unpredictability of Leo's spontaneous plans. Over time, they learned to talk openly about their differences—Sarah explained how sensory overload felt, and Leo began inviting her input on social activities. Now, they celebrate their neurodiversity as a strength: Sarah's attention to detail makes her a thoughtful gift-giver, while Leo's flexibility helps them adapt to new experiences. Their journey hasn't always been easy, but learning to honor each other's brains has brought deeper intimacy and understanding.

### **Jake and Priya: Case Study**

Jake and Priya met in graduate school, instantly bonding over their love of science fiction and late-night debates.



Jake, diagnosed with ADHD in college, had always found relationships difficult—his impulsivity and forgetfulness often led to misunderstandings. Priya, who discovered she was autistic in her twenties, valued routine and clear communication, and felt anxious when plans changed unexpectedly.

In the early months, their differences showed up in small ways. Jake would enthusiastically plan last-minute getaways, while Priya needed time to mentally prepare. Priya preferred texting to talking on the phone, sometimes leaving Jake feeling disconnected. When Jake forgot important dates, Priya worried he didn't care.

Rather than letting these differences divide them, they decided to learn more about each other's neurotypes. Priya researched ADHD and discovered Jake's forgetfulness was not a lack of caring, but a neurological difference. Jake read about autism and realized that Priya's directness wasn't criticism, but her way of being honest and supportive.

They started experimenting with strategies that honored both partners:

- Priya created shared calendars and gentle reminders for important events.
- Jake learned to ask before making spontaneous plans, allowing Priya to set boundaries or suggest alternatives.
- They developed a “code word” to use if either felt overwhelmed, signaling time for a sensory break without offense.

Over time, their communication improved. Jake appreciated Priya’s loyalty and deep empathy, and Priya adored Jake’s humor and creativity. They both practiced self-advocacy, learning to express needs without guilt or shame. When challenges arose, they reminded each other that their brains worked differently—not better or worse, just different.

Of course, setbacks still happened—old patterns would sometimes resurface, or stressful periods made communication harder. But instead of seeing these moments as failures, Jake and Priya treated them as cues to pause, check in, and revisit the strategies that worked for them. Their willingness to repair and adapt helped them keep growing, even when things got tough.

Now, Jake and Priya see their neurodiversity not as a hurdle, but as a toolkit that helps them solve problems and grow stronger together. Their story is proof that understanding, acceptance, and flexibility can turn differences into the foundation for a loving, resilient partnership.

### **Research Insights:** Understanding Neurodiversity's Role in Romantic Relationships

Current research highlights the complexity and richness of neurodiverse relationships, especially those involving autism and ADHD. There is also diversity within individual neurospecial experiences: not all autistic or ADHD people are the same.

Studies indicate that neurospecial individuals experience and express intimacy, attachment, and love in ways that may differ from neurotypical norms, but these differences are not deficits.

For example, research published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (2021) found that autistic adults value honesty, shared interests, and intellectual connection in romantic partnerships. While sensory

sensitivities or communication differences can present challenges, many couples report that these factors lead to creative problem-solving and deep emotional bonds.

ADHD, similarly, brings unique strengths and challenges. A 2018 study in *The Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* showed that couples where one or both partners have ADHD often report high levels of passion and spontaneity, but may struggle with organization, follow-through, and emotional regulation. Importantly, couples who learn about ADHD together and implement practical strategies—such as shared reminders, clear routines, and regular check-ins—report greater relationship satisfaction.

Researchers emphasize the importance of neurodiversity-affirming perspectives. Instead of focusing solely on deficits or challenges, successful couples and clinicians frame neurodiversity as a natural variation of human experience, bringing both obstacles and unique strengths to relationships. Acceptance, open communication, and willingness to adapt are consistently linked to positive outcomes. Understanding and accepting neurodiversity are the keys to relationship success, happiness, and long-term connection.

### **Solo Exercise: Mapping Your Neurodiverse Strengths**

This exercise helps you recognize the value you bring to your relationship and invites you to advocate for your needs with confidence and clarity.

Step 1: Find a quiet place and set aside 10 minutes to reflect.

Step 2: List three ways your neurodivergence positively shapes your personality or relationships (e.g., loyalty, creativity, attention to detail, humor, honesty).

Step 3: List three situations where you feel challenged or misunderstood because of your neurotype (e.g., sensory overload, distractibility, difficulty with small talk).

Step 4: For each challenge, write one thing that helps you cope (e.g., taking breaks, using reminders, communicating preferences).

Step 5: Choose one strength and one challenge to share with your partner. Consider how you might use your strength more intentionally in your relationship, and ask your partner for support with your challenge.

### **Pair Activity: Neurodiversity Swap**

This activity is designed to foster empathy, appreciation, and practical teamwork.

1. Each partner writes down three things they appreciate about the other's neurospecial traits or behaviors (e.g. "I love how you notice details others miss," or "Your passion for your hobbies inspires me").
2. Share your lists with each other, taking turns reading them aloud. Allow time for gratitude and gentle discussion.
3. Next, each partner writes one challenge they face because of their own neurotype in the relationship.
4. Swap these notes, and brainstorm together at least one way you could support each other in those moments (e.g., "When I'm overwhelmed by noise, could we agree on a quiet signal or break?").
5. End the exercise by affirming your commitment to learning and growing together.

## **Mindfulness Log**

Choose one or more prompts to explore in your journal. Writing regularly about your experiences can provide insights, foster self-compassion, and help track your growth over time.

1. In what ways has neurodiversity enriched your relationship?
2. What misunderstandings have arisen from differences in communication, sensory needs, or routines? How did you work through them?
3. Are there any beliefs about autism or ADHD in relationships that you've had to unlearn? How has this changed your perspective?
4. What is one thing you wish your partner understood better about your neurotype?
5. How do your unique strengths show up in your partnership, and how can you celebrate them more?

## **Worksheet: Understanding Our Neurodiverse Relationship**

### **Part 1: Our Strengths**

- List three strengths each partner brings to the relationship because of their neurotype.

- Partner A: \_\_\_\_\_

- Partner B: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Part 2: Our Challenges**

- Identify two recurring challenges that stem from neurodiversity in your relationship.

- Challenge 1: \_\_\_\_\_

- Challenge 2: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Part 3: Our Strategies**

- For each challenge, list one coping strategy or tool you've used or want to try.

- Challenge 1 Solution: \_\_\_\_\_

- Challenge 2 Solution: \_\_\_\_\_



#### Part 4: Our Communication Agreements

- What communication “hacks” or boundaries can help? (e.g., “We will use a code word when overwhelmed,” or “We’ll check in after social events.”)

- Agreement 1: \_\_\_\_\_

- Agreement 2: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part 5: Celebrating Neurodiversity

- Write one way you will celebrate your neurodiversity as a couple this week (e.g., plan a sensory-friendly date, share a favorite special interest, or acknowledge a recent success).

#### **Reflection:**

Review your worksheet together and discuss how these insights can shape your daily life. Revisit and update this worksheet as your relationship evolves.

What’s one insight you’ll apply this week?

#### **FAQs**

Q: Can two neurospecial partners have a successful relationship?

A: Absolutely! Many neurospecial couples thrive, especially when both partners are open to learning about their unique needs and strengths. Success comes from mutual respect, communication, and flexibility—not from being “neurotypical.”

Q: How do autism and ADHD affect intimacy?

A: Sensory sensitivities, communication preferences, and routines may influence how partners approach physical and emotional intimacy. Open conversation about comfort, boundaries, and desires is key. Neurodiverse couples often find creative ways to build closeness—like using written notes, shared interests, or sensory-friendly rituals.

Q: What if my neurotypical partner doesn't understand my experience?

A: Education is the first step. Share articles, books, or documentaries together. Invite your partner to support groups or therapy sessions. Honest, patient dialogue can build empathy and connection over time.

Q: Is it normal to feel frustrated or misunderstood in a neurodiverse relationship?

A: Yes—every relationship has challenges, and neurodiverse couples may face unique ones. Frustration is natural, but it's important not to blame yourself or your partner. Focus on problem-solving and self-advocacy, and seek outside support if needed.

Q: How can we handle criticism or misunderstanding from family or friends?

A: It can be tough when others don't understand neurodiversity. Set boundaries, educate when possible, and seek support from people who "get it." Remember, your relationship is valid—outside opinions don't define your happiness.

Q: Does masking or trying to "act neurotypical" help?

A: Masking may reduce friction in the short term, but it can be exhausting and erode self-esteem. Authenticity promotes long-term relationship satisfaction and well-being. Encourage each other to be yourselves and celebrate your differences.

## **Troubleshooting Section**

### Common Challenges and Solutions in Neurodiverse Relationships

#### 1. Miscommunication:

- Challenge: Literal vs. implied language, missed cues, or “parallel conversations.”
- Solution: Use clear, direct language. Check for understanding (“Did I get that right?”). Consider written or visual supports (texts, lists, emojis).

#### 2. Sensory Overload:

- Challenge: Crowded places, loud events, or unexpected touch can overwhelm one partner.
- Solution: Plan sensory-friendly dates, agree on “escape plans,” and use code words to signal when breaks are needed.

#### 3. Routine vs. Spontaneity:

- Challenge: One partner needs predictability, the other craves novelty.

- Solution: Compromise by scheduling “spontaneous time” or alternating who plans activities. Discuss comfort zones in advance.

#### 4. Emotional Regulation:

- Challenge: Emotional intensity, shutdowns, or “meltdowns” can create tension.

- Solution: Learn each other’s warning signs. Practice grounding techniques, and give each other permission to take breaks without guilt.

#### 5. Hyperfocus and Attention Differences:

- Challenge: One partner may “zone out,” the other feels ignored.

- Solution: Set aside dedicated connection time. Use reminders to check in emotionally. Normalize asking for attention or reassurance.

#### 6. Outside Judgment:

- Challenge: Friends or family may criticize or misunderstand your dynamic.

- Solution: Agree on boundaries. Decide together what you’ll share and with whom. Seek out neurodiversity-affirming communities.

Remember:

You won't solve every challenge overnight. Progress is about experimenting, learning, and adapting. Celebrate small victories, and don't hesitate to seek outside help if you feel stuck.

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Neurodiversity brings both unique strengths and challenges to relationships.
- Open, honest communication is the foundation for navigating differences.
- Misconceptions about autism and ADHD in love are just that—misconceptions. Neurodiverse couples can and do thrive.
- Learning about each other's neurotypes fosters empathy, intimacy, and teamwork.
- Support, flexibility, and celebration of differences are key to long-term satisfaction.
- "Every relationship is different; adapt these tools to fit your unique partnership."

## **Practice Scripts**

Expressing Needs:

1. "I feel overwhelmed when plans change suddenly.  
Can we talk about it before making decisions?"

2. “I love how passionate you are about your interests. Tell me more about what you’re working on.”
3. “When I seem distracted, it’s not about you. Sometimes my brain is just very busy.”

#### Repairing Misunderstandings:

- “I think we misunderstood each other. Can we try again?”
- “I want to understand how you’re feeling. Can you help me see it from your perspective?”

#### Celebrating Neurodiversity:

- “Your brain works differently, and that’s one of the things I love about you.”
- “Let’s make our own rules for our relationship, not just follow what works for everyone else.”

### **Closing Thoughts**

Neurodiversity is not an obstacle to love—it’s a source of resilience, creativity, and connection. By understanding and embracing your unique ways of thinking, feeling, and relating, you open the door to a relationship that’s not just



possible, but extraordinary. Celebrate your differences, support each other's growth, and remember: your love story is yours to write.

## Chapter 2: Communication Foundations

*"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."*

— George Bernard Shaw

### **Maya and Alex's Story**

Maya and Alex have always loved talking late into the night, but sometimes, even after hours of conversation, they realize they've misunderstood each other. Maya prefers to talk things out right away, while Alex needs time to process thoughts before responding. At first, this difference led to frustration and hurt. Over time, they learned to ask, "What do you need right now—time to think, or to talk it through?" Small questions like this became the bridge that kept them connected, even when their styles clashed.

## **Why Communication Styles Matter**

Every relationship is made up of two (or more) unique communication styles. These styles are shaped by personality, upbringing, culture, and—for many—neurotype. Whether you're neurodiverse, neurotypical, or both, understanding how you and your partner naturally send and receive messages is the cornerstone of connection.

In the next chapters, we'll explore the specific communication patterns common in ADHD and Autistic partners. Before we dive into those details, let's lay some groundwork that applies to all relationships—skills and awareness that will make the rest of this book even more practical.

## **Identifying Your Communication Style**

These questions will help you recognize your default tendencies, which is key for the more tailored strategies in the next chapters.

- Self-Reflection: How do you best express yourself—directly, through stories, with emotion, or by writing things down? Do you need time to process before responding, or are you a “think out loud” type?
- Notice Patterns: When do misunderstandings most often happen? Are there certain topics or situations that trip you up?
- Adaptation: What helps you feel most heard and understood?

## **Recognizing Your Partner’s Style**

Paying attention to these cues sets the stage for the ADHD and Autistic-specific communication techniques ahead.

- Observation: Does your partner prefer text to phone calls? Do they use lots of gestures, or are they more reserved? Are they energized or drained by deep conversations?
- Timing: Are there better times of day for important talks? How does your partner react to being interrupted or surprised?

- Check-Ins: Try asking, “What’s the best way for us to talk about something important?”

### **Universal Techniques for Better Understanding**

These skills are especially useful as you explore the unique dynamics of ADHD (rapid-fire, tangential, or energetic communication) and Autistic (direct, literal, or detail-oriented communication) in the next chapters.

- Active Listening: Repeat what you heard. Ask clarifying questions (“So what I’m hearing is...”).
- Nonverbal Cues: Use and respect gestures, facial expressions, and visual aids—even if interpreting them is sometimes tricky.
- Scheduled Check-Ins: Regularly set aside time to talk about how your communication is working, not just what you’re communicating about.
- Fun Practice: Play games like charades or collaborative story-building to practice different ways of sending and receiving messages in a low-stakes setting.

## **Research Insights**

Research shows that communication difficulties are among the most common challenges in all relationships, but especially in those where partners have different neurotypes. A 2022 review in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* highlights that mismatches in communication style—not lack of love—are often at the root of misunderstandings (Overall, et al, 2015).

Neurotypical partners may rely heavily on nonverbal cues or implied meanings, while neurospecial partners (including those with ADHD and Autism) may prefer directness, explicit language, or alternative forms of expression such as writing or visuals. Studies also reveal that when couples intentionally learn about each other's communication preferences, their satisfaction and resilience improve significantly.

Importantly, researchers agree that there is no single “correct” way to communicate; rather, the healthiest couples are those who experiment, build shared routines, and repair miscommunications quickly. This “communication flexibility” is even more important in neurodiverse partnerships, where assumptions can easily lead to frustration.

The next two chapters draw on this research, offering specific strategies for ADHD and Autistic communication patterns. But foundational skills—self-awareness, curiosity, and regular check-ins—remain essential, regardless of neurotype.

### **Solo Exercise: Your Communication Map**

Step 1: Reflect: When you feel most connected and understood, what's happening? Are you talking in person, texting, sharing an activity, or just sitting quietly together?

Step 2: List three communication methods that feel natural or effective for you (e.g., writing, voice notes, face-to-face talks).

Step 3: List two situations where you often feel misunderstood.

Step 4: Identify one thing that helps you clarify or repair a misunderstanding (e.g., taking a break, using humor, restating your point in another way).

Step 5: Bring your list to your partner and compare notes. Notice similarities and differences.

### **Pair Activity: Communication Swap**

1. Each partner chooses a preferred communication method (e.g., text, voice memo, written note, face-to-face).
2. Take turns sharing something positive about your day using your chosen method.
3. Now, switch methods—each partner tries the other's preferred style.
4. Discuss: How did each method feel? Which was easiest or hardest? What did you learn about each other's preferences?
5. Agree on one new way to incorporate both styles in your day-to-day life.

### **Mindfulness Log**

1. When have you felt truly “in sync” with your partner's communication? What made that possible?



2. What's one communication habit you'd like to change or strengthen?
3. How does your neurotype (or your partner's) influence your style?
4. What assumptions do you make about how your partner "should" communicate?
5. What's one question you wish your partner would ask about your communication needs?
6. When and how does your communication style change (if ever)?
7. When and how does your partner's communication style change (if ever)?

## **Communication Foundations Worksheet**

### **Part 1: My Style**

- My top 2 preferred ways to communicate are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

- I feel misunderstood when:

---

## Part 2: My Partner's Style

- My partner's top 2 preferred ways to communicate are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

- I notice we struggle most when:

---

## Part 3: Bridging the Gap

- One thing I can do to meet my partner where they are:

---

- One thing I'd like my partner to try for me:

---

## Part 4: Our Plan

- We agree to have regular check-ins about communication (circle one):

- Weekly • Monthly • As needed
- We'll use this "repair phrase" if we get stuck:
- 

## FAQs

1. Q: What if my partner and I have completely different communication styles?

A: That's normal and common! The key is to get curious about each other's styles and agree on shared signals or routines. You don't need to be the same—you just need to be flexible and willing to learn.

2. Q: How do we handle misunderstandings without blame?

A: Use neutral language ("I heard... Is that right?" or "Can we try again?") and focus on the message, not the person. Remember, it's normal to miss each other sometimes—repair is more important than perfection.

3. Q: Are there “wrong” ways to communicate?

A: There are only unhelpful habits (like stonewalling or sarcasm), not inherently wrong styles. What matters is whether your methods work for both of you and can be adjusted as needed.

4. Q: What if one partner prefers texting and the other hates it?

A: Compromise! Maybe use text for logistics and face-to-face for emotions. Or try voice notes as a middle ground. The goal is mutual respect, not forcing anyone into discomfort.

5. Q: How does this relate to ADHD and Autism?

A: ADHD and Autistic communication styles often include unique preferences and challenges—like impulsivity, directness, or sensory needs. The next chapters will give you tailored strategies, but these

basics—self-awareness, curiosity, and regular check-ins—apply no matter your neurotype.

## **Troubleshooting**

### **Common Communication Stuck Points—and How to Get Unstuck**

#### **1. Talking Past Each Other:**

**Problem:** You're both talking, but not about the same thing.

**Solution:** Pause and check: "Are we talking about the same issue?" Redirect gently if needed.

#### **2. Feelings Overlooked:**

**Problem:** One partner feels dismissed or not taken seriously.

**Solution:** Use validation phrases ("I hear you," "That sounds tough") before offering solutions.

### 3. Overwhelm or Shutdown:

Problem: One or both partners get flooded and can't process.

Solution: Agree on a time-out signal. Revisit the conversation after a break.

### 4. Misreading Cues:

Problem: Nonverbal signals are missed or misinterpreted.

Solution: Rather than guessing, ask directly (e.g. "Are you upset?" "Do you need space?")

### 5. Mismatch in Processing Speed:

Problem: One person responds quickly, the other needs time to think.

Solution: Normalize saying "I need a minute to think," or "Can we come back to this?"

Remember. The goal isn't to be perfect, but to keep trying new strategies, revisit what works, and give each other grace.

### **Practice Scripts**

- a. "What's the best way for us to talk about this?"
- b. "Can I check if I understood you correctly?"
- c. "I need some time to think before I respond—is that okay?"
- d. "Let's try switching how we talk about this and see what feels better."
- e. "Can we use a code word if either of us feels overwhelmed?"

### **Chapter Highlights**

- Everyone has a unique communication style, influenced by many factors—including neurotype.
- Self-awareness and curiosity are the foundation for improving communication.

- Universal skills like active listening, validation, and regular check-ins help every couple.
- Differences can be strengths when approached with openness and flexibility.
- The next chapters will help you tailor these basics to ADHD and Autistic partnerships.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Communication is the bridge between two worlds. By understanding your own style and your partner's, you lay the groundwork for deeper connection and fewer misunderstandings. As you move into the next chapters, keep these foundations in mind—they'll help you get the most out of the ADHD and Autistic communication strategies to come.



## Chapter 3: ADHD Communication Styles

*"Communication works for those who work at it."* — John Powell

### **Sam and Riley's Story**

Sam and Riley have been living together for a year. Sam has ADHD, and Riley sometimes gets frustrated when Sam jumps from topic to topic during conversations or interrupts without meaning to. One night, Sam excitedly starts talking about a new hobby, but before Riley can respond, Sam is already sharing a story about work. Riley feels lost and a bit ignored. After a pause, Riley says, "Hey, can we finish one story before starting the next? I really want to follow what you're saying." Sam apologizes and suggests they try using a "topic change" signal in the future so both feel heard.

### **Understanding ADHD Communication**

People with ADHD often have communication styles that reflect their fast-moving thoughts and energetic interests. This can show up as speaking impulsively, interrupting, changing topics abruptly, or jumping between ideas that

seem loosely connected. For a partner, this can make conversations feel unpredictable or overwhelming—but it can also bring spontaneity, humor, and passion to interactions.

Some people with ADHD may struggle with waiting their turn to speak, especially if they're excited or afraid of forgetting an idea. Others might “hyperfocus” on a favorite topic, talking at length and missing cues that their partner wants to contribute. These patterns aren't intentional rudeness; they're often the result of differences in attention regulation, working memory, and impulse control.

Recognizing and respecting these differences helps couples prevent misunderstandings and build stronger connections. When both partners understand the brain-based reasons behind these patterns, it becomes easier to respond with patience and curiosity rather than frustration.

## **Research Insights**

Research shows that adults with ADHD are more likely to experience conversational disruptions, such as frequent

interruptions, off-topic remarks, and difficulties following conversational “rules” (Barkley, 2015; Ramsay & Rostain, 2015). These differences can contribute to increased conflict and feelings of being misunderstood in romantic relationships.

However, studies also highlight that couples who intentionally use clear communication strategies—such as setting ground rules, using visual or verbal signals for topic changes, and checking in regularly—report higher relationship satisfaction and fewer communication-related frustrations (Weiss et al., 2012; Barkley, 2015). Openly discussing each partner’s preferences and needs is key to developing a communication style that works for both.

Neurodiversity-affirming research emphasizes that ADHD communication is not inherently problematic; the challenges arise mainly from mismatches in style and expectations. By embracing flexibility and experimenting with new approaches, couples can transform communication differences into opportunities for growth and connection.

**Table: ADHD Communication Styles**

<b>ADHD Speaking Style</b>	<b>Partner's Strategy</b>	<b>Partner's Response</b>
Impulsive	Raise hand to ask to take a turn.	"Let's say 'Subject change' when we're going to change topics."
Scattered	Help organize their thoughts with questions	"Can we summarize what we just talked about?"
Hyper-focused	Acknowledge interest but set time limit to change topic.	"How interesting, but that's all I can take in about that for now. Let's talk about..."
Expressive	Do breathing techniques together to calm down before continuing.	"I can see this topic really matters to you. Let's take a break for a moment to calm down".
Unaware	Practice reading social cues	(Quietly) "I think this man wants to leave. We should let him go".
Short Attention Span	Keep discussions brief	"We can talk more about this later?"

<b>ADHD Speaking Style</b>	<b>Partner's Strategy</b>	<b>Partner's Response</b>
Anxious in Social Gatherings	Prepare by role-playing responses	Let's make a plan for social situations, like if you want to leave, give me a sign.
Oversharing	Set boundaries and time limit.	I'm happy that you trust me to share that, but let's take things a little slower.

### **Solo Exercise**

Self-Check:

Think about your last three conversations.

- Did you interrupt or change topics quickly?
- How did the other person react?
- Write down one thing you could try differently next time (for example: pausing before speaking, or asking if your partner wants to switch topics).

### **Pair Activity**

#### **Sticky Note Exchange:**

Each partner writes a short message on a sticky note about something that's hard for them in conversations. Exchange notes and read them quietly. Then, discuss one way you can help each other feel heard.

### **Mindfulness Log**

- a. When do I feel most comfortable communicating with my partner?
- b. What situations make it harder for me to stay on topic or listen fully?
- c. What's one thing I appreciate about my partner's communication style?

### **Practice Scripts**

1. "Can we finish this story before we start another?"
2. "I'm having trouble keeping up. Can we pause and check in?"

3. “Let’s make a plan for this conversation before we start.”
4. “I appreciate how excited you are. Can we set a timer for this topic?”

## **Chapter Highlights**

- ADHD communication can be lively and creative, but may also lead to misunderstandings.
- Using visual cues, clear turn-taking, and planning ahead can help both partners feel respected.
- Self-awareness and honest discussion are the first steps to smoother conversations.

## **Closing Thoughts**

ADHD brings both challenges and strengths to communication. By working together, using simple strategies, and being patient with yourselves and each other, you can turn potential conflicts into opportunities for better connection.

## Chapter 4: Autism Communication Styles

*"I don't speak in riddles. I say what I mean."* — Anon autistic self-advocate

### **Jordan and Taylor's Story**

Jordan loves to talk about trains and knows every detail about their favorite railway line. When their partner, Taylor, asks about their day, Jordan quickly shifts the topic to trains and shares facts for several minutes. Taylor listens, but after a while says, "I'd like to talk about my day too." Jordan nods, a little confused, but appreciates the clear feedback. Later, they agree to take turns in conversations and check in if either wants to change the topic.



## **Understanding Autistic Communication**

People with autism often have communication styles that differ from neurotypical expectations. They may communicate with honesty and precision, prefer discussing favorite or specialized topics in detail, and rely less on nonverbal cues such as facial expressions or tone of voice. Directness is often valued, so conversation can be refreshingly straightforward—but it may sometimes be perceived as blunt. Autistic partners might also interpret language literally and miss implied meanings, jokes, or sarcasm.

These differences are not flaws, but natural variations in how people process and share information. However, mismatches in style—such as one partner relying on hints while the other prefers explicit statements—can lead to confusion or hurt feelings. Recognizing and appreciating these unique patterns is the first step toward better understanding and connection.

## **Research Insights**

Research shows that autistic individuals are more likely to use direct and unambiguous language, focus on areas of strong personal interest, and interpret conversation in a literal way (de Marchena & Eigsti, 2010). Studies have found that when partners make an effort to use clear, explicit language and provide direct feedback, there are fewer misunderstandings and greater relationship satisfaction. Additionally, incorporating written or visual supports—such as notes, text messages, or visual schedules—can help both partners feel more comfortable and understood. This collaborative approach can turn communication differences into strengths, fostering deeper empathy and trust within the relationship.

## **Building Connection**

For couples, understanding and respecting each other's communication preferences is essential to preventing miscommunication and hurt feelings. Openly discussing what helps you feel heard, what feels challenging, and what support you need creates a safer, more supportive environment for both partners. Strategies such as using written communication, visual aids, or even agreed-upon “code words” can make conversations smoother—especially when emotions run high or words are hard to find. By making room for each other's styles and needs, you create pathways for genuine connection, shared problem-solving, and mutual respect.

**Table: Autism Communication Styles**

<b>Autistic Communication Style</b>	<b>Partner's Strategy</b>	<b>Partner's Response</b>
Detailed Topics	Set boundaries politely, guide to new topics, balance interests, use cues	"That's interesting! Can we also talk about...?"
Literal Interpretation	Use clear, direct language; avoid idioms/sarcasm; explain figurative phrases	"When I say 'Break a leg,' it means 'Good luck.'"
Directness	Acknowledge honesty, don't take offense, model gentle language	"Thanks for sharing that," "I appreciate your honesty."
Conversation Dominating ("Info-dumping")	Politely interject, use cues, set limits, remind of turn-taking	"Now it's my turn," "Let's make sure everyone has a chance to talk."
Lack of Nonverbal Cues	Be patient, don't misinterpret silence, offer alternative expression methods	"I see what you're saying," "Absolutely."
Unaware of Social Cues	Gently inform, use social	"I need to go now. It was nice talking with you."

## You, Me and AuDHD Relationship Tools

	stories/scripts, role-play, give consistent feedback	
Prefers Written Communication	Use text/email, be concise, respect preference, avoid phone/video pressure	Respond promptly via written message, encourage writing if needed

### **Solo Exercise**

#### **Self-Reflection:**

Think about a time when a conversation didn't go as you expected. What happened? Was there a misunderstanding about words, tone, or cues? Write down one thing you could try next time, like asking for clarification or using written notes.

### **Pair Activity**

#### **Turn-Taking Practice:**

Choose a topic. Set a timer for 3 minutes. One partner talks while the other listens. When the timer is up, switch roles. After both turns, talk about how it felt and what made it easier or harder to listen and share.

## **Mindfulness Log**

- What is one topic I love talking about?
- How do I feel when someone interrupts or changes the subject?
- What helps me understand when my partner is interested or not interested in a topic?

## **Practice Scripts**

- a. "Can we take turns sharing?"
- b. "I'm not sure what you mean. Can you say it another way?"
- c. "I'd like to talk about something else now. Is that okay?"
- d. "It helps me if you tell me directly how you feel."

### **General Tips to Partner:**

1. Be patient and accepting.
2. Use clear, direct language.
3. Allow time for processing and responses.
4. Encourage, but don't force, new methods of communication.
5. Use visual aids, lists, or drawings if helpful.

### **Chapter Highlights**

- Autistic communication is often direct, focused, and unique.
- Clear language, patience, and gentle feedback help avoid misunderstandings.
- Written or visual supports can make conversations easier for both partners.



## **Closing Thoughts**

Autism brings unique strengths and styles to communication. With mutual support, clear feedback, and some practice, you and your partner can find ways to connect that feel natural and comfortable for both of you.

## Chapter 5: ADHD and Autism Communication

*"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."*— Anaïs Nin

Aspects	ADHD & Autism Similarities	ADHD Contrasts	Autism Contrasts
Social Interaction	Difficulty with social cues & non-verbal cues	May recognize some cues, but can be impulsive or get distracted	Often struggles to recognize & interpret cues
Direct	Tendency to be direct or blunt	May be overly talkative/animated, or off-topic	May talk less often & focus on specific topics
Speech Patterns	Atypical patterns (speed, tone, or content)	Speech is energetic, variable, and may jump topics	Speech is formal, precise, detailed monologue
Hyperfocus	May infodump	Rapid change to different topics	Hyperfocus is sustained

Conversing	Struggle with balanced back-and-forth conversing	Erratic, frequent interruptions & rapid topic changes	May have lulls/gaps. Struggles with reciprocity
Emotional Expression	May be perceived as atypical	Emotions expressed openly, rapid mood changes	Emotions may appear muted or hard to articulate
Language Use	Unique use of language, diverges from neurotypical norms	Dynamic, energetic, but sometimes disorganized	Formal, precise, focused on detail
Response to Silence	May be uncomfortable with silence	Tends to fill silences with chatter	May not fill silences, leading to long pauses

### Mindfulness Log

- Which traits in the table do I see in myself? Which do I see in my partner?
- How can this knowledge help us communicate better?

### Chapter Highlights:

- Both profiles may struggle with social cues, directness, and hyperfocus, but the way these manifest is different.
- ADHD tends toward energetic, rapidly shifting conversation; autism toward detailed, focused monologues.
- Understanding these patterns helps couples adapt and support one another.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Every relationship is unique. By learning about ADHD and autism communication styles, you and your partner can find ways to connect that work for you both. Remember that your differences can be your strength.

## Chapter 6: Handling ADHD Rage and ASD Meltdowns

*"Not every storm comes to disrupt your life. Some come to clear your path."* — Unknown

### **Alex and Jamie's Story**

Alex and Jamie are making dinner when a loud blender noise and a sudden change in plans overwhelm Jamie, who is autistic and has ADHD. Jamie starts shouting, leaves the room, and slams the door. Alex stays calm, quietly dims the lights, and places Jamie's weighted blanket nearby. Later, when things are calm, they talk about what triggered the meltdown and agree to use a "quiet signal" to pause when things get too much.

### **Understanding Intense Emotions**

ADHD rage and autistic meltdowns are both powerful emotional experiences that can be overwhelming for everyone involved. While they may look similar on the surface—sudden anger, tears, yelling, or shutting down—

their underlying causes and the most effective responses can be quite different. ADHD rage is often triggered by frustration, feeling misunderstood, or difficulties with impulse control. Autistic meltdowns are more likely to result from sensory overload, unexpected changes, or cumulative stress.

For both partners, these moments can feel frightening or confusing. The most important thing is to remember that these reactions are not intentional or personal—they're a sign that someone's emotional or sensory system is overloaded. Learning to recognize early warning signs and having a clear plan for what to do next can help both partners feel safer and more supported during intense moments.

## **Research Insights**

Studies show that strong emotional reactions, such as rage episodes in ADHD and meltdowns in autism, are linked to challenges with emotional regulation, impulse control, and sensory processing (Mazefsky et al., 2013; Barkley, 2015). Both ADHD and autistic individuals may have a lower threshold for stress, leading to more

frequent or intense outbursts when overwhelmed.

Research also highlights that identifying personal triggers and developing proactive coping strategies—like using calming routines, sensory breaks, or agreed-upon signals—can reduce how often these episodes occur and help partners recover more quickly. By approaching these experiences with compassion and preparation, couples can transform moments of crisis into opportunities for understanding and growth.

## Comparison Table: ADHD Rage vs. Autistic Meltdown

Aspects	ADHD Rage	Autistic Meltdown
<b>Underlying Cause</b>	<p>Triggered by frustration, disappointment, or a perceived injustice.</p> <p>Linked to executive function challenges (e.g., planning, organization, impulse control).</p> <p>Can also be due to sensory overload.</p>	<p>Triggered by sensory overload, overwhelming social demands, or changes in routine.</p> <p>Also, difficulty with communication, feeling overwhelmed by multiple demands, or emotional regulation challenges.</p>
<b>Duration</b>	Short, but may be frequent.	Longer and more intense than ADHD rage, lasting from minutes to hours.
<b>Behavior</b>	Verbal outbursts and possible aggressive behaviors	Yelling, crying, shutdown & possible self-harm or stimming
<b>Sensory Sensitivity</b>	May be a factor, but not usually the primary trigger.	Usually the primary trigger.



## You, Me and AuDHD Relationship Tools

<b>Communication</b>	Verbal attacks during the rage often due to both anger & frustration.	Communication attempts may stop if interrupted, misinterpreted or poorly received.
<b>Regulation</b>	A calm space to de-escalate, but also discipline and boundaries to prevent future episodes.	A safe, predictable, and sensory-regulated environment to de-escalate.

## Response Strategies Table

<b>Response Strategy</b>	<b>ADHD Rage</b>	<b>Autistic Meltdown</b>
<b>Safety First</b>	Ensure the person and others are safe.	Ensure the person and others are safe.
<b>Environment</b>	Limit external stimuli (noise, distractions). Provide a structured, predictable environment.	Create a calm, quiet, sensory-regulated space (dim lights, soft music, weighted blanket).
<b>Demeanor</b>	Stay calm and neutral; avoid anger, judgment, or escalation	Avoid confrontation; acknowledge distress without direct questioning.
<b>Validation</b>	Acknowledge feelings: “I see you're really upset.”	Recognize that meltdowns are not intentional acts of defiance.
<b>Support</b>	Offer clear instructions and boundaries. Consider professional help (medication or therapy if frequent).	Offer sensory support (fidget toys, weighted blankets, calm music). Avoid physical contact (no hugging unless invited)

## You, Me and AuDHD Relationship Tools

<b>Routine/Consistency</b>	Provide predictability and structure.	Maintain a consistent routine to minimize triggers and unexpected changes.
<b>Patience</b>	Be patient and give space if needed.	Be patient and understanding; allow recovery time without pressure.

### **Solo Exercise**

Identify Triggers:

Think of a recent rage or meltdown (yours or your partner's).

- What were the triggers?
- What signs showed things were escalating?
- Write down one thing you could do differently next time.

### **Pair Activity**

Create a Calm Plan Together:

Sit down when calm and make a “calm plan” for future intense moments.

- What environment helps each of you de-escalate?
- Agree on a signal or word to use when someone needs a break.
- List two things each of you can do to self-soothe.

## **Mindfulness Log**

1. How do I feel when I or my partner has a meltdown or rage episode?
2. What helps me calm down, or what do I wish my partner would do to help?

## **Practice Scripts**

- a. “Let’s take a break and talk when we’re both calm.”
- b. “I see you’re upset. How can I help right now?”
- c. “Would you like some space, or do you want me to stay with you?”
- d. “Can we use our calm signal now?”

## **Chapter Highlights**

- ADHD rage and autistic meltdowns look similar but have different triggers and needs.
- Stay calm, create a safe space, and avoid escalating.

- Afterward, talk about what happened and work together on strategies for next time.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Handling rage or meltdowns is hard for both partners. With patience, planning, and open communication, you can get through these storms together and build a stronger relationship.

## Chapter 7: Navigating Conflict in a Healthy Way

*"Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional."* — Max Lucado

### **Morgan and Lee's Story**

Morgan and Lee disagree about weekend plans. Morgan (ADHD) wants last-minute adventure; Lee (autistic) prefers a set schedule. Voices rise. Lee asks for a pause. After cooling off, they use a written list to plan together—finding a compromise that includes both structure and spontaneity.

### **Understanding Conflict in Neurodiverse Relationships**

People with ADHD or autism are sometimes misunderstood as seeking out conflict or “drama,” but the reality is quite different. Most neurospecial individuals strongly prefer calm, stability, and respectful connection.

Conflicts may arise more frequently not because they are desired, but because of factors such as impulsivity, a need for clear communication, difficulty interpreting social cues, or sensory overload. For example, an ADHD partner might interrupt or react quickly out of enthusiasm or frustration, while an autistic partner might seek clarification or challenge assumptions for the sake of accuracy—not to provoke an argument. Recognizing the root causes of conflict helps both partners respond with empathy rather than blame.

## **Research Insights**

Research indicates that neurospecial couples, especially those in which one or both partners have ADHD or autism, often experience more frequent misunderstandings and disagreements compared to neurotypical couples (Murray, 2020). However, studies also show that when these couples actively work on respectful conflict resolution—by listening, clarifying, and validating each other’s perspectives—they report even greater relationship satisfaction and resilience. Approaching disagreements as opportunities to learn about each other’s needs, rather than as battles to be



won or lost, helps build trust and a stronger partnership over time.

**Table: Comparing Conflict Styles**

<b>Conflict Aspect</b>	<b>ADHD</b>	<b>Autism</b>	<b>Both/Shared Traits</b>
Conflict Triggers	Boredom, impulsivity frustration	Need for clarity, routine changes	Miscommunication, unmet needs
Argument Patterns	May interrupt, escalate quickly	May focus on details, seem blunt	Emotional dysregulation can escalate conflict
Goal in Conflict	Quick resolution	Clarity, predictability	Wanting to be understood and respected
Resolution Preferences	Clear steps, short talks	Direct, written communication	Safe space, validation, active listening

### **Key Strategies for Resolving Disagreements**

Disagreements are a normal part of any relationship, but for neurospecial couples, arguments can quickly become overwhelming and emotionally intense. Sometimes, if not managed carefully, these moments can escalate to unsafe behaviors such as threats, physical violence, or

self-harm. Prioritizing safety and emotional regulation is always the first step.

### **Make a Non-Violence Pact**

Agree together: “No matter how upset we get, we will never physically harm each other.” You might write this down or say it aloud—reaffirming it as often as needed. This pact is a powerful commitment, especially for couples who have experience with physical training or a history of intense emotional reactions.

### **Practice Self-Regulation**

Self-regulation means recognizing your own emotional and physical warning signs before you lose control. This can include noticing when your heart rate increases, your thoughts start racing, or you feel the urge to yell, throw things, or hurt yourself. Build your own “toolkit” of calming strategies: deep breathing, stepping away, using a fidget, or splashing cold water on your face. Talk with your partner about what helps you de-escalate and how you can support each other in those moments.

## **Our Relationship Safety Plan**

### **1. Our Non-Violence Agreement:**

We agree that, no matter how upset or overwhelmed we feel, we will never use physical violence or threats toward each other.

### **2. Warning Signs to Watch For:**

- I notice I'm getting overwhelmed when I:

---

- My partner notices I'm getting overwhelmed when I:

---

- I notice my partner getting overwhelmed when they:

---

(e.g., "start throwing things". Sometimes the signs are obvious!)

### 3. Safe Words/Signals to Pause:

- Our safe word or signal is:

---

- When this is used, we agree to stop and take a break.

### 4. Break Plan:

- Where I will go to calm down:

---

- How long before we check in:

---

- How we'll reconnect (text, note, verbal check-in):

---

### 5. Self-Regulation Tools:

- My top 3 self-calming strategies:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Support Resources:

- Trusted friend or support person:

\_\_\_\_\_

- Crisis helpline (phone/text):

\_\_\_\_\_

- Therapist or counselor:

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What We'll Do If Things Escalate:

- Plan for immediate separation if needed (leave the room, call for help, etc.)
- No further discussion until both partners feel safe.

Signed and dated by both partners as a symbol of mutual commitment.

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Tip: Couples should revisit and update their plan as needed, and celebrate each time they successfully use it. Small wins build trust and self-efficacy.

## **Why This Matters**

Making a non-violence pact and practicing self-regulation aren't just about preventing harm—they're about building a relationship based on mutual respect, trust, and safety. For neurospecial couples, who may experience emotional intensity or sensory overwhelm, these strategies help ensure that disagreements don't become dangerous, and that both partners have the tools to return to calm, connection, and problem-solving.

## **Strategies to Avoid Escalation**

Your safety and well-being are more important than winning any argument. Having a clear, shared plan for what to do in moments of crisis is an act of love and care for both partners.

1. If either partner feels unsafe, threatened, or at risk of self-harm, take immediate action to ensure safety:
  - End the conversation and move to a safe place.
  - Use a pre-agreed “safe word” or nonverbal signal to pause the interaction.
  - Reach out to a trusted support person, therapist, or crisis hotline if needed.



2. To prevent escalation and resolve conflicts more effectively:

\* Create a Safe Space

Set ground rules for respectful language and tone. Agree that insults, shouting, or threats are never acceptable. If either person becomes overwhelmed, pause and take a break.

\* Use “I” Statements

Express your feelings and needs without blaming. For example, “I feel anxious when conversations get loud,” instead of “You always yell at me.”

\* Take Turns Speaking

Avoid interruptions by using a timer or an object you pass back and forth. This helps both partners feel heard and reduces impulsive outbursts.

\* Write Things Down

If talking is too intense, switch to written communication—notes, texts, or shared documents. Visual aids like diagrams or lists can help clarify points and reduce misunderstandings.

\* Take A Break

When emotions run high, take a sensory or emotional break. Step outside, use a calming activity, or agree to revisit the issue later. Pausing is not avoidance—it's healthy self-regulation.

3. Compromise and Problem-Solve Together

Approach disagreements as a team. Brainstorm possible solutions, and aim for outcomes that respect both partners' boundaries and needs.

4. Know Your Triggers and Warning Signs

Learn to recognize early signs of overload or shutdown in yourself and your partner (e.g., raised voices, pacing, withdrawal). Agree in advance on what to do if either of you needs to step away.

## 5. Seek Professional Support if Needed

If arguments often escalate to unsafe levels, consider working with a therapist who understands neurodiversity and can help you build safer conflict resolution skills.

### **Solo Exercise: Conflict Reflection**

Think about your last argument.

- What triggered it?
- How did you react—emotionally and physically?
- Did you notice any early warning signs, like getting louder, withdrawing, or fidgeting?
- What was your partner doing or saying?
- Write down one thing you could do differently next time to keep things safer or calmer. (For example: “Take a break when I feel myself getting tense” or “Use an ‘I’ statement instead of blaming.”)

### **Pair Activity: Role-Play a Disagreement**

Instructions:

Pick a common source of tension (e.g., chores, schedules, shared spending, social plans). Take turns playing both sides of the disagreement. Practice using “I” statements, active listening, and compromise. After each round, discuss what felt helpful, what was hard, and what you might try in real life.

#### **Practice Dialogues for Role-Play**

##### *Example 1: Chores*

Partner A: “I feel frustrated when the dishes pile up because it makes the kitchen overwhelming for me. Can we come up with a plan together?”

Partner B: “I know I get distracted and forget sometimes. Maybe if we make a visual schedule, I’ll remember more easily. I want us both to feel comfortable at home.”

*Example 2: Changing Plans*

Partner A: “I feel overwhelmed when plans change at the last minute. Can we agree to give each other as much notice as possible?”

Partner B: “I didn’t realize how much that impacted you. I’ll try to let you know about changes sooner, and if something comes up unexpectedly, we can check in about how to handle it together.”

*Example 3: Needing a Break*

Partner A: “I’m starting to feel overloaded and need a short break. Can we pause and come back to this in 20 minutes?”

Partner B: “Thank you for telling me. Let’s both take a break and check in later.”

## **Tips for Using Humor to Diffuse Tension in Conflict**

Humor works best when it's gentle, not mocking, and when both partners know it's a way to reconnect, not avoid the issue. If one person isn't in the mood for jokes, it's okay to switch back to a more direct approach.

### **1. Know Your Partner's Humor Style**

Some people love puns or gentle teasing, while others prefer silly voices or physical comedy. Notice what makes your partner genuinely smile or laugh outside of conflict, and use those forms of humor in tense moments.

### **2. Use Humor to Connect, Not to Dismiss**

Aim to lighten the mood, not to avoid or belittle the issue. Check in after a joke: "I'm just teasing. Are you okay if we laugh about this?"

Avoid sarcasm or jokes that could sound like criticism.

### 3. Laugh Together, Not At Each Other

Use “we” language or poke fun at the situation (“Well, that conversation went from zero to soap opera in five seconds!”), not at your partner’s expense.

### 4. Use Shared Inside Jokes or Code Words

Many couples develop their own silly phrases, voices, or references. Using a familiar inside joke can quickly break the tension and remind you both of your bond.

### 5. Create Playful Rituals

When a common argument pops up, agree on a humorous “reset button”, like tossing a soft pillow, making a silly sound, or saying a favorite movie quote, then starting the conversation over more calmly.

### 6. Respect Boundaries

If you or your partner say, “I’m not in the mood for joking right now,” pause and return to a more straightforward

approach. Humor is helpful, but only when both people are on board.

### 7. Use Humor to Take Responsibility

- Lighten up apologies or self-reflection: “Well, I just set a new world record for forgetting to put away the leftovers. Gold medal in absent-mindedness!”

### 8. Validate First, Then Joke

Acknowledge feelings before using humor: “I know you’re frustrated. I’d be too. Want to help me organize these socks into a modern art masterpiece?”

### **Mini Practice Script:**

“We’re both getting cranky—should we call a timeout before one of us turns into a drama llama?”

“If this conversation gets any more intense, we’ll need popcorn. Let’s take a breather.”



### **Longer Scenario:**

Partner A is upset that Partner B left their laundry all over the living room again.

Partner A: (sighs, then grins and adopts a mock-serious tone)

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the grand opening of the Sock Art Installation, featuring works by the one and only [Partner B’s name].”

Partner B: (laughs) “Thank you, thank you! This piece is called ‘Chaos in Blue Cotton.’ I was going for an avant-garde vibe.”

Partner A: “Well, the exhibit is very... immersive. Any chance the artist could help with cleanup before the critics arrive?”

Partner B: “You drive a hard bargain, but for you, I’ll do a limited-time clean-up performance.”

Both partners laugh, tension eases, and they tidy up together.

## **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What helps me feel physically and emotionally safe during disagreements?
- b. How do I usually prefer to resolve conflicts—talking, writing, taking space, or something else?
- c. What's one thing my partner does during arguments that helps me feel respected or understood?
- d. What's one thing I wish my partner knew about how I experience conflict?

## **Practice Scripts**

1. "Can we take a break and come back to this later?"
2. "I feel overwhelmed when plans change suddenly."
3. "Let's write down our ideas so we can both see them."
4. "I want to understand your point of view."
5. "When you raise your voice, I feel anxious. Can we try to keep things calm?"

6. “Thank you for telling me how you feel. I appreciate your honesty.”

## **Chapter Highlights**

- ADHD and autism don’t cause arguments for “fun”. Conflict often comes from communication differences, sensory overload, or unmet needs.
- Using clear language, active listening, and taking breaks when emotions run high can prevent escalation and support both partners.
- Practicing role-play and writing things down (lists, notes, scripts) can build conflict resolution skills and make disagreements less overwhelming.
- Making explicit agreements—like a non-violence pact or a break plan—adds safety and predictability.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Conflict is a normal part of every relationship. For neurospecial couples, being proactive—using clear strategies, written notes, and lots of compassion—can

turn disagreements into opportunities for better understanding. Supporting each other through intense moments isn't just about avoiding fights; it's about building trust, safety, and deeper connection over time.

## Chapter 8: Humor in Neurodiverse Relationships

“Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.”  
— Victor Borge

Humor can be a lifeline in relationships, offering relief during tough times and helping partners feel close. For neurodiverse couples, humor is both a powerful tool and a potential minefield. Some neurospecial partners use humor to bond, self-soothe, or navigate social situations. Others may find certain jokes confusing, overwhelming, or even hurtful—especially if they miss social cues, take things literally, or have sensory sensitivities. By understanding each other’s humor styles and boundaries, couples can use laughter as a bridge, not a barrier.

### **Why Humor Matters**

**Stress Relief:** Laughter can break tension and help partners reconnect after disagreements.

**Building Connection:** Shared jokes and playful moments create intimacy and positive memories.

Communication Tool: Humor can signal affection, lighten heavy conversations, or defuse potential arguments.

Potential Challenges: Misunderstandings can arise if one partner doesn't "get" a joke, dislikes puns or sarcasm, or feels left out of inside jokes.

### **Research Insight: Neurodiversity and Humor**

Many autistic people report preferring literal or absurd humor over sarcasm (Samson et al., 2011).

Some ADHDers use humor impulsively or to mask discomfort, while others may struggle with timing or "reading the room." Neurospecial individuals may develop unique humor styles—ranging from wordplay and niche references to physical comedy or meme culture.

Research shows that sharing laughter strengthens relationship satisfaction, but only when both partners enjoy the joke (Martin & Ford, 2018). Understanding and respecting each other's humor preferences reduces miscommunication and increases bonding.

## **Challenges Neurospecial Couples Face with Humor**

- Literal interpretation: Jokes, puns, or sarcasm might be missed or misunderstood.
- Sensory overload: Loud laughter, pranks, or certain physical humor can be overwhelming.
- Missed cues: Not recognizing when a partner is joking, or missing social signals to join in.
- Code-switching: Adapting humor style in different contexts (family, friends, alone).
- Feeling left out: If one partner “doesn’t get it,” they may feel excluded or even criticized.

## **Humor Playbook for Couples**

Not everyone experiences or enjoys humor the same way. In neurodiverse relationships, what one person finds hilarious, another may find confusing—or even hurtful.

Creating a humor playbook helps you both understand each other's style, avoid misunderstandings, and use laughter as a tool for connection (not conflict).

Step 1: Humor Preferences Inventory: Fill this out together or separately, then compare notes.

- What types of humor do you enjoy?  
(Check all that apply, or add your own)
- ☐ Puns/wordplay
- ☐ Physical comedy (slapstick)
- ☐ Silly voices/fake accents
- ☐ Satire or parody
- ☐ Memes or internet humor
- ☐ Sarcasm
- ☐ Absurd or random humor
- ☐ Inside jokes
- ☐ Practical jokes/pranks
- ☐ Jokes about daily life or shared experiences
- ☐ None of the above—humor is not my thing!
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_



What kinds of humor do you dislike or find confusing?

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### Step 2: Humor Boundaries

- Are there topics that are always off-limits (e.g., family, trauma, sensory issues)?
- Are there times when you don't want jokes (e.g., during arguments, when overwhelmed)?
- Do you want a "no sarcasm" rule or to clarify when you're joking vs. serious?

### Step 3: Humor as a Tool

- How can humor help us when we're stressed or in conflict?
- (e.g., "Using a silly code word to pause an argument")
- What are some of our favorite shared jokes or funny memories?
- Is there a way to use humor to signal "I love you" or "We're on the same team"?

#### Step 4: Humor Red Flags

- How do you let your partner know if a joke has crossed a line?
- What's your repair strategy if someone feels hurt or misunderstood?

#### Step 5: Create Your Humor Toolkit

- List 3-5 things that usually make you both laugh.
- Agree on a “reset” joke, phrase, or gesture to use when things get tense.
- Write down a “Humor SOS” plan:  
 (“If I’m not laughing, please check in with me instead of telling more jokes.”)

Humor Preferences Inventory Example (Filled out by a couple):

Alex: Loves: puns, silly voices. Dislikes: sarcasm, practical jokes.

Morgan: Loves: absurd memes, satire. Dislikes: puns (“They’re annoying”).

Shared: Both love inside jokes about their pets.

Humor boundaries: No jokes about forgetfulness during arguments.

Humor SOS: “If you say ‘banana phone,’ it means I need you to get serious.”

### **Pair Activity: Humor Mapping**

- Each partner writes down 3-5 types of humor they enjoy and 3 they don’t.
- Share your answers and discuss any surprises.
- Try telling each other a favorite joke or story; reflect on how it feels to share and to listen.

### **Practice Scripts: Humor in Action**

- a. “Is this a joking moment, or a serious moment?”
- b. “I know you’re joking, but I need a straight answer right now.”
- c. “Banana phone!” (agreed-upon code word for “too silly, let’s reset”)
- d. “I love that we can laugh about this together.”

- e. “Can we make up a silly name for this problem so it feels less big?”

### **Real-Life Stories**

“My partner loves puns and I hate them, but now we have a running gag where I pretend to groan extra loud every time. It’s become our thing.”

— Jamie & Alex, married 6 years

“We made a ‘no jokes about being late’ rule, since it’s a sensitive subject for both of us. Now, we use humor to plan ahead instead, like setting fake alarms with silly labels.”

— Sam & Riley

### **Mindfulness Log**

- a. When has humor helped me feel close to my partner?
- b. When has humor made me feel left out or misunderstood?
- c. What types of jokes do I wish my partner would use (or avoid)?

- d. How can I use humor to show love and support?

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Humor can be a bridge or a barrier—knowing each other’s humor style is key.
- Use explicit communication about what’s funny and what’s not.
- Agree on boundaries and repair strategies for humor “misfires.”
- Celebrate the laughter you share—it’s a unique bond!

## **Closing Thoughts**

Humor can be a superpower or a stumbling block. By getting clear on each other’s humor map, you’re more likely to use laughter as a bridge, not a barrier.

Humor is personal. In neurodiverse relationships, learning each other’s comedic language brings joy, resilience, and connection. Your shared laughter is part of your love story.

## Chapter 9: Building Emotional Connections

*"Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity."*

— Brené Brown

### Taylor and Jordan's Story

Taylor and Jordan sometimes struggle to talk about their feelings. One evening, they each write a short letter about what makes them feel loved. Reading each other's words helps them open up and start a gentle, honest conversation.

### Research Insight

Expressing emotions can be especially difficult for neurospecial people. Many autistic and ADHD adults experience something called **alexithymia**—a challenge in identifying, naming, or describing feelings. Others may have learned to “mask” or hide emotions to fit in, or worry

about being misunderstood or rejected if they show vulnerability. Communication differences can make it hard to find the right words or the right moment to share what's going on inside. That's why simple "I feel..." statements and creative approaches (like writing letters or drawing) can be so helpful. When both partners learn to listen without judgment, emotional sharing can become safer and more rewarding (Kinnaird et al., 2019; Bird & Cook, 2013) Research shows that using "I" statements and active listening builds trust and reduces misunderstandings, especially in neurodiverse couples (Gottman & Silver, 2015).

**Table: Tips for Emotional Connection**

Challenge	What Helps	Example
Hard to talk about feelings	Use "I feel" statements, write letters	"I feel anxious when plans change"
Communication differences	Set aside quiet, calm time, listen without interrupting	Schedule weekly feelings check ins

Emotional triggers (overwhelm)	Use code words, take breaks, plan for stressful situations	Say "pause" when overwhelmed
Struggle to connect emotionally	Do creative and fun activities together	Cook, paint, or create a scrapbook

## Key Strategies

1. Pick the right moment: Avoid sharing big feelings when tired or stressed.
2. Use "I" statements: Focus on your own emotions, not blaming your partner.
3. Listen actively: Show you care by listening without interrupting.
4. Share a feelings journal: Write and swap daily thoughts or experiences.
5. Plan for triggers: Talk about what situations are hard for each of you, and create signals for when to take a break.
6. Try bonding activities: Write letters, do creative projects, or share fun routines.



### **Solo Exercise**

Feelings Journal:

Write down one emotion you felt today and what caused it. Was it easy or hard to share? Why?

### **Pair Exercise**

Letter Swap:

Each partner writes a short note or letter about what helps them feel connected and loved. Exchange and read. Talk about one thing you learned from your partner's letter.

### **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What helps me feel safe sharing my feelings?
- b. Which activities make me feel closest to my partner?

- c. What's an emotional trigger I want my partner to understand?

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Emotional connection grows with honest, gentle sharing and listening.
- “I” statements and active listening make a big difference.
- Doing activities together, especially creative or fun ones, can deepen your bond.

## **Practice Scripts**

1. “Can we talk about how I’ve been feeling?”
2. “I feel overwhelmed. Can we take a break?”
3. “I love when we do things together. Want to plan something fun?”
4. “Thank you for listening. It means a lot to me.”

## **Closing Thoughts**

Emotional connection is built step by step, with kindness, patience, and small acts of vulnerability. Keep practicing—every effort helps your relationship grow stronger.

## Chapter 10: Mental Health and Self-Care

*"Caring for myself is not an act of self-indulgence, it is an act of self-respect."*

— Audre Lorde

Mental health is the foundation of a thriving relationship, but for neurospecial (ND) couples, it can be especially complex. Both partners may carry the weight of past misunderstandings, burnout, trauma, or simply the everyday exhaustion that comes from navigating a world not built for your brains. At the same time, ND couples often develop deep resilience, creativity, and empathy for each other's struggles. In this chapter, we'll explore what mental health means for neurospecial couples, how to build self-care routines that work for your unique needs, and how to support each other without losing yourself.

## **Research Insights: Neurodiversity and Mental Health**

### **Neurospecial Traits Are Not Mental Illness**

First, it's important to know that being neurospecial is not a mental illness. Autism, ADHD, and other forms of neurodiversity are natural variations in the human brain. However, ND people are at higher risk for mental health concerns—like anxiety, depression, trauma, and burnout—due to a lifetime of masking, misunderstanding, and societal pressures (Lever & Geurts, 2016; Russell et al., 2019).

### **Masking and Internalized Ableism**

Many ND adults learn to “mask” or hide their differences, especially in social situations. While masking can be a survival strategy, it's also exhausting and linked to poor mental health outcomes over time (Hull et al., 2017).

Internalized ableism—believing negative messages about yourself because you're different—can lead to shame, low self-esteem, and loneliness.

## The Double Empathy Problem

Miscommunication between ND and non-neurospecial people isn't just about "social skills"—it's a two-way street. The "double empathy problem" means both sides can struggle to understand each other, leading to frustration and isolation (Milton, 2012). Even in ND-ND couples, different neurotypes may have clashing communication or sensory needs, increasing the risk of misunderstanding.

## **Common Mental Health Challenges for Neurospecials**

(For more, see Chapter 32: Special Focus)

1. Anxiety and depression: Chronic stress, sensory overload, social anxiety, or a sense of never quite fitting in can feed anxiety and depression.
2. Burnout: Autistic and ADHD burnout is real—prolonged stress, masking, or over-committing can lead to exhaustion, shutdown, or loss of skills.
3. Trauma and PTSD: Many ND adults have experienced bullying, abuse, or medical trauma.
4. Executive dysfunction: Difficulty starting or completing tasks can make self-care feel impossible, leading to guilt or shame.

5. Alexithymia: Trouble identifying and naming emotions is common in autism and ADHD, making it harder to recognize when you need support.
6. Sleep issues, chronic pain, or physical health concerns: These often overlap with mental health, creating a cycle of stress and fatigue.

### **Maya & Chris' Story**

Maya (autistic, ADHD) and Chris (ADHD) both struggle with anxiety and periods of low mood. When Maya is overwhelmed, she gets quiet and needs space. Chris wants to talk about everything right away. After several arguments, they work together to create a “bad brain day” plan: Maya uses a color-coded card to signal when she needs silence, and Chris knows it’s not rejection—just self-care. They agree to check in later, when Maya’s ready.

### **Self-Care: Beyond the Buzzword**

Self-care isn’t just bubble baths and spa days. For neurospecial folks, it’s about building routines and

environments that honor your sensory, emotional, and physical needs. It might mean:

- Taking sensory breaks (quiet time, fidget toys, weighted blankets)
- Engaging in special interests or hyperfocus as a form of joy and regulation
- Setting boundaries with family, friends, or work
- Planning meals, sleep, and movement routines that work for your body
- Saying “no” to social events or activities that leave you drained

Couple self-care means supporting each other’s needs without trying to “fix” one another. It’s about co-regulation: finding ways to calm down together, whether that’s cuddling, parallel play, or just sitting in silence.



## **Recognizing When One or Both Partners Are Struggling**

Neurospecial people sometimes miss (or misread) the signs of mental health distress in themselves or each other. Here are some red flags:

- Withdrawing or “shutting down”
- Irritability or explosive anger
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Neglecting hygiene, meals, or basic routines
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Increased stimming, pacing, or nervous habits
- Expressing hopelessness or thoughts of self-harm

What to do:

- Check in gently: “I’ve noticed you seem down lately. Is there anything you want to talk about, or would you rather just hang out quietly?”
- Respect each other’s boundaries. Sometimes, the best support is simply being present.
- Agree on a signal or code word for when you need space vs. when you need help.

## **Creating a Mental Health Check-In Routine**

- a. Schedule regular “emotional weather reports”—a time to share how you’re feeling using a scale, color, or simple words (“green/yellow/red,” or “stormy/sunny”).
- b. Use journaling, texting, or voice memos if talking face-to-face is hard.
- c. Normalize checking in, not as a sign of crisis, but as everyday maintenance.

## **Building Your Self-Care Toolkit**

### **Solo Self-Care**

- Make a list of activities that help you recharge (music, movement, art, games, sensory tools).
- Set up your space to reduce overwhelm: organize, declutter, or use noise-canceling headphones.
- Identify your “early warning signs” of burnout (fatigue, irritability, loss of interest) and make a plan to slow down when you notice them.

### **Pair Self-Care Activities**

- Create shared rituals (morning coffee, evening walks, watching a favorite show).
- Plan “low-demand” time: activities where no one has to mask or perform.
- Build a “bad brain day” plan: What can you do for each other when one or both of you is struggling? (e.g., order takeout, use a feelings card, agree not to problem-solve)
- Celebrate small wins—reward yourselves for getting through tough days.

### **Self-Care Inventory**

Solo:

List 3 things you can do when you feel anxious, sad, or burned out.

Pair:

Share your lists and see if there are overlaps or new ideas to try as a couple.

## **Crisis Plan: When Things Get Really Hard**

Sometimes, self-care isn't enough. If you or your partner is in crisis:

- Have a written list of emergency contacts (doctor, therapist, trusted friend, crisis line).
- Agree on a crisis plan together—what helps, what doesn't, who to call, and how to signal you need urgent help.
- Know the signs of suicidal thoughts or self-harm. If either of you is at risk, reach out to a professional or crisis resource immediately.

(US: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline; UK: Samaritans 116 123)

## **Seeking Professional Help**

- Finding the right therapist: Seek out ND-affirming, trauma-informed professionals. Sometimes you'll need to "therapist-shop". That's okay!
- Medication: Many ND people benefit from medication, but it can take trial and error. Be

honest with your partner about side effects and changes.

- Barriers to care: If you face obstacles (cost, accessibility, bad past experiences), consider online or peer support, and advocate for your needs together.

### **Scripts for Tough Moments**

1. “I’m having a bad brain day. Can we keep things low-key?”
2. “I need some time alone, but I love you and will check in later.”
3. “I’m worried about you. Would you like me to just listen, or do you want help finding support?”
4. “I’m not okay right now—can we make a plan together?”

## **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What are my early warning signs that I'm struggling?
- b. How do I usually practice self-care? What would I like to change?
- c. How do I want my partner to support me when I'm having a hard time?
- d. What's something I'm proud of about how my partner and I handle tough days?

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Mental health is a journey, not a destination. It's okay to have ups and downs.
- Self-care is not selfish—it's essential, for yourself and your relationship.

- You and your partner are a team. Supporting each other means listening, respecting boundaries, and finding what works for you.
- Professional help is a valid and sometimes necessary part of self-care.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Mental health and self-care are not boxes to check off, but ongoing acts of love and survival. For neurospecial couples, these acts may look different—and that's okay. By making space for each other's needs, being gentle with yourselves, and reaching out for help when you need it, you're building a relationship that can weather any storm.

## Chapter 11: Intimacy & Physical Connection

*True intimacy requires vulnerability, transparency, and honesty.” — Nayyirah Waheed*

Intimacy is more than sex. For neurospecial couples, physical connection can be deeply meaningful, beautifully unique, and sometimes challenging. Sensory differences, communication styles, past trauma, and social expectations can all shape how partners experience touch, affection, and sexual connection. In this chapter, you’ll explore ways to build a safe, satisfying, and affirming intimate life together—on your own terms.

### **What Is Intimacy? (And Why Does It Matter?)**

Intimacy means closeness: emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual, or sexual. It can be holding hands, sharing secrets, cuddling on the couch, or exploring sexuality. For neurospecial couples, it often includes creative, nontraditional forms of closeness: parallel play, shared routines, or bonding out over special interests.



### Why it matters:

- Intimacy deepens trust and keeps relationships resilient.
- Touch and affection can regulate the nervous system and relieve stress.
- Feeling safe and desired is a basic human need, regardless of neurotype.

### **Neurodiversity and Intimacy: What's Different?**

#### Sensory Processing Differences:

- Some partners crave touch; others are easily overloaded.
- Light touch may tickle or irritate; deep pressure may be calming.
- Scent, taste, sound, and visual input can affect arousal or comfort.

#### Communication Styles:

- Directness vs. hints: Neurospecial folks may need explicit requests, not subtle cues.

- Difficulty reading body language or facial expressions.
- Needing time to process or script conversations about sex or affection.

#### Emotional Vulnerability:

- Fear of rejection, past trauma, or performance anxiety.
- Alexithymia can make it hard to identify or express desire.
- Masking in the bedroom: feeling pressure to “perform” neurotypical intimacy.

#### Unique Strengths:

- Openness to experimentation and creative connection.
- Deep loyalty, honesty, and willingness to learn together.

### **Jules & Morgan's Story**

Jules (autistic, sensory-seeking) loves long hugs and backrubs; Morgan (ADHD, sensory-sensitive) finds hugs overwhelming unless initiated by them. After some awkward moments and hurt feelings, they create a “touch

menu”: a list of physical interactions each enjoys or dislikes. Now, they check the menu together when they want to connect, leading to more comfort, laughter, and closeness.

## **Consent and Communication**

Consent isn’t a one-time question—it’s an ongoing conversation. For neurospecial couples:

- Spell out preferences, boundaries, and triggers explicitly.
- Use checklists, rating scales (“1–10, how much do you want a hug right now?”), or written notes if talking is hard.
- Agree on “no go” zones, safe words, or signals for “stop”/ “more”/ “change.”

## **Practice Scripts**

- a. “Is it okay if I hold your hand?”

- b. “Can I kiss you? Do you want soft or firm pressure?”
- c. “I’m not feeling sexual today, but I’d love to cuddle if you’re up for it.”

## **Navigating Sensory Differences**

### **Tips:**

- Explore textures: clothing, bedding, massage oils, toys—find what’s comfortable.
- Manage the environment: lighting, temperature, noise, scents.
- Plan for aftercare: time to decompress, shower, or be alone after intimacy.
- Allow for “parallel intimacy” (being close but not touching, sharing space in silence).

**Pair Exercise: Sensory Mapping**

- Each partner writes down what kinds of touch, pressure, and sensations they like, tolerate, or dislike.
- Swap lists and discuss. Make a “touch menu” or “yes/no/maybe” chart to reference.

**The Truth About Sexual Intimacy**

Common Misconceptions:

- a. “Autistic people don’t want sex.” (False: neurospecial people have a full range of desires.)
- b. “ADHD equals hypersexuality.” (False: Everyone’s libido is different.)
- c. “Good sex is spontaneous.” (For neurospecial couples, scheduling can be sexy!)

Realities:

- a. Desire may fluctuate with stress, medication, or sensory overload.
- b. Routines can support arousal and safety (e.g., showering first, using the same playlist).
- c. Communication is key—before, during, and after.

Possibilities:

- a. Explore erotic scripts, role-play, or fantasy in a safe, nonjudgmental way.
- b. Use visuals, diagrams, or written notes to express desires or boundaries.
- c. Redefine sex: it can mean anything from kissing to cuddling to sharing fantasies—whatever feels good to both partners.

## **Nonsexual Physical Connection**

Not all intimacy involves sex. Many neurospecial couples thrive on:

- Hand-holding, sitting side by side, or “stacking” (lying together, not touching)
- Parallel activities (reading, gaming, watching TV together)
- Creating rituals of affection (inside jokes, special greetings, “hug quotas”)
- Sharing creative projects, movement, or sensory play

## **Research Insight: Asexuality, Demi-sexuality, and Neurodiversity**

Not everyone experiences sexual attraction, and that’s completely normal. Asexuality (ace) describes people who experience little or no sexual attraction to others. Demi-sexuality means only experiencing sexual attraction

after a strong emotional bond is formed. Both are valid identities, and both are found at higher rates in neurospecial communities, especially among autistic and ADHD individuals (see: Pecora et al., 2020; Brotto & Yule, 2017).

### **What This Means for Neurospecial Couples**

Asexuality is not a disorder or a problem to fix. It's simply one way of being.

Ace and demi neurospecial folks may enjoy touch, cuddling, romance, or emotional intimacy without wanting sex, or may prefer little or no physical affection at all.

Some ND couples are both ace, while others navigate relationships with different levels of sexual desire (mixed-orientation relationships).

### **Building Intimacy Without Sex**

Focus on nonsexual forms of connection: cuddling, hand-holding, creative projects, parallel play, sharing special interests, or caring gestures.



Communicate openly about needs, boundaries, and what feels good or stressful.

Don't assume that lack of sexual interest means lack of love or attraction—ace and demi people can experience deep romantic, emotional, or sensual attraction.

### **Navigating Differences in Desire**

1. Use explicit, compassionate communication:

“I love being close to you, but I don't experience sexual attraction. How can we connect in ways that feel good for both of us?”

2. Explore creative compromises:

Maybe one partner enjoys giving/receiving certain types of affection, or you develop rituals that honor both partners' needs.

3. It's okay to negotiate boundaries and revisit them over time as needs or comfort levels change.

## **If You're Ace/Demi and Neurospecial**

Your identity is valid and you deserve relationships that honor your boundaries.

It's okay to seek out ace-affirming communities or therapists if you face outside pressure to "fix" or "change" your orientation.

Remember: intimacy and partnership are about mutual respect, not meeting anyone else's expectations.

## **Practice Scripts—Asexuality and Intimacy**

- a. “I care about you deeply. For me, intimacy doesn’t mean sex, but I’d love to cuddle or spend time together.”
- b. “Can we talk about what physical affection means to each of us? I want us both to feel comfortable.”
- c. “I’m ace, so sexual attraction isn’t part of my experience. If you have questions, I’m open to talking about it.”

## **Mindfulness Log**

- What does intimacy mean to me? How does my neurotype or orientation shape this?
- What are my favorite ways to feel close to my partner that don’t involve sex?
- How can I communicate my needs and boundaries with kindness and confidence?

## **Navigating Trauma, Shame, and Rejection**

Some neurospecial people have experienced shaming, abuse, or rejection about their bodies or desires.

It's okay to go slow, take breaks, or seek therapy for sexual or relational trauma.

Discuss triggers in advance and agree on how to pause or reset if needed.

Celebrate progress, not perfection. Every step toward comfort is a win.

## **Building Your Intimacy Toolkit**

### **Solo Exercise: My Intimacy Map**

- List what makes you feel physically connected, safe, and desired.
- Are there places, times, or activities that increase or decrease your comfort?
- What are your “hard no’s,” “maybes,” and “yes, please!” activities?

**Pair Activity: Intimacy Wish-list**

- Each partner writes down 3 things they'd like to try (physical or nonphysical).
- Swap lists and discuss—what overlaps? What's new? Set a date to try one together.

**Addressing Mismatched Needs**

It's normal for partners to have different levels of desire for touch, sex, or closeness.

Negotiate: "Would you like a cuddle now, or later?"  
"What's a good compromise?"

Consider "intimacy tokens" or a menu of options to choose from.

If mismatches cause distress, seek therapy or coaching together.

## **Practice Scripts**

1. “I want to connect, but I’m not sure how. Can we talk about it?”
2. “This feels really good—can we do more/less of that?”
3. “I need a break, but I still care about you.”
4. “Can we plan a special time for intimacy this week?”

## **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What makes me feel close to my partner—physically, emotionally, or spiritually?
- b. How do I like to give and receive affection?
- c. What’s something I wish my partner understood about my sensory or intimacy needs?

d. What's an intimacy goal I'd like to try?

### **Chapter Highlights**

- Intimacy is unique. Define it for yourselves, not by outside standards.
- Clear, explicit communication is loving, not “unromantic.”
- Sensory needs and boundaries deserve respect and celebration.
- Every couple can create a physical connection that feels safe, affirming, and joyful.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Intimacy is an unfolding journey, not a destination. For neurospecial couples, honoring sensory needs, clear communication, and creative exploration can turn connection into a deeply meaningful, ever-evolving adventure. There is no “right” way to be close, only what feels right for you, together.

## Chapter 12: Family & Friends

*"Some friends are the family we choose for ourselves."*

— Edna Buchanan

No couple exists in a vacuum. Family and friends can be sources of support, joy, stress, misunderstanding, or all of the above—especially for neurospecial couples. You may face challenges that neurotypical couples don't: explaining boundaries, educating relatives about neurodiversity, managing sensory or social overwhelm at gatherings, or coping with stigma or skepticism. But you also have opportunities to build chosen family, set healthy boundaries, and create a support network that truly honors your relationship.

### **Neurodiversity and Social Circles: What's Different?**

**Misunderstandings and Stigma:** Some family members or friends may not “get” neurodiversity, or may minimize your needs (“Everyone’s a little ADHD!” or “You’re just being difficult!”).



**Communication Styles:** ND folks might prefer directness, written communication, or need extra time to process social events—this can clash with family expectations.

**Sensory/Social Overload:** Gatherings can be exhausting or even painful. Extended socializing, loud environments, or physical displays of affection may not be comfortable.

**Chosen Family:** Many ND individuals build close, supportive friendships with other neurospecial people, online or offline, sometimes more supportive than biological family.

## **Sam & Taylor's Story**

Sam is autistic and dreads holiday gatherings because of the noise, bright lights, and small talk. Taylor, their partner, is ADHD and loves chatting but gets overwhelmed by the number of people. Together, they create a “party plan”: a safe-word to signal “I need a break,” a quiet room to retreat to, and a pre-written script for declining invitations. They also set up a text check-in with a trusted friend for extra backup. For the first time, both enjoy the holidays—on their own terms.

## **Setting Boundaries with Family and Friends**

Why Boundaries Matter:

Boundaries are essential for self-care, mental health, and relationship security—especially for ND couples who may have experienced boundary violations in the past.

Common Boundaries Neurospecial Couples Set:

- Limiting time at family events
- Saying “no” to physical touch (hugs, kisses)
- Asking for clear start/end times for visits
- Declining or limiting topics of conversation (e.g., no talking about diagnoses, job searching, kids, politics)
- Choosing not to disclose certain ND traits or diagnoses to everyone

### How to Set Boundaries:

- Be clear, kind, and direct (“We’ll be leaving by 8:00 tonight,” or “Please don’t comment on our routines.”)
- Practice scripts for saying “no” or redirecting conversations
- Support each other in upholding boundaries—present a united front

### **Educating Family and Friends About Neurodiversity**

Decide What to Share: You’re not required to disclose your diagnosis or details to anyone. Share only what feels safe and helpful.

Use Simple Explanations: “I get overwhelmed by loud noises, so I may step out for a break.” Or, “We both have ADHD, so we use reminders and lists to keep things on track.”

**Recommend Resources:** Share books, websites, or videos for relatives who want to learn more.

**Accept Limits:** Some people may never fully understand—and that’s okay. Prioritize your wellbeing.

### **Handling Criticism, Stigma, or “Advice”**

Some family or friends may offer unsolicited “solutions,” criticize your coping methods, or doubt your relationship.

Use rehearsed responses:

- “Thank you, but we know what works for us.”
- “We’re not looking for advice right now.”
- “We appreciate your concern, but this is a private matter.”

If interactions are toxic or abusive, it’s okay to limit or end contact for your safety.

## **Building Your Chosen Family**

- Seek out neurospecial-affirming communities—online groups, local meetups, or support networks.
- Cultivate friendships with people who respect your boundaries and celebrate your wins.
- Consider “family of choice” rituals: regular get-togethers, shared projects, or support circles.

## **Supporting Each Other with In-Laws and Friends**

- Debrief after gatherings: What went well? What was hard? How can you support each other better next time?
- Use code words or signals in social settings to communicate discreetly.
- Plan exits in advance (e.g. “If I tap your arm three times, let’s go outside for a break.”)

### **Practice Exercise: Social Support Mapping**

- **Solo:** List the people in your life who support you, drain you, or fall somewhere in between.
- **Pairwork:** Map out your shared support network. Where are the gaps? Where are the strengths?
- Make a plan for how (and with whom) you want to spend your social energy.

### **Practice Scripts for Family & Friends**

- a. “Thank you for inviting us. We’ll join you for dinner but we’ll be heading home early.”
- b. “I need to step out for a sensory break—I’ll be back soon.”
- c. “We’d rather not discuss our diagnoses today. Let’s focus on catching up.”
- d. “We handle things differently, and that’s okay.”

## **Mindfulness Log**

1. Who in my life makes me feel seen and supported?
2. What boundaries do I wish I could set with family or friends?
3. How can my partner and I support each other better in social situations?
4. What does “chosen family” mean to me?

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Family and friends can be both support and stress. Your needs and boundaries are valid.
- Communication and preparation make socializing easier.
- Building chosen family and ND community is a powerful act of self-care.

- You and your partner deserve to feel safe, respected, and celebrated—inside and outside your relationship.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Navigating family and social circles as a neurospecial couple isn't always easy. But with boundaries, honest communication, and support, you can build a network of relationships that uplifts you both. Remember: you get to decide who has a place in your life, and how much energy you give.



## Chapter 13: Navigating Change

*“Change is hard at first, messy in the middle, and gorgeous at the end.” — Robin Sharma*

Change is part of every relationship—sometimes planned, sometimes unexpected. For neurospecial (aka neurodivergent or ND) couples, change can be both an opportunity and a challenge. Whether you’re moving house, starting a new job, facing a health shift, or adjusting to new routines, change can trigger anxiety, sensory overload, or executive dysfunction. But with preparation, flexibility, and teamwork, ND couples can not only survive transitions, but grow stronger together.

### **Why Change Feels Different for Neurospecial Couples**

**Need for Predictability:** Many autistic and ADHD folks find comfort in routines and struggle when those routines are disrupted.

**Sensory & Emotional Impact:** Even positive changes (vacations, new jobs) can bring sensory overwhelm or emotional exhaustion.

**Executive Function Challenges:** Planning, organizing, and shifting gears may be harder for ND brains, leading to stress, missed details, or shutdown.

**History of Difficult Transitions:** Past experiences of change may have brought trauma, loss, or a sense of “failure to cope,” making new changes feel scarier.

### **Jamie and Priya's Story**

Jamie (autistic) and Priya (ADHD) are moving to a new city for Priya’s job. Jamie dreads the chaos of packing, unfamiliar routines, and meeting new people. Priya is excited, but forgets important details and gets distracted. Together, they make a color-coded checklist, plan daily “quiet time,” and set up a “comfort kit” for the first week in their new home. By naming their needs and working as a team, they turn a stressful move into a bonding experience.

## **Common Life Changes Couples Face**

- Moving house or cities
- Job or career changes
- Education or returning to school
- Health changes (diagnosis, disability, injury)
- Family shifts (marriage, divorce, loss, children leaving home)
- Financial changes (windfalls, setbacks, retirement)
- Crisis events (pandemic, loss of a loved one, global events)
- New diagnoses or shifting understanding of neurodiversity

## **Preparing for Change**

### **1. Name the Change**

Talk openly about what's happening, how you both feel, and what you expect might be hard or exciting.

## 2. Identify Needs and Triggers

- What routines or comforts do you each need to feel safe?
- What are your biggest fears or stressors about this change?
- Are there sensory, social, or emotional triggers to plan for?

## 3. Make a Transition Plan

- Use lists, calendars, visual schedules, and reminders.
- Break big changes into smaller, concrete steps.
- Assign roles based on strengths (who packs, who organizes the movers, who handles paperwork).

## 4. Build in Recovery Time

- Schedule breaks, downtime, and familiar routines before, during, and after the change.
- Plan “buffer days” for recovery after big events.

## **Practicing Flexibility—Together**

Recognize that things may not go as planned. Agree in advance on how you'll handle curveballs (e.g., "If things get overwhelming, let's pause and regroup.")

Encourage each other to try new things at your own pace—no forced "just get over it."

Celebrate small wins when you adapt, even if it's not perfect.

## **Coping with Unexpected Change**

Not all change is planned. Sometimes, you'll face job loss, illness, or sudden upheaval.

In those moments: Focus on basic needs first: sleep, food, rest, connection.

Lean on your support network, family, friends, ND community.

Use scripts for communicating your needs to each other and to outsiders ("We're going through a tough time and need some space.")

Practice self-compassion and reassure each other: “It’s okay to struggle. We’ll figure this out together.”

### **Navigating Grief, Loss, and Identity Shifts**

Major change can bring grief, loss of routine, health, identity, or dreams. ND couples may grieve differently:

Give space for each person’s unique process—one may want to talk, another may need silence or creative outlets.

Rituals can help: lighting a candle, writing letters, making art, or saying goodbye to old routines.

If grief or stress feels overwhelming, seek professional support.

### **Practice Exercise: Change Map**

#### **Solo:**

Draw or write about a big change in your life. What helped? What made it harder?

#### **Pairwork:**

Map out an upcoming change. List what you each need for comfort, what roles you'll take, and how you'll signal if you need support.

### **Practice Scripts for Navigating Change**

1. "Change is hard for me—even when it's good change. Can we plan extra downtime?"
2. "I'm excited, but I'm also nervous. Can we talk through what to expect?"
3. "I need help breaking this into smaller steps. Can we make a list together?"
4. "If I get overwhelmed during this transition, can you remind me to take a break?"

## **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What is my biggest challenge during transitions? How can I support myself?
- b. How do I want my partner to support me when things change?
- c. What is a past change we handled well, and what did we do right?

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Change is hard for most people, but can be especially challenging for ND brains.
- Planning, communication, and self-compassion make transitions easier.
- It's okay to have mixed feelings, like excitement and fear.
- Facing change together boosts your relationship + resilience.



## **Closing Thoughts**

Every relationship will face change—some joyful, some difficult. As neurospecial partners, you bring unique strengths and challenges to these transitions. By supporting each other with patience, creativity, and love, you can find your way through the unknown—together.

## Chapter 14: Financial Planning

*“Do not save what is left after spending, but spend what is left after saving.”*

— Warren Buffett

Money can be a source of stress for any couple, but for neurospecial partners, it can be especially challenging. Executive function difficulties, impulsivity, sensory needs, and communication differences may affect how you earn, save, spend, and talk about money. But with openness, creative strategies, and a little humor, ND couples can build a financial plan that works for their unique brains and lives—one that reduces anxiety and supports your shared dreams.

### **Why Financial Planning Can Feel Different for Neurospecial Couples**

- **Executive Dysfunction:** Forgetting bills, missing deadlines, or struggling to organize paperwork can lead to late fees or missed payments.

- **Impulsivity:** ADHD and some autistic folks may find it hard to resist impulse purchases, or may “hyperfocus” on special interests when spending.
- **Sensory/Self-Care Needs:** Neurospecial people may need to spend more on comfort items, fidgets, specific foods, or healthcare, which can add up.
- **Communication Styles:** Money is a sensitive topic. Neurospecial folks may avoid money conversations, find them overwhelming, or struggle to express financial worries.
- **Financial Trauma or Shame:** Many neurospecial adults have experienced underemployment, job loss, or shame about “not adulting right” with money.

### **Alex and Riley's Story**

Alex (autistic) likes to know exactly where every dollar goes, while Riley (ADHD) prefers to “wing it” and often forgets to check bank statements. Arguments about spending used to escalate quickly. Now, they have a weekly “money meeting” with snacks and a checklist. They use budgeting apps with reminders, and Alex

handles bill payments while Riley tracks grocery spending. It's not perfect, but they're building trust—and slowly, a little savings.

## **Budgeting for Neurodiverse Brains**

### **1. Keep It Simple**

Skip complicated spreadsheets if they're overwhelming. Use visual tools—color-coded apps, pie charts, or a whiteboard.

### **2. Automate Everything You Can**

Set up automatic transfers for savings and bills to avoid missed deadlines.

### **3. Divide and Conquer**

Play to your strengths. One partner can manage bills, the other can track spending or set reminders.

#### 4. Plan for “Neurospecial Expenses”

Budget for sensory tools, therapies, special interests, or comfort items as real, valid needs—not “extras.”

#### 5. Build in Fun and Flexibility

Allow “no questions asked” spending money for each partner, so you both have autonomy.

### **Handling Impulsivity and Special Interests**

- Use a “cooling off” rule—wait 24 hours before big purchases.
- Make a wish list for special interests or “splurge” items; review together each month.
- Use prepaid cards or separate accounts for discretionary spending.
- Celebrate both saving and planned spending as wins.

## **Communicating About Money**

- Set a regular, low-pressure time for money check-ins, once a week or month, with snacks or a positive ritual.
- Use scripts to start hard conversations:
- “Can we look at our budget together today?”
- “I’m feeling stressed about bills—can we talk about a plan?”
- Share your financial history, fears, and goals, so you understand where each other is coming from.
- Avoid blame—focus on solving problems together, not assigning fault.

## **Planning for the Future—Together**

- Set shared goals: a trip, a new gadget, an emergency fund, or a sensory-friendly home.
- Break big goals into small, actionable steps.

- Review and adjust as needs change (new jobs, health, family, or interests).
- Celebrate milestones, even small ones.

### **Navigating Big Changes: Jobs, Benefits, and Disability**

- Learn about workplace accommodations, disability benefits, and support programs you may be eligible for.
- If one or both partners is underemployed or unable to work, plan together for how to manage on a single income or seek community resources.
- Know that it's normal for ND adults to have “nonlinear” career paths—support each other through ups and downs.

### **Practice Exercise: Money Mapping**

#### **Solo:**

List your top three financial worries and top three financial hopes.

#### **Pairwork:**

Share your lists. Find one goal you can work toward together and one worry you can tackle as a team.

### **Practice Scripts for Financial Conversations**

1. "I noticed we went over budget on groceries. Can we brainstorm solutions?"
2. "I'd like to save up for a new sensory tool. Can we add it to our wish list?"
3. "Money talk makes me anxious. Can we check in while doing something fun?"



## **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What messages did I learn about money growing up?  
How do they affect me now?
- b. How does my neurotype affect my spending or saving habits?
- c. What would financial security look and feel like for me—and for us as a couple?
- d. What's one small financial win we can celebrate today?

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Financial planning may look different for ND couples, and that's okay.
- Communication, simplicity, and flexibility are your best tools.
- Sensory and comfort needs are real and deserve space in your budget.

- Tackle challenges as a team, and celebrate every step forward.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Money can be stressful, but it's also a tool for building the life you want—together. By planning with honesty, creativity, and compassion, ND couples can turn financial conversations into opportunities for teamwork, understanding, and hope.

## Chapter 15: Aging as a Neurospecial Couple

*“We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.”*

— George Bernard Shaw

Aging brings change for every couple, but for neurospecial partners, the journey can be especially complex, misunderstood, and even isolating. Many resources focus on youth or young adulthood, yet autistic, ADHD, and otherwise neurospecial people grow older too—sometimes discovering their neurodivergence late in life, sometimes navigating new health, sensory, or cognitive shifts, and always bringing a lifetime of unique experiences to the process. This chapter explores how ND couples can approach aging with creativity, resilience, and mutual care.

## **Neurodiversity Across the Lifespan**

Lifelong Neurodivergence: Autism, ADHD, and related traits don't "fade away" with age. However, how they show up and how you cope may change over time.

Late Diagnosis: Many older adults, especially women and people of color, discover their neurodivergence in midlife or later. This can bring relief, grief, new self-understanding, and shifts in identity.

Masking and Burnout: Decades of masking or "passing" can take a toll. Burnout may emerge or intensify with age, especially as energy for masking decreases or life circumstances change.

## **Louise and Henry's Story**

Louise received her autism diagnosis at age 62, after a lifetime of feeling "just different." Her husband, Henry, always knew she needed extra downtime and disliked noisy gatherings, but didn't understand why. Now, with new language and support, they revisit old routines, adapt

their home for sensory comfort, and finally feel seen—both by each other and themselves.

### **Navigating Physical and Cognitive Changes**

**Sensory Needs May Shift:** Aging can bring changes in vision, hearing, touch, and tolerance for sensory input. What once felt soothing may become overwhelming, or vice versa.

**Cognitive Changes:** Memory, processing speed, and executive function may change with age. Neurospecial traits like forgetfulness or difficulty organizing may become more pronounced, or may be confused with age-related changes.

**Physical Health:** Chronic pain, mobility issues, and new health diagnoses may impact routines, intimacy, or independence.

**Tips:**

- Regularly check in about sensory needs—what’s working, what isn’t?
- Use adaptive tools: pill organizers, reminders, visual schedules, labels, and comfort items.
- Be open to adjusting routines and seeking medical or occupational therapy support.

**Late Diagnosis, Self-Discovery, and No Official Label**

Many neurospecial adults reach midlife or older adulthood without ever receiving a formal diagnosis. For some, the signs have always been there: social exhaustion, sensory sensitivities, struggles with organization or communication. However, these may have been masked, misunderstood, or dismissed as simply “quirky” or “difficult.” Others may have only begun to question their neurotype after a child or grandchild was diagnosed, or when reading about neurodiversity online.

## **Why Are So Many Diagnosed Late (Or Never)?**

**Gender and Cultural Bias:** Historically, autism and ADHD have been underdiagnosed in women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ people due to stereotypes and diagnostic criteria based on young, white, cisgender males.

**Masking:** Many learn to hide or “mask” their differences, especially in professional or family settings, only to find this becomes unsustainable with age or life stress.

**Lack of Access:** Diagnosis can be expensive, hard to access, or simply unavailable in some regions—especially for adults.

**Changing Awareness:** Understanding of neurodiversity is still evolving. Many people only encounter accurate information later in life.

## **Changing Awareness: Why So Many Older Adults Were Missed**

Our understanding of neurodivergence has changed dramatically over the past century. Autism was first described in the 1940s, and ADHD (then called “minimal brain dysfunction”) came into wider medical awareness in

the 1950s and 1960s. For baby boomers—those born in the 1940s and 1950s—these concepts were virtually unknown, and diagnostic tools were extremely limited.

**Autism as “Rare”:** Autism was believed to be extremely rare, affecting only a tiny fraction of children—usually those with the most visible, Level 3 traits (non-speaking, significant intellectual or physical disabilities). The idea that autism could include people with average or above-average intelligence, or those who spoke and masked their struggles, simply wasn’t on the radar.

**Diagnostic Tools Were Scarce:** There were no standardized diagnostic tests for autism or ADHD until the late 20th century. Only children with the most pronounced behaviors (usually boys) might be referred to specialists, and even then, misdiagnosis or institutionalization was sadly common.

**Girls, Women, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ People Missed:** Diagnostic criteria were based on studies of young, white boys. Girls, women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ folks were (and often still are) overlooked or misdiagnosed.

**Adult Diagnosis Unheard Of:** The idea that adults could be autistic or have ADHD was rarely considered. Most



professionals believed these were exclusively childhood conditions that people “grew out of” or that simply didn’t exist in adults.

Misdiagnoses and Stigma: ND traits were often labeled as “shyness,” “nervousness,” “laziness,” “eccentricity,” or attributed to poor parenting, trauma, or even moral failing.

## **The Legacy Today**

Because of this history, many older adults grew up without language or support for their experiences. Many internalized shame or developed elaborate coping strategies to “fit in.” Discovering neurodivergence later in life—whether through self-assessment, reading, or a formal diagnosis—can be both a relief and a source of grief for missed understanding and support.

Today, as awareness expands and diagnostic criteria become more inclusive, more older adults are finally recognizing their neurodivergence and gaining access to supportive communities, self-acceptance, and practical strategies for thriving.

If you went undiagnosed or misunderstood for decades, it is not your fault. The world simply did not have the knowledge or tools to see your neurodivergence for what it was. Self-discovery at any age is valid, and it's never too late to seek understanding and support.

### **The Emotional Impact of Late Diagnosis or Self-Discovery**

- Relief: "It all makes sense now!" Many feel validated and understood for the first time.
- Grief or Anger: Mourning missed opportunities, supports, or the struggles faced without explanation.
- Identity Shifts: Re-examining the past, relationships, and even personality traits in a new light.
- Relationship Growth: Partners may gain new empathy for each other, adapt routines, and communicate more effectively.

## **What If You Suspect Neurodivergence, But Don't Have a Diagnosis?**

A growing number of adults self-identify as autistic, ADHD, or otherwise neurospecial based on traits, experiences, and the results of self-assessment tools. For many, a formal diagnosis is not accessible—or necessary for personal growth and relationship well-being.

You are the expert on your own experience. If you find validation, community, or helpful strategies by identifying as ND, that identity is yours to claim.

## **Self-Assessment Tools and Online Tests**

Online self-assessments can be helpful first steps in understanding your neurotype. They are not a substitute for a clinical diagnosis, but many people find that these tools reliably mirror their lived experience and, in studies, often align closely with professional assessments.

## **Free Online Tools**

**1. RAADS-R (Ritvo Autism Asperger Diagnostic Scale-Revised).** Widely used for adult autism self-assessment.

Take it online: <https://embrace-autism.com/raads-r/>

**2. AQ (Autism Spectrum Quotient).** Developed by Simon Baron-Cohen et al., this brief test screens for autistic traits.

Take it online: <https://embrace-autism.com/aq-test/>

**3. ASRS (Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale).** Developed by the World Health Organization for ADHD in adults.

Take it online: <https://psychcentral.com/quizzes/adult-adhd-test>

#### **4. CAT-Q - Camouflaging Autistic Traits**

**Questionnaire.** Explores masking behaviors.

Take it online <https://embrace-autism.com/cat-q/>)

#### **Research Insights: Self-Assessments**

Studies show that these tools, especially when used thoughtfully by adults reflecting on their lifelong experiences, align well with clinical diagnoses. For example, the RAADS-R and AQ are frequently used in research and clinical settings as part of a diagnostic battery (Murray et al., 2017; Ritvo et al., 2011). However, they are not perfect—they may miss or misclassify people whose life experiences or identities fall outside the populations these tools were designed for.

Self-assessments are most accurate when used as one part of a broader self-discovery process.

Many adults find that their self-assessment scores are later confirmed by professionals, if they choose to seek formal diagnosis.

A formal label is not required to honor your needs, build neurospecial-affirming routines, or seek community.

### **Resources for Self-Discovery**

- Embrace Autism (<https://embrace-autism.com/>): Free, research-backed tests and in-depth articles.
- ADDA (Attention Deficit Disorder Association): Resources for adults with ADHD, diagnosed or self-identifying (<https://add.org/>).
- Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network: Community and resources for those who may have been missed by traditional diagnosis (<https://awnnetwork.org/>).
- NeuroClastic: Lived-experience essays from ND writers (<https://neuroclastic.com/>).

### **Practice Scripts**

1. “I think I might be autistic/ADHD, even if I don’t have a diagnosis. Can we talk about what that might mean for us?”

2. “I found this online test that really described my experiences. It’s helping me understand myself better.”
3. “Whether or not I ever get a formal diagnosis, I want to honor what I need.”

Late discovery or self-identification can be every bit as valid and transformative as a formal diagnosis. The most important thing is to find understanding, self-acceptance, and strategies that help you live well—as individuals, and together as a couple.

## **Planning for the Future**

**Legal & Financial Planning:** Wills, powers of attorney, advance directives, and financial plans become even more important as you age. Seek professionals who understand neurodiversity, if possible.

**Long-Term Care:** Discuss preferences for care—at home, with family, or in supportive communities. Research ND-friendly assisted living or senior centers.

**Advocacy:** As you age, you may need to advocate for accommodations in healthcare, housing, or community settings.

## **Social Connection & Fighting Isolation**

**Shrinking Circles:** As people age, social circles may shrink due to retirement, relocation, or loss. ND elders often face extra isolation if family or old friends don't understand their needs.

**Building Community:** Seek out ND-affirming senior groups, online forums, or hobby clubs. Consider starting your own group or regular meet-up if none exist.

**Chosen Family:** Lean into supportive friendships, not just biological family. Intergenerational ND friendships can be especially rewarding.

## **Addressing Grief, Legacy, and Meaning**

**Grieving Losses:** Aging may bring grief—loss of loved ones, health, identity, or routines. Allow space for mourning and ritual.



**Celebrating Legacy:** Reflect on your shared journey, the obstacles you've overcome, and the wisdom you've gained as a neurospecial couple.

**Finding Meaning:** Volunteering, creative projects, mentoring younger ND folks, or sharing your story can provide a sense of purpose.

### **Practice Exercise: Aging Map**

**Solo:** Write about what you hope your later years will look like. What comforts, routines, or relationships matter most to you?

**Pairwork:** Discuss your hopes and fears for the future. What preparations can you make now—emotionally, practically, and socially?

## **Navigating Healthcare and Ageism**

**Bias in Healthcare:** ND elders may be misdiagnosed, ignored, or denied accommodations. Bring written support, advocate for clear communication, and bring a trusted partner or friend to appointments when possible.

**Ageism and Ableism:** Society often devalues both older adults and disabled/ND people. Recognize internalized stigma and celebrate your resilience.

**Self-Advocacy:** Practice scripts for requesting accommodations (“I need you to speak slowly,” “I prefer written instructions,” etc.)

### **Practice Scripts for Aging & Change**

1. “My needs have changed lately. Can we adjust our routines?”
2. “I’d like us to talk about future plans, so we’re both prepared.”
3. “Let’s celebrate what we’ve accomplished together—aging is a gift, not a loss.”

### **Mindfulness Log**

- a. How has my understanding of my neurodivergence changed over time?

- b. What do I want to hold onto as I age? What can I let go of?
- c. Who makes me feel seen and supported at this stage in life?

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Neurospecial couples age, thrive, and face challenges just like anyone else, but with unique strengths and needs.
- Planning, honest communication, and building support networks are key to aging well.
- Your partnership can grow deeper with time, as you adapt together.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Aging is an adventure—sometimes daunting, often beautiful. As a neurospecial couple, you bring resilience, wisdom, and hard-won self-knowledge to this chapter of life. By honoring your changing needs, planning ahead, and staying connected, you can embrace later life with courage, creativity, and love.

## Chapter 16: Advocacy

*“Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty, truth and compassion against injustice, lying and greed.” —*

William Faulkner

Advocacy means speaking up for your needs, rights, and values—sometimes to others, sometimes to each other, and sometimes to the world. For neurospecial (ND) couples, advocacy is both a personal and shared journey. It can involve navigating healthcare systems, workplaces, schools, government agencies, or simply helping friends and family understand your needs. Advocacy can feel daunting, but it’s also empowering. Finding your voice—together—can transform your relationship and your place in the world.

### **What Does Advocacy Look Like?**

Self-Advocacy: Asking for accommodations, setting boundaries, seeking information, and communicating your needs.

**Mutual Advocacy:** Supporting each other's goals, backing each other up in challenging situations, and building solidarity as a couple.

**Systems Advocacy:** Working to change policies, practices, or culture at work, in healthcare, or in the broader community.

### **Marcus and Lena's Story**

When Lena's doctor dismissed her sensory sensitivities as "just anxiety," Marcus spoke up, backing up Lena's description and requesting written instructions. Later, Lena advocated for Marcus at work, helping him request a quieter workspace. Their teamwork didn't just get results—it deepened their trust and pride in each other.

### **Why Advocacy Can Be Hard for Neurospecial Couples**

**Masking and People-Pleasing:** Many ND adults have spent years hiding their needs or trying to "fit in," making self-advocacy feel risky or exhausting.

**Fear of Rejection or Retaliation:** Speaking up can feel threatening, especially if you've faced stigma, discrimination, or gas-lighting.

**Communication Barriers:** Finding the words, remembering scripts, or managing emotional overwhelm can make it hard to advocate effectively in the moment.

**Unclear Rights:** Many don't know what accommodations or supports they're entitled to, or how to access them.

## **Building Your Advocacy Toolkit**

### **1. Know Your Rights**

**Workplace:** In many countries, laws like the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) or the Equality Act (UK) protect your right to reasonable accommodations. This can include flexible schedules, quiet spaces, written instructions, or sensory supports.

**Healthcare:** You have the right to clear communication, informed consent, and accommodations such as extended appointment times or sensory-friendly environments.

Education: If you are in school or have children, you may be entitled to IEPs (Individualized Education Programs), 504 plans, or other supports.

## **Resources:**

### **1. ADA National Network** - (<https://adata.org/>)

Autistic Self Advocacy Network -  
(<https://autisticadvocacy.org/>)

Understood.org - (<https://www.understood.org/>)

### **2. Practice Self-Advocacy**

- Identify your needs: What accommodations or supports would help you function and thrive? Prepare scripts or written notes for appointments or meetings. Use “I” statements: “I need...” “I find it helpful when...” “I am requesting...”

### **3. Support Each Other**

De-brief after advocacy experiences: What worked? What was hard?

Take turns being the “spokesperson” if one of you is more comfortable in certain settings.

Celebrate each other’s wins—big and small.

### **4. Engage in Systems Advocacy (If You Wish)**

Join neurodivergent-led organizations, write letters, participate in campaigns, or share your story (if you feel safe).

Remember: It is not your job to fix broken systems alone, but collective action can lead to real change.

### **Practice Scripts for Advocacy**

1. “I need written instructions, as I process spoken information differently.”
2. “Could I have a few minutes in a quiet space before we continue?”



3. “My partner and I communicate differently—please address both of us directly.”
4. “I am requesting a sensory-friendly environment for my appointment.”

### **Practice Exercise: Advocacy Planning**

**Solo:** Identify one situation where you wish you’d advocated for yourself. What stopped you? What would you like to try next time?

**Pairwork:** Role play an advocacy scenario (e.g., asking for accommodations at work, clarifying needs with a doctor). Practice scripts and offer each other feedback.

## **Navigating Pushback or Discrimination**

- **Know Your Allies:** Bring someone with you to appointments or meetings if possible.
- **Document Everything:** Keep written records of requests, responses, or incidents.
- **Seek Support:** Connect with advocacy organizations or legal resources if rights are denied.
- **Self-Care:** Advocacy is draining. Take breaks, recharge, and debrief with supportive people.

## **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What is one need I have that I'm afraid to express?
- b. How can I support my partner's advocacy journey?
- c. What does "being heard" feel like for me?

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Advocacy is a skill you can learn and practice—it gets easier with time.
- You and your partner are a team; mutual advocacy strengthens your bond.
- Your needs are valid, and you have a right to be accommodated and respected.
- Change is possible, and every act of advocacy matters.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Advocacy is not just about fighting for rights—it's about claiming space, dignity, and belonging for yourself and your relationship. Whether you're speaking up in a doctor's office, at work, or simply within your own home, every step you take is an act of courage. Together, your voices are stronger—and the world is better for hearing them.

## Chapter 17: Pets & Animal Companions

*"Some people talk to animals. Not many listen though. That's the problem."* — A.A. Milne

For many neurospecial couples, pets are more than just animals—they are family, friends, sensory balancers, and even co-regulators. From the steady purr of a cat to the enthusiastic greeting of a dog, animal companions can bring immense joy, routine, purpose, and comfort. In this chapter, we'll explore the therapeutic power of pets, the unique ways ND couples connect with animals, and practical tips for nurturing these special relationships.

### **Why Animals Feel So Different—and So Right—for Neurospecial People**

For countless neurospecial adults, animals aren't just easier to love—they're sometimes easier to understand and relate to than people. Many ND folks describe animals as "kindred spirits," noting that they find animals' signals clearer, their intentions more straightforward, and

their companionship more comfortable than many human interactions. Animals don't require small talk or masking. They don't judge, gossip, or expect you to intuit unspoken social rules. Their affection and acceptance are simple and unconditional.

It's common to hear:

- "I understand animals better than I understand people."
- "I'd rather be with my pets than at a party."
- "Animals just get me. No words needed."

This isn't a sign of weakness or "antisocial" tendencies. It's a reflection of the way many ND brains are wired for direct, honest, and sensory-based connection. When conversation is hard or the world feels overwhelming, tending to animals together can be a profound source of comfort and wordless bonding.

### **Why Pets Can Be So Good for Neurospecial Brains**

- Stress Relief: Interacting with animals can lower blood pressure, reduce anxiety, and increase oxytocin (the "bonding hormone") (Beetz et al., 2012).

- Routine & Structure: Pets need feeding, walking, and care—helping ND couples create daily routines.
- Sensory Regulation: Soft fur, rhythmic purring, or the gentle weight of a pet can soothe overwhelmed sensory systems.
- Nonjudgmental Companionship: Animals offer unconditional love and presence—no social scripts or masking required.
- Social Connection: Pets can be a bridge for meeting people and practicing social skills in low-pressure settings.

## **Neurospecial Sensitivity: Empathy, Rescue, and Healing**

Neurospecial people are often highly sensitive—not just to physical sensations, but to emotional undercurrents and suffering in others. Many NDs report a deep, almost instinctive empathy for animals, especially those who are

vulnerable or hurting. Sometimes, we feel an animal's distress almost as if it were our own.

This sensitivity often translates into a powerful drive to rescue, foster, and rehabilitate abused, neglected, or abandoned animals. The journey of earning an animal's trust and watching them heal mirrors the ND experience of seeking understanding, dignity, and safety in a sometimes-harsh world. For many, helping animals isn't just a hobby or a kindness—it's a calling, a way to give back what we wish the world had given us, and to create a chosen family of fellow survivors and healers.

For ND couples, sharing this work can be profoundly meaningful—a source of purpose, teamwork, and mutual healing.

### **Lance and Lili's Story: Rescuing Dogs, Rescuing Ourselves**

"In our own lives, animals are more than friends—they're family and fellow travelers on the neurospecial journey. Right now, our home is filled with the joyful chaos of 25 dogs. Running a dog rescue as a couple is a lot of work,

but it's also a shared passion that brings us together. Each dog's journey from fear to trust, from trauma to joy, is a reminder of our own path as neurospecial people. In saving them, we are also saving parts of ourselves".

### **Types of Animal Companions**

Dogs: Loyal, routine-oriented, often deeply attuned to their humans.

Cats: Independent, affectionate, and perfect for quiet companionship or sensory comfort.

Small mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish: Less demanding, still offer routine and fascination for special interests.

Service Animals: Specially trained to help with disability tasks (e.g., alerting to meltdowns, guiding during dissociation).

Emotional Support Animals (ESAs): Provide comfort and calming, often with documentation for housing/travel.



Therapy Animals: Visit hospitals, schools, or therapy sessions to provide comfort (not the same as service animals).

### **Therapeutic Benefits of Animals for Neurospecial People**

- Sensory Soothing: Stroking, holding, or lying with a pet can help regulate sensory input.
- Emotional Regulation: Animals can absorb and reflect emotional states, offering calm during distress.
- Reducing Meltdowns & Overload: Some ND people find pets help de-escalate or recover from shutdowns and meltdowns.
- Supporting Executive Function: Feeding, cleaning, and playing with pets creates external cues for time and structure.

- Combatting Loneliness & Isolation: Animals provide companionship without the pressure of human social rules.

### **Practice Exercise: Animal Connection Inventory**

**Solo:** List your favorite memories with animals (pets, therapy animals, even favorite animals in media). What did you feel during those times?

**Pair-work:** If you have a pet, discuss what each partner likes best about them and what responsibilities feel easiest or hardest. If you're considering getting a pet, list what you hope for and what worries you.

### **Considerations Before Adopting a Pet**

**Energy & Capacity:** Pets are a big responsibility. Consider your routines, executive function needs, and sensory sensitivities.

**Type of Animal:** Some pets are lower-maintenance (fish, reptiles); others require more time and energy (dogs, some birds).

**Allergies & Safety:** Be mindful of allergies, sensory triggers, and household safety.

**Finances:** Pets need food, vet care, and supplies—factor this into your budget.

**Shared Responsibility:** Discuss how you'll divide pet care, especially during tough times (burnout, illness, travel).

### **When Pets Become Part of the Couple's Story**

**Shared Bonding:** Caring for a pet can strengthen your partnership, create shared routines, and spark joy.

**Communication:** Use pets as a way to practice gentle communication and teamwork.

**Navigating Loss:** Pets' shorter lifespans mean grief is inevitable. Support each other through end-of-life decisions, mourning, and honoring your animal's memory.

## **Practice Scripts**

- a. “I’m overwhelmed. Can we take the dog for a walk together?”
- b. “I love the way our cat comes to check on us when we’re sad.”
- c. “Let’s make a pet care chart for tough days.”

## **Gratitude Journal**

Start a “pet gratitude” journal: write down small moments of joy your animal brings each day.

## **Mindfulness Log**

- 1. How do animals help me feel safe, calm, or connected?
- 2. What are my favorite parts of having a pet as a couple?
- 3. What routines or rituals involving pets bring us closer?
- 4. How do I want to honor my bond with my pet—now and in the future?

## Chapter Highlights

- Pets can be powerful partners in neurospecial wellbeing, offering comfort, structure, and unconditional love.
- Animal companionship can enrich your relationship, foster teamwork, and create a soothing home environment.
- Many neurospecial people and couples find animals easier to relate to than humans, and their empathy often leads them to rescue or rehabilitate those who are most vulnerable.
- The joy, comfort, and even grief of loving animals is part of a full and connected life.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Whether you share your life with a loyal dog, a purring cat, a flock of birds, or a tank of fascinating fish, animals have a unique way of touching ND hearts. Their presence brings play, comfort, and gentle companionship—reminding you that love doesn't always need words. In caring for your pets, you care for each other—and for yourselves.

## Chapter 18: Parenting as a Neurospecial Couple

*“To be in your children’s memories tomorrow, you have to be in their lives today.”*

— Barbara Johnson

Parenting is a journey filled with joy, exhaustion, learning, and surprises. For neurospecial (ND) couples, parenting brings unique challenges and rewards. You might be raising neurospecial children—or not. You might be co-parenting with ex-partners, navigating family expectations, or figuring out how to parent when routines, executive function, or sensory needs are difficult. This chapter explores how ND couples can parent with compassion, creativity, and self-acceptance.

### **Why Parenting Looks Different for Neurospecial Couples**

- Sensory Overload: Children (especially young ones) can be loud, unpredictable, and messy—potential triggers for ND parents.

- Executive Functioning: Keeping track of schedules, paperwork, meals, and chores may be overwhelming.
- Communication Styles: ND parents may prefer directness or need extra time to process emotions—sometimes clashing with children’s or other parents’ expectations.
- Masking & Burnout: Trying to appear “neurotypical” for your kids or outside observers can lead to exhaustion.
- Empathy & Advocacy: ND parents are often deeply empathetic and quick to recognize signs of difference or distress in their children.

### **Jamie and Noor's Story**

Jamie (autistic) and Noor (ADHD) are raising two kids—one ND, one not. Jamie struggles with noisy playdates and last-minute schedule changes; Noor forgets school forms and deadlines. Together, they use visual calendars, noise-cancelling headphones, and shared online lists.



They teach their kids about neurodiversity, celebrate each person's differences, and model self-acceptance. On tough days, they remind themselves: "Good enough is good enough."

### **Supporting Each Other as ND Parent Partners**

**Share Responsibilities by Strengths:** One parent may handle forms, another may excel at creative play or bedtime routines.

**Tag Team:** Agree on signals for when one parent needs a break. Trade off during meltdowns or high-stress moments.

**Communicate Openly:** Check in about energy, overwhelm, and support needs. Debrief after hard days.

**Model Self-Care:** Show your children that it's okay to rest, set boundaries, and ask for help.

## **Raising ND Kids (or Suspecting You Might Be)**

**Recognize Early Signs:** ND parents are often the first to notice neurospecial traits in their children.

**Advocate for Support:** Use your lived experience to seek IEPs, therapies, or accommodations while remembering that your child's needs may not mirror your own.

**Celebrate Differences:** Teach kids that there's no one "right" way to think, feel, or learn.

**Connect with Community:** Find ND-affirming parenting groups, online resources, or local support.

## **When Parenting Styles or ND Traits Clash**

**Talk It Out:** Discuss what's hardest for each of you and brainstorm creative solutions.

**Use Tools:** Visual schedules, reminders, quiet spaces, and sensory aids can help everyone.

**Avoid Blame: Remember: Struggling doesn't mean you're failing. Every family has rough patches. Focus on teamwork, not perfection.**

### **Parenting Strengths Inventory**

**Solo:** List three things you do well as a parent (big or small).

**Pair-work:** Share your lists. Celebrate your strengths and discuss ways to support each other in areas that are harder.

### **Navigating Stigma, Judgment, & “Advice”**

**Ignore the Critics:** Friends, family, or professionals may not understand your needs or parenting style. Trust your instincts.

**Find Your People:** Connect with other ND parents who understand the journey.

### **Practice Scripts for Outsiders:**

- a. “Every family is different.”
- b. “This works for us.”
- c. “We’re focusing on what’s best for our child.”

### **Coping with Overwhelm & Burnout**

- Plan Downtime: Schedule quiet time for yourself and your partner.
- Ask for Help: From each other, friends, or professionals. There's no shame in needing support.
- Let Go of Perfection: Good-enough parenting is real and valid.
- Teach Self-Advocacy: Let your kids see you advocating for your needs—they'll learn to do the same.

### **Mindfulness Log**

1. What's one thing I love about being a parent?
2. What's my biggest challenge, and how can my partner support me?

3. What do I want my children to remember about our family?
4. What ND trait or perspective do I hope to pass on to my kids?

### **Chapter Highlights**

- Parenting as ND partners is challenging, creative, and uniquely rewarding.
- Lean on your strengths, support each other, and let go of unrealistic expectations.
- Celebrate your family's differences; they are your superpower.
- Your children will learn resilience, empathy, and self-acceptance from watching you grow together.

## **Closing Thoughts**

There's no one right way to parent, especially as a neurospecial couple. What matters most is love, authenticity, and the willingness to adapt and learn together. Your journey is valid, your struggles are real, and your story is a gift to your children and to yourselves.

## Chapter 19: Growth Over Time

*“Love is not about how many days, months, or years you have been together. Love is about how much you grow together.”*

— Unknown

*“We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly, we grow. We are relative.”*

— Anaïs Nin

Every relationship is a journey. For neurospecial couples, the path may be winding, filled with unique challenges, unexpected joys, and continual learning. Growth is not linear—sometimes it’s slow, sometimes it leaps forward, sometimes it circles back. In this final chapter, we’ll reflect on how ND couples evolve, how to nurture your bond as you change, and why your story matters.

## **Embracing Change as a Couple**

Growth together means accepting that you and your partner will change—sometimes in ways you can predict, sometimes in ways you can't. The routines, coping strategies, and comfort zones that work for you now may shift over the years. New diagnoses, changing health, moves, children, career shifts, grief, or simply the passage of time all shape your partnership.

The key is not to resist change, but to grow through it—together.

### **Sam & Taylor, 20 Years Later**

Sam and Taylor, married for two decades, have weathered career changes, the diagnosis of one child as autistic, and their own evolving understanding of what it means to be a neurospecial couple. Early on, they struggled with communication and burnout. Now, they have rituals for reconnecting, a shared calendar system, and a deep, intuitive empathy for each other's needs.



Their relationship isn't "perfect"—but it's deeply theirs, and deeply resilient.

### **Growth Isn't Always Comfortable**

**Old Coping Skills May Stop Working:** Strategies that got you through your twenties may need updating as you age or as life circumstances shift.

**There May Be Setbacks:** Regression, burnout, health issues, or life crises can make you feel like you're "back at square one." This is normal.

**Emotional Growth Can Be Uneven:** One partner may move faster or in a different direction; that's okay. Allow space for each person's process.

## **Practices for Ongoing Growth**

**Regular Check-Ins:** Set aside time to talk about how things are going—what’s working, what’s not, what each of you needs.

**Celebrate Progress:** Notice and appreciate the small wins: a new coping skill, a resolved argument, a shared moment of joy.

**Stay Curious:** Keep learning about yourselves, each other, and neurodiversity. Read, share, explore.

**Adjust and Adapt:** Be open to tweaking routines, boundaries, and communication as you both grow.

**Forgive Imperfection:** Growth is messy! Self-compassion (and compassion for your partner) is essential.

## **Building a Legacy**

Your relationship doesn’t exist in isolation. By growing together, you show your children, friends, and community what it looks like to build a life rooted in authenticity and

mutual respect. You model hope for other ND couples, maybe even for your younger selves.

**Consider:**

What wisdom would you share with a newly diagnosed ND couple?

How can you pass on what you've learned—through mentoring, advocacy, or simply sharing your story?

**Practice Exercise: Looking Back, Looking Forward**

**Solo:** Write a letter to your past self at the beginning of your relationship. What do you wish you'd known? What can you celebrate?

**Pair-work:** Make a list of three ways you've grown as a couple. Then, dream together: what do you hope for in the next five or ten years?

**Mindfulness Log**

- a. How have I changed since our relationship began?
- b. What has surprised me about our journey together?
- c. What do I want to keep, and what am I ready to let go of?
- d. How can I support my partner (and myself) in growing and changing?

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Growth is a lifelong process. Don't expect perfection, just progress.
- Regular reflection, open communication, and flexibility keep your relationship strong.
- Your story matters and can inspire others.
- The journey itself, complete with its twists, turns, messes, and joys, is the heart of a neurospecial partnership.

## **Closing Thoughts**

As you close this book and look to the future, remember: your partnership is not defined by how “neurotypical” it looks, but by the authenticity, care, and resilience you bring to it. Every day you show up for each other, you are growing—sometimes in ways only you two will understand. Let your story be a celebration of difference, hope, and the power of growing together.

## Chapter 20: Fun Games to Play Together

*"Play is our brain's favorite way of learning."* — Diane Ackerman

Fun activities—games, outdoor adventures, or crafts—bring couples closer, especially when communication feels hard. Playing together builds teamwork, lowers stress, and creates positive memories.

### **Avery and Sam's Story**

Avery and Sam feel stressed after a long week. Instead of talking, they set up “Forbidden Island” and start playing. As they laugh and solve challenges together, the tension fades. Later, they take a walk in a quiet park, spotting birds and sharing stories. On Sunday, they try painting together, making silly art and enjoying the process more than the result.

## **Research Insight**

Studies show that shared leisure activities improve relationship satisfaction, problem-solving, and emotional bonding (Gager & Sanchez, 2003).

**Table: Connection-Boosting Activities**

Activity Type	Example Ideas	Why It Works	Tips
Board Games	- Hoot Owl Hoot! - Forbidden Island	Builds teamwork, encourages talking	Pick co-op games, avoid high-pressure
Outdoor Fun	Nature walks, birdwatching, picnics	Reduces stress, sparks conversation	Choose quiet spots, plan for sensory needs
Arts & Crafts	Painting, scrapbooking, bracelet-making	Fosters creativity, mindfulness	Focus on process, not perfection



## Activity Strategies

- Schedule regular game/craft nights: Try different activities and see what you both enjoy.
- Choose sensory-friendly settings: Visit quiet parks or museums, and avoid crowds when possible.
- Celebrate small wins: Cheer for teamwork, not just winning.
- Rotate who chooses the activity: Keeps things fresh and fair.

### Solo Exercise

Activity Wish List:

Write down three games, outdoor spots, or craft projects you'd love to try with your partner.

### Pair Activity Game Night Plan:

Each partner picks a favorite board game or outdoor activity. Try both this month, then talk about what you liked best and why.

## Mindfulness Log

## You, Me and AuDHD Relationship Tools

- a. What's my favorite way to play or relax with my partner?
- b. Which activities help me feel connected and calm?
- c. How did I feel after our last game night or creative project?

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Play and creativity strengthen bonds and lower stress.
- Board games, outdoor fun, and crafts offer safe, enjoyable ways to bond.
- Focus on enjoying the time together, not on winning or perfection

## **Practice Scripts**

- a. “Let’s try a new game this weekend.”
- b. “Want to go for a quiet walk together?”
- c. “I found a fun craft. Want to do it with me?”
- d. “It’s not about winning; I just love playing with you.”

## **Closing Thoughts**

Fun and play are essential parts of any relationship. By exploring new games, adventures, and creative projects, you build joy and resilience together—one laugh and one memory at a time.

## Chapter 21: Sensory-Friendly Activities for Couples

*"The senses are gateways to connection."* — Inspired by Temple Grandin

Sensory-friendly activities help couples relax, connect, and have fun without stress. Creating a comfortable space and choosing the right activities helps both partners feel safe and understood—especially for those with autism or ADHD.

### **Alex and Riley's Story**

Alex and Riley both find loud restaurants overwhelming. Instead, they create a cozy reading nook at home with soft lighting, gentle music, and a pile of blankets. On weekends, they try painting together and later take a quiet walk in the park, enjoying the fresh air and gentle sounds of nature.

## Research Insights

Research shows that sensory-friendly environments lower stress and improve well-being for neurospecial people (Ashburner et al., 2013).

**Table: Sensory-Friendly Ideas**

Preference	At Home	Out	Sensory
Quiet/Low Noise	Rugs, curtains, soft music, noise-canceling headphones	Nature walk, empty park, quiet cafe (off-peak times)	Birdwatch, gentle walks
Soft Lighting	Lamps, string lights, candles	Botanical gardens, twilight stroll	Sunset watching
Comfort/Touch	Weighted blanket, plush pillows, fidget toys	Bring cozy jacket, soft scarf	Cooking, crafting
Enjoying Scents	Lavender oil, fresh flowers	Rose garden, bakery	Baking, nature smells

## Activity Strategies

- Customize your space: Use soft colors, gentle lights, and items that feel good.
- Create a sensory toolkit: Have headphones, weighted blankets, or calming scents ready.
- Plan low-stimulation dates: Movie nights at home, painting, or quiet nature walks.
- Communicate needs: Use code words or signals if you need a break.
- Share sensory exploration: Try cooking, crafts, or nature walks together. Talk about what you each enjoy.

### **Solo Exercise**

My Comfort List:

Write down three sights, sounds, or textures that make you feel calm. Add one item to your space this week.

### **Pair Activity**

#### **Sensory Exploration Night:**

Take turns picking an activity—baking cookies, painting, or a gentle walk. Afterward, each partner shares which parts they enjoyed most and why.

### **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What makes a space feel safe and comfortable for me?
- b. Which sensory activities help me feel connected to my partner?
- c. How do I let my partner know when I'm overwhelmed?

### **Practice Scripts**

- “Can we make our space a little quieter/darker/more comfortable?”
- “I’m feeling overwhelmed—can we take a sensory break?”
- “Let’s try a new calming activity together this weekend.”
- “I love how cozy this feels with you.”

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Sensory-friendly activities help couples relax and connect, especially with autism or ADHD.
- Adjust your environment and choose gentle, low-stress activities.
- Talk openly about what feels good or overwhelming, and explore together.

## **Closing Thoughts**

You and your partner deserve comfort and fun, your way. By tuning into your sensory needs and enjoying gentle activities together, you create a safe space where connection can flourish.



## Chapter 22. Establishing Routines That Work

*"Rituals are the formulas by which harmony is restored."*  
— Terry Tempest Williams

Routines bring comfort and stability, especially for couples with ADHD or autism. Predictable schedules reduce stress, help manage symptoms, and make daily life smoother. Even small rituals, like weekly movie night, build shared memories and deepen connection.

### **Maya and Chris' Story**

Maya (autistic) and Chris (ADHD) both feel overwhelmed by unpredictable days. Together, they create a morning checklist: coffee, feed pets, review the day's plan. Every Thursday, they cook dinner together. These routines give them comfort, help them remember tasks, and provide moments to reconnect.

### **Research Insights**

Studies show that routines and daily structure lower stress and improve well-being for neurospecial individuals and their partners (Pallathra et al., 2019).

**Table: Routines That Build Connection**

<b>Routine Type</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Why It Helps</b>	<b>Tips for Success</b>
Daily Ritual	Morning coffee, checklists	Starts the day predictably	Keeps it simple and repeatable
Shared Calendar	Paper planner or phone app	Reduces forgetfulness, increases teamwork	Check together each evening
Weekly Bonding Time	Movie night, cooking session	Builds anticipation and joy	Rotate activity choice
Celebration Rituals	Ice cream after a goal, high-five	Reinforces teamwork & motivation	Celebrate even small wins

## **Activity Strategies**

- Start small: Pick one or two routines to begin with.
- Make it visual: Use checklists, calendars, or apps to track routines.
- Discuss and adjust: Talk about what's working and tweak as needed.
- Balance: Include time for work, rest, and fun.
- Celebrate: Mark achievements together, big or small.

**Solo Exercise**

Routine Reflection:

Write down your favorite daily or weekly ritual. Why does it help you? Is there a new one you'd like to try?

**Pair Activity**

Build a Shared Schedule:

Sit together and list what's important for each of you in a daily or weekly routine. Create a visual plan (chart, calendar, or app). Try it for a week, then review what went well and what could change.

**Mindfulness Log**

- a. How do routines make me feel?
- b. Which routines help my relationship most?
- c. What's one small ritual I want to add to our week?

## **Practice Scripts**

- a. “Let’s make a checklist for our mornings.”
- b. “What’s one thing we could add to our week to make it smoother?”
- c. “Can we review our schedule together tonight?”
- d. “I love our Friday ritual—it makes me feel close to you.”

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Routines create security, reduce stress, and strengthen bonds.
- Predictability helps manage ADHD and autism symptoms.
- Start simple, keep it visual, and celebrate every win together.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Routines aren’t about rigidity—they’re about making life easier and more joyful together. By building habits that fit both your needs, you create a foundation for teamwork, comfort, and deep connection.

## Chapter 23: Exploring Interests & Hobbies Together

*"Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow."* — Swedish Proverb

Discovering and sharing hobbies is a fun way to connect, learn about each other, and build new memories. Exploring different activities helps you find common ground, grow together, and add variety to your relationship.

### **Jules and Pat's Story**

Jules loves photography. Pat enjoys painting. They set up “art nights” where Jules takes photos and Pat paints scenes from them. Later, they pick one new hobby a month to try together—like salsa dancing or cooking a new recipe—writing down what they liked (or didn’t) in a shared journal.

## Research Insight

Research shows that shared leisure and hobby activities increase relationship satisfaction, communication, and emotional bonding in couples (Gager & Sanchez, 2003; Vanderbleek et al., 2011).

**Table: Making Hobbies Work for Both**

Step	Examples	Success Tips
Explore Together	Cooking, hiking, board games, art nights	Try something new each month
Mix Interests	Painting + photography, gardening + baking	Combine hobbies for creative fun
Keep a Hobby Journal	Notes, photos, or drawings	Review together to track favorites
Schedule Regularly	Hobby calendar, color-coded days	Make time just for shared fun
Try Challenges	Monthly recipe, art project, or trip	Embrace mistakes and celebrate small wins

## Activity Strategies

- Take online quizzes or use hobby apps to get ideas.
- Discuss likes/dislikes in a non-judgmental way.
- Combine interests for unique, shared activities.
- Schedule regular “hobby time” and keep a shared journal or calendar.
- Include “exploration days” to try something new together.

### Solo Exercise

Interest Inventory:

Write down your top three hobbies. Circle one you’d like to share or combine with your partner’s interests.

### Pair Activity

Hobby Brainstorm:

Sit together and list 10 activities you both might enjoy. Try one this week and write about the experience in your hobby journal.

## **Mindfulness Log**

1. What shared activity brought us the most joy recently?
2. How do I feel when we try something new together?
3. What's a hobby I'd like to explore with my partner next?

## **Practice Scripts**

- a. "What new activity should we try this month?"
- b. "Want to do an art night or a game night?"
- c. "Let's add that to our hobby calendar!"
- d. "Your interests inspire me to try new things."

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Exploring hobbies together builds connection, trust, and fun.
- Keep the process playful. Mistakes and surprises are part of the journey.
- A shared hobby calendar and journal help keep things organized and memorable.



## **Closing Thoughts**

Hobbies and interests bring color to your relationship. By exploring together, you create stories and traditions that are uniquely yours.

## Chapter 24. Managing Stress

*"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."* —  
Benjamin Franklin

Recognizing and managing stress is key for healthy relationships—especially when autism or ADHD are involved. Stress looks different for everyone: one partner may get restless, the other may withdraw. Noticing your own and your partner's stress signals makes it easier to communicate and support each other.

### **Morgan and Jamie's Story**

Morgan notices they're snapping at their partner more than usual. They realize they've been overwhelmed at work and are sensitive to noise. Together, Morgan and Jamie create a "stress signal" word and make a cozy relaxation corner with soft lights and fidget toys. When stress builds, they take a break together to breathe, listen to calming music, or just sit quietly.

## Research Insight

Research shows that understanding stress signs and practicing stress-management as a couple leads to better communication, less conflict, and improved well-being—especially for neurospecial couples (Padden & James, 2017; Antshel et al., 2016).

**Table: Stress Management for Couples**

Challenge	Recognize	Try This Together	Why It Helps
Stress Signals	Irritability, distraction, withdrawal	Stress signal word or gesture	Promotes early support & empathy
Overwhelm/ Anxiety	Body tension, noise sensitivity	Deep breathing, guided imagery	Calms body & mind, builds unity
Sensory Overload	Restlessness, need for routine	Create quiet relaxation space	Offers comfort & control
Different Stress Styles	One fidgets, one shuts down	Discuss & accept differences	Promotes understanding & connection

## **Activity Strategies**

- Notice your stress signals and share them with your partner.
- Create a “stress signal” word or gesture to communicate overwhelm.
- Build a toolkit of activities: deep breathing, walks, music, crafts.
- Design a relaxing space together; think soft lights, comfy seats, and favorite sensory items.
- Talk openly and adjust your strategies as you learn what works best for both.

### **Solo Exercise**

Track Your Triggers:

Write down three situations where you felt stressed this week. What signs did you notice? What helped (or would have helped) you feel better?

### **Pair Activity**

Create a Stress-Relief Toolkit:

Together, list activities and tools that soothe each of you. Put your toolkit in an easy-to-find spot—or make a “menu” of options for stressful times.

## **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What does stress look and feel like for me?
- b. How do I know when my partner is stressed?
- c. Which stress-relief techniques work best for us as a couple?

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Recognize your own and each other's stress signals early.
- Use shared stress-relief techniques to calm down together.
- Create a relaxation space and a toolkit to make stress management easy and fun.

## **Practice Scripts**

1. "I'm starting to feel overwhelmed. Can we use our stress signal?"
2. "Let's take a few deep breaths together."
3. "Want to sit in our relaxation corner for a bit?"
4. "What could help us both feel calmer right now?"

### **Closing Thoughts**

Stress is a part of every relationship, but with teamwork, early communication, and the right tools, you can weather the storms—and come out stronger together.

## Chapter 25: Celebrating Each Other's Differences

*"Strength lies in differences, not in similarities."* —  
Stephen R. Covey

Neuro-special couples often see the world in different ways. These different perspectives add color, creativity, and resilience to relationships. When you value each other's strengths, quirks, and viewpoints, you foster empathy, teamwork, and joy.

### **Taylor and Robin's Story**

Taylor loves planning every detail. Robin is spontaneous and creative. At first, these traits caused tension. But over time, they learned to appreciate each other's strengths: Taylor keeps things organized, Robin brings fresh ideas. Together, they create a "strengths list" and celebrate their differences with themed date nights that mix structure and surprise.

## **Research**

Studies show that celebrating neurodiversity in couples—recognizing and using each partner’s strengths—leads to greater relationship satisfaction, resilience, and deeper emotional bonds (Pallathra et al., 2019; Lau & Peterson, 2011).



**Table: Turning Differences into Strengths**

<b>What's Different</b>	<b>How to Celebrate It</b>	<b>Why It Works</b>
Planning vs. spontaneity	Alternate who plans date nights	Blends structure and fun
Detail-oriented vs. big-picture	Team up on projects, each using their strengths	Completes the puzzle
Sensory Needs	Accommodate with shared rituals and empathy	Builds trust and comfort
Communication Styles	Perspective nights, active listening	Grows understanding & empathy

### **Activity Strategies**

1. Have a “perspective night”: Each partner shares their view on a topic, then switches and explains the other’s view.
2. Build a strengths inventory: List each partner’s talents and quirks. Use them to divide tasks and celebrate each other.

3. Appreciate daily: Leave notes, share gratitude, and celebrate small quirks or talents.
4. Create unique traditions: Themed date nights, gratitude jars, or mini-celebrations for each other's passions.

### **Solo Exercise**

Strengths Reflection:

List three things you admire about your partner. How do their differences make your life richer?

### **Pair Activity**

Strengths Inventory Night:

Sit together and list your strengths and quirks. Brainstorm ways to use them as a team—at home or in fun activities. Update this list every few months.

### **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What's one difference I've learned to appreciate?
- b. How do our unique strengths complement each other?

- c. What's a fun way I can show appreciation for my partner this week?

### **Practice Scripts**

- a. "I love how your (quirk/strength) helps us as a team."
- b. "Let's try a perspective night on something fun."
- c. "Your ideas inspire me to see things differently."
- d. "Thanks for being you."

### **Chapter Highlights**

- Differences are assets. Celebrate them!
- Recognizing and using each other's strengths builds teamwork and trust.
- Daily appreciation and traditions help love grow.

### **Closing Thoughts**

A relationship built on appreciation for differences is strong, creative, and joyful. Embrace your unique mix, and let your partnership shine.

## Chapter 26: Date Night Ideas

*"Love doesn't make the world go round. Love is what makes the ride worthwhile."*

— Franklin P. Jones

Date nights don't have to be expensive or overwhelming. With a little creativity, you can design homey, low-cost, or themed date nights that honor your preferences, sensory needs, and interests—deepening your connection and making memories.

### **Ava and Drew's Story**

Ava and Drew want to connect but are on a budget and have different sensory needs. They try a themed movie night at home, complete with homemade snacks and cozy lighting. Another week, they take a nature walk and picnic in a quiet park. Sometimes, they pick a country and cook its food together, learning new words in that language. These special evenings become traditions they both look forward to.

## **Research**

Research shows that regular, intentional date nights increase intimacy, communication, and relationship satisfaction—especially for neurodiverse and long-term couples (Williamson et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2016).

**Table: Date Night Options for Every Couple**

Date Type	Example Ideas	Sensory-Friendly Tips
At-Home Cozy	Cook together, movie marathon, game night	Dim lights, soft music, comfy clothes
Low-Cost Outings	Park picnic, gallery free day, nature walk	Go at quiet times, bring familiar snacks
Themed Nights	Cultural cuisine, costume night, art/craft	Adapt themes for sensory comfort
DIY Projects	Paint, build, or craft something together	Use favorite materials/textures

**Activity Strategies**

1. Adapt each date to both partners’ sensory and comfort levels.
2. Try themed nights: dress up, cook new foods, or create a playlist together.
3. Make a regular date night schedule (weekly or monthly) to build anticipation.
4. Track your favorite activities in a “date night journal” for easy repeats.

### **Solo Exercise**

Date Night Wish-list:

List three low-cost or themed date ideas you'd like to try.  
Share with your partner and pick one for your next date.

### **Pair Activity**

Plan a Themed Night:

Together, choose a theme (favorite movie, culture, decade). Plan food, music, and activities to match.

Afterward, talk about what you enjoyed and how to make it even better next time.

### **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What's my favorite date night memory so far?
- b. How do I feel before and after our date nights?
- c. What new theme or activity would I like to try together?

### **Practice Scripts**

1. "Let's try a new theme for our next date night!"
2. "What would make tonight's date extra cozy for you?"

3. “I love our traditions. Want to add something new?”
4. “Thanks for planning this with me.”

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Date nights can be fun, affordable, and tailored to your needs.
- Themes, DIY, and sensory-friendly options keep things fresh and meaningful.
- Regular, intentional date time boosts connection and relationship happiness.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Date nights aren’t about perfection—they’re about connection. When you tailor your evenings to your unique relationship, you create joyful memories and keep your bond strong.



## Chapter 27: Bonding Through Technology

*"Technology is best when it brings people together."* —  
Matt Mullenweg

Technology can make relationships stronger, especially for neurospecial couples. From communication apps to fun video games and creative virtual dates, digital tools can help you stay connected, organized, and close—no matter where you are.

### **Kai and Morgan's Story**

Kai and Morgan have busy schedules and different communication needs. They use a shared calendar app to keep track of appointments and plan video game nights with Overcooked! each Friday. When apart, they cook dinner together over video chat, laughing at kitchen mishaps and sending each other memes throughout the week.

## Research Insight

Studies show that technology—like communication apps, shared calendars, and collaborative games—improves connection, organization, and satisfaction in neurodiverse and long-distance couples (Schillings et al., 2021; Hertlein & Ancheta, 2014).

**Table: Tech Tools for Connection**

Tool Type	Example Apps/Games	Benefit	ND Tips
Communication	Avaz, Card Talk, Cozi Calendar	Easier Sharing, less stress	Try visual & flexible tools
Task/Calendar	Google Calendar, Todoist	Shared routines, reminders	Color-code for clarity
Mindfulness Relaxation	Headspace/Calm	Guided relaxation, stress relief	Short, simple sessions
Video Games	Overcooked! Minecraft, Portal 2	Teamwork, fun, bonding	Pick co-op, low-pressure games
Virtual Dates	Teleparty, Zoom, VR apps	Shared experience, connection	Plan ahead, keep it playful

## **Activity Strategies**

1. Try different apps for communication, organization, and relaxation.
2. Set up a shared calendar for events, chores, and date nights.
3. Block out weekly game or virtual date times—make it a ritual.
4. Choose games or platforms that both partners enjoy and find accessible.
5. Keep tech use intentional—balance screen time with other activities.

### **Solo Exercise**

App Exploration:

Download a new communication or mindfulness app. Try it yourself, then share what you liked (or didn't) with your partner.

### **Pair Activity**

Tech Date Night:

Pick a co-op game, virtual tour, or video call cooking session. Afterward, talk about what worked and what could be more fun next time.

### **Mindfulness Log**

- a. Which tech tools make me feel closer and more supported?
- b. What's my favorite digital activity to share with my partner?
- c. How do I feel after our virtual or tech-based dates?

### **Practice Scripts**

- 1. "Want to try a new app to track our plans?"
- 2. "Game night this Friday?"
- 3. "Let's cook together over video chat tonight!"

4. “This app makes it easier for me to share how I feel.”

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Technology can strengthen communication, teamwork, and fun for neurodiverse couples.
- Use shared apps, games, and virtual dates to stay connected and organized.
- Try new tools together and adjust to what fits your relationship best.

## **Closing Thoughts**

With the right tech tools and habits, you can make distance and daily chaos easier to manage—transforming your screens into bridges for connection and joy.

## Chapter 28: Setting and Respecting Boundaries

*"Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves, even when we risk disappointing others."*

— Brené Brown

Boundaries are vital for healthy relationships, especially for neurospecial couples. They help each partner feel secure, understood, and respected. Setting boundaries protects your individual needs and creates space for closeness and trust.

### **Sam and Jordan's Story**

Sam (autistic) needs quiet time after work; Jordan (ADHD) loves to chat. They set a daily “quiet hour” for Sam, and Jordan uses this time for a solo hobby. They check in weekly to see if their boundaries still feel good, making adjustments as needed.

## Research

Research shows that clear, respectful boundaries improve relationship satisfaction, communication, and reduce conflict, especially in neurodiverse couples (Hartwell-Walker, 2020; Pakenham et al., 2005; AASPIRE, 2017).

**Table: Boundary-Building in Relationships**

What & Why	How to Communicate	How to Respect
Alone/quiet time	"I need 30 minutes to recharge"	Avoid interruptions, support solo time
Sensory limits	Loud noises overwhelm me	Lower TV, music volume, use headphones
Emotional space	"I need time to process"	Delay deep talks until both are ready
Social boundaries	"I prefer small gatherings"	Plan for quieter, shorter social events

## **Key Strategies**

1. Use “I” statements: “I need...” or “I feel...”
2. Be specific and kind: explain what helps and why.
3. Invite your partner’s input. Make boundaries a team process.
4. Check in regularly and adjust as life changes.
5. Treat boundaries as flexible preferences, not rigid rules.

### **Solo Exercise**

Boundary Reflection:

List one boundary that’s important to you and why. How can you communicate this clearly to your partner?



### **Pair Activity**

#### **Boundary Check-In:**

Set aside time to talk about one boundary for each partner. Brainstorm together how to honor them in daily life.

### **Mindfulness Log**

- a. When did I feel my boundaries were respected?  
How did it affect me?
- b. What's one boundary I'd like to clarify with my partner?
- c. How do I feel when I have enough personal space?

## **Practice Scripts**

1. “I need quiet time after work to recharge. Can we plan for that?”
2. “What boundaries feel important to you right now?”
3. “Let’s check in about our boundaries this weekend.”
4. “Thank you for respecting my need for space.”

## **Chapter Highlights**

- Boundaries create safety, trust, and room for individuality in relationships.
- Communicate needs calmly and clearly, using specific language.
- Respecting each other’s space strengthens the bond and reduces misunderstandings.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Boundaries are not walls—they’re bridges to better understanding and connection. By setting and respecting them, couples create a partnership where both can thrive.

## Chapter 29: Planning for the Future

*"The best way to predict the future is to create it."* —  
Peter Drucker

Planning for the future deepens your bond and makes dreams feel real. For neurospecial couples, breaking big goals into smaller steps, using visual or tech tools, and celebrating progress help keep things achievable and fun.

### **Alex and Morgan's Story**

Alex and Morgan dream of traveling together. They start a shared vision board—cutting out pictures of places they want to visit and adding quotes that inspire them. They use a goal-setting app to track their savings and plan monthly “dream check-ins” to celebrate progress and adjust their plans if needed.

### **Research**

Couple goal-setting and collaborative planning increase relationship satisfaction, motivation, and resilience,

especially when tools and steps are tailored to individual needs (Bodenmann et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2021).

**Table: Tools for Future Planning**

<b>Tool/Method</b>	<b>How to Use</b>	<b>Why It Helps</b>
Shared Journal	Write hopes, dreams & steps together	Encourages open communication
Vision Board	Collect images/quotes that inspire you both	Makes goals visual and concrete
Goal-Setting Apps	Track tasks, savings, and dates digitally	Keeps plans organized and shared
Progress Check-Ins	Monthly “dream dates” to review and adjust	Maintains motivation and teamwork
Rewards System	Celebrate milestones with treats or outings	Reinforces effort and progress

### **Activity Strategies**

1. Break big dreams into small, actionable steps.
2. Use visual tools (vision boards, charts) and digital apps to stay organized.
3. Have regular “dream check-ins” to celebrate wins and adapt plans.

4. Align individual and shared goals—support each other's passions.
5. Make the process creative and fun, not just practical.

### **Solo Exercise**

Dream Inventory:

List three personal dreams and three shared dreams.

Pick one to discuss with your partner this week.

### **Pair Activity**

Vision Board Night:

Gather supplies and create a shared vision board. Talk about why each image or quote matters to you.

### **Mindfulness Log**

- a. What small step can we take toward our dream this month?
- b. How do our individual dreams overlap?
- c. What have we already achieved together that makes me proud?

### **Practice Scripts**

1. “What dream should we work toward next?”
2. “Let’s check our vision board and see what inspires us.”
3. “How can I support your dream this month?”
4. “I love dreaming and planning with you.”

### **Chapter Highlights**

- Planning together builds connection, clarity, and excitement about the future.
- Use tools that match your strengths—visual, tactile, digital.
- Celebrate progress, no matter how small—the journey is as important as the goal.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Building your future as a team is all about sharing, supporting, and celebrating every step. When you dream together, you make the future brighter for both of you.

## Chapter 30: Therapeutic Activities

*“Play is our brain’s favorite way of learning.”* — Diane Ackerman

Building a resilient and joyful relationship means having a toolkit of strategies that support connection, understanding, and growth. For neurospecial couples (with autism, ADHD, or both), certain approaches—especially those that are playful, creative, or structured—can make a world of difference. This chapter gathers some of the best evidence-based tools and activities, with a special focus on therapeutic games and interventions. You’ll find activities you can try together, plus research insights to help you choose what works best for your unique partnership.

### Glossary

#### **DIRFloortime:**

DIR stands for “Developmental, Individual-differences, Relationship-based.” DIRFloortime is a therapeutic approach that uses play and emotional engagement to



support social, emotional, and intellectual growth, tailored to each person's unique profile.

**Mentalization:** The ability to understand your own and others' thoughts and feelings, building empathy and connection.

**Dance Movement Therapy:** Therapy that uses movement and dance to enhance emotional awareness and relationship quality.

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** A structured therapy focused on changing unhelpful thoughts and behaviors.

**Therapeutic Recreation:** Leisure activities designed to build social, cognitive, and adaptive skills.

**Gamified Physical Activity:** Exercise programs or apps that use game-like rewards and challenges to motivate participation.

**Video Game Interventions:** Digital games used as therapeutic tools to improve social and emotional skills.

## **Why Activities Matter**

Many neurospecial adults (and their partners) thrive with hands-on, experiential ways to connect. Therapeutic games and creative activities can:

- Reduce social pressure and lower anxiety
- Build emotional awareness and communication skills
- Foster joy and playfulness
- Strengthen teamwork and shared regulation

## **Research Insights**

Research shows that playful, movement-based, and gamified approaches aren't just for kids—they can help adults connect, too (Engelhard & Vulcan, 2021; García-Villamizar et al., 2017).

### **1. Play-Based & Affect-Based Strategies**

#### **DIRFloortime-Inspired Connection:**

DIRFloortime is a therapeutic approach that uses play and emotional interactions to enhance social, emotional, and intellectual growth.

Spend 10–15 minutes together engaging in an unstructured, playful activity (drawing, building, gentle roughhousing, or imaginative play). The goal isn't to “win” but to enjoy shared attention and emotional expression.

**Research Insight:** Play-based approaches like DIRFloortime help adults build emotional bonds and communication skills by focusing on shared enjoyment and affect (Engelhard & Vulcan, 2021; García-Villamizar et al., 2017).

**Mentalization Moments:**

Take turns describing what you think your partner might be feeling or thinking in a given moment (“I wonder if you feel tired after work—do I have that right?”). Then let your partner confirm, clarify, or add their own perspective.

**Why it works:** Practicing mentalization boosts emotional awareness and empathy, key skills for neurospecial couples.

## **2. Group and Social Interventions**

Join a Group CBT or Skills Workshop:

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a structured, evidence-based therapy that helps people recognize and change unhelpful thought patterns and behaviors.

Look for structured group programs focused on relationship skills, social interaction, or emotional regulation. Even attending a recreational class or group hobby together can build self-esteem and social comfort.

**Research Insight:** Group CBT and recreational group activities can improve social skills and life satisfaction for adults with ASD, with lower dropout rates than some individual therapies (Hesselmark et al., 2014).

## **3. Movement & Embodied Connection**

Dance Movement Therapy at Home:

Try a movement-based activity together, even simple swaying, mirroring each other's motions, or dancing to music in your living room.

**Research Insight:** Dance movement therapy supports emotional development and deepens relationship bonds in adults with ASD (Engelhard & Vulcan, 2021).

#### **4. Recreational and Gamified Activities**

##### **1. Therapeutic Recreation Programs:**

Sign up together for a board game night, art class, or join an online gaming group. Structured, enjoyable activities foster executive function, adaptive behaviors, and social skills—plus, they’re fun (García-Villamizar et al., 2017).

##### **2. Gamified Physical Activity:**

Use apps like PuzzleWalk, Pokémon Go, or other step-based games to motivate movement and explore outdoors together.

**Research Insight:** Gamified physical activity improves social interaction and well-being in adults with ASD (Kim et al., 2020).

### **Video Games for Social Skills:**

Play cooperative or turn-based video games together. Discuss strategies, celebrate victories, and reflect on teamwork.

**Research Insight:** Some games are designed specifically for therapeutic goals—look for those recommended by therapists or ASD organizations (Jiménez-Muñoz et al., 2021; Banskota & Ng, 2020).

## **5. Addressing Challenges & Comorbidities**

Be aware that co-occurring anxiety or depression is common. If you notice these issues, consider seeking a therapist who can integrate mental health support with relationship-building activities (Schweizer et al., 2024).

Not every intervention works for every couple. Try different approaches, and give yourself permission to skip what doesn't fit.

## Choosing What's Right for You

- Experiment: Try one new activity each week and discuss what works best for both partners.
- Adapt: Modify activities for sensory needs, energy levels, or personal interests.
- Reflect: Use a journal or worksheet to track what you enjoyed, what felt challenging, and what you want to try again.

**Table: Sample Activity Plan**

Day/Week	Activity Type	Notes for Next Time
Monday	Unstructured play	Felt silly, but laughed a lot
Wednesday	Board Game night	Worked with clear rules
Saturday	Dance in living room	Preferred slow songs

## **Quick Tips for Success**

- Set clear start/end times for each activity
- Use visual schedules or reminders
- Celebrate small wins
- Debrief after each activity: “What did you like?  
What could we change?”

## **Closing Thoughts**

Therapeutic games and activities—whether playful, movement-based, or digital—can support social, emotional, and relational growth in AuDHD couples. These approaches are low-pressure, enjoyable, and adaptable. Find what brings you both joy and connection, and make it a regular part of your relationship.



## Chapter 31: Special Focus - Co-Occurring Conditions

Neuro-special couples often find that their experiences extend beyond just autism or ADHD. Many individuals live with additional conditions that can shape how they communicate, connect, and navigate daily life. These "co-occurring" or overlapping conditions might bring unique challenges, but also new insights, strengths, and opportunities for empathy in your relationship.

If you or your partner are dealing with something not listed here, know that your experience is just as important. You can use these templates as a starting point for your own exploration, advocacy, and growth. This Special Focus section is a mini-guide.

For in-depth strategies, see the latest book in this series:

*You, Me and AuDHD: Real World Self Care & Survival Skills*, now available on Amazon.com

## Co-Occurring Conditions

- 1) Dyspraxia
- 2) Misophonia
- 3) Synesthesia
- 4) Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)
- 5) Dyslexia/Dyscalculia
- 6) Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- 7) Anxiety & Depression
- 8) Tourette's/Tics
- 9) Chronic Pain/Fatigue
- 10) PTSD/Trauma History
- 11) ARFID (Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder)
- 12) Demand Avoidance (PDA)
- 13) Procrastination
- 14) Rejection Sensitivity

## **1) Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder)**

### **What is Dyspraxia?**

Dyspraxia is a developmental coordination disorder that affects movement, planning, and fine motor skills, making daily tasks more challenging.

### **Casey's Story**

Casey gets anxious about trying new activities with their partner, Jamie, because they often trip, drop things, or struggle with tasks like tying shoes or riding a bike. Jamie learns to be patient, offers gentle help, and together they find activities that build Casey's confidence.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Struggles with chores, hobbies, or physical activities together
- Sensitivity to clumsiness being misunderstood as carelessness
- Anxiety about new routines or public activities
- May avoid certain tasks, leading to frustration or misunderstandings

**Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Creative problem-solving skills
- Perseverance and patience

**Practical Strategies:**

1. Choose joint activities that aren't highly physical or can be adapted for comfort
2. Break tasks into small, manageable steps
3. Use visual instructions or reminders for routines
4. Celebrate effort, not just results—encourage trying new things together
5. Practice patience and avoid jokes that could feel shaming
6. Consider occupational therapy resources for support

**Further Resources:**

- Dyspraxia Foundation  
(<https://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk>)
- Understood.org's guide to dyspraxia

## **2) Misophonia**

### **What is Misophonia?**

Misophonia is a condition where specific sounds, such as chewing, tapping, or breathing, trigger strong emotional reactions like anger, anxiety, or distress.

### **Sarah's Story**

Sarah feels overwhelmed by the sound of her partner chewing at dinner. She worries about snapping at him, while he feels confused by her sudden irritability. After talking, they agree to play soft background music during meals and establish a signal for when Sarah needs a break.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Triggers conflict or avoidance during shared meals or quiet activities
- Partners may misinterpret distress as anger or rejection
- Can cause anxiety, guilt, or frustration for both partners
- Makes some social or leisure activities challenging

### **Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Heightened awareness of the sensory environment
- Motivation for creative solutions and empathy-building

### **Practical Strategies:**

1. Use background music or white noise during meals or stressful times
2. Develop nonjudgmental signals for when a trigger occurs
3. Plan “quiet times” or safe spaces for decompressing
4. Communicate openly about triggers and needs
5. Consider professional support if reactions are severe

### **Further Resources:**

- Misophonia Association (<https://misophonia-association.org>)
- Sounds Like Misophonia (<https://www.soundslikemisophonia.com>)

### **3) Synesthesia**

#### **What is Synesthesia?**

Synesthesia is a neurological trait where stimulation of one sense involuntarily leads to experiences in another, such as seeing colors when hearing music or associating numbers with personalities.

#### **Alex's Story**

Alex hears music as swirling colors and finds certain voices “taste” sweet or bitter. When Alex describes these experiences, their partner, Sam, is fascinated and learns to ask about Alex’s perceptions, making conversations more engaging and intimate.

#### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- May create communication gaps if experiences are misunderstood
- Can affect choices in music, art, or even names/words
- Sensory overload may occur in stimulating environments

- Offers unique insights into sensations and emotions

**Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Enhanced creativity and emotional expression
- Unique sensory experiences to share and bond over

**Practical Strategies:**

1. Encourage sharing of synesthetic experiences in a judgment-free way
2. Integrate sensory preferences into shared activities (e.g., art, music)
3. Be patient with sensory overload or strong preferences
4. Use synesthetic insights to enhance connection (e.g., “What color is our date night?”)

**Further Resources:**

- Synesthesia.org (<https://www.synesthesia.org>)
- American Synesthesia Association (<https://synesthesia.info>)



## **4) Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)**

### **What is Sensory Processing Disorder?**

SPD is a condition where the brain has trouble receiving and responding to sensory input, leading to over- or under-sensitivity to sights, sounds, textures, tastes, or smells.

### **Jordan's Story**

Jordan withdraws from social events because loud noises and bright lights feel overwhelming. Their partner, Taylor, learns to choose quieter venues and always carries earplugs and sunglasses for support.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Challenges with shared environments (restaurants, events, travel)
- May avoid or seek extra sensory input (touch, movement, etc.)
- Can lead to misunderstandings about “pickiness” or “avoidance”
- Impacts intimacy and daily routines

**Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Deep appreciation for supportive environments
- Often creative in finding sensory-friendly solutions

**Practical Strategies:**

1. Plan outings with sensory needs in mind (off-peak hours, quiet spaces)
2. Use sensory tools (earplugs, weighted blankets, fidget items)
3. Communicate preferences and boundaries openly
4. Celebrate small wins when trying new activities
5. Build sensory-friendly routines at home

**Further Resources:**

- STAR Institute for Sensory Processing  
(<https://www.spdstar.org>)
- Sensory Processing Disorder Foundation  
(<http://www.spdfoundation.net>)

## **5) Dyslexia/Dyscalculia**

### **What is Dyslexia/Dyscalculia?**

Dyslexia affects reading, writing, and spelling, while dyscalculia affects understanding numbers and math. Both are learning differences, not a reflection of intelligence.

### **Jamie's Story**

Jamie dreads games that involve reading cards aloud, while their partner, Lee, struggles with handling the household budget. They work together to use audiobooks, speech-to-text apps, and budgeting tools that make tasks easier for both.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Frustration or avoidance around reading/writing tasks or finances
- Miscommunications if difficulties are mistaken for lack of effort
- Strain during joint projects or planning
- May impact self-esteem

**Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Creative problem-solving and out-of-the-box thinking
- Often strong in visual, spatial, or oral communication

**Practical Strategies:**

1. Use assistive technology (text-to-speech, calculators, budgeting apps)
2. Divide tasks based on strengths, not stereotypes
3. Practice patience and celebrate effort, not just outcomes
4. Communicate openly about challenges and support needs
5. Seek professional support if needed

**Further Resources:**

- International Dyslexia Association  
(<https://dyslexiaida.org>)
- Dyscalculia.org (<https://www.dyscalculia.org>)

## **6) Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**

### **What is OCD?**

OCD is a mental health condition marked by unwanted, recurring thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviors or rituals (compulsions) performed to reduce anxiety.

### **Casey's Story**

Casey needs to check the door locks several times each night, which delays bedtime routines. Their partner, Morgan, learns not to rush Casey but also gently encourages them to talk with a therapist about new strategies.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Disrupts routines or causes delays
- Can lead to conflict if compulsions are misunderstood
- May create secrecy or shame for the partner with OCD
- Impact on intimacy, spontaneity, or shared plans

**Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Attention to detail and reliability
- Deep empathy for others' stress or anxiety

**Practical Strategies:**

1. Learn about OCD together to build understanding
2. Develop routines that accommodate both partners' needs
3. Encourage professional help for severe symptoms
4. Use nonjudgmental language and avoid "just stop" advice
5. Celebrate progress, no matter how small

**Further Resources:**

- International OCD Foundation (<https://iocdf.org>)
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America (<https://adaa.org>)

## **7) Anxiety & Depression**

### **What are Anxiety & Depression?**

Anxiety is ongoing, excessive worry or fear, while depression involves persistent sadness, low motivation, and loss of interest in activities.

### **Sam's Story**

Sam often cancels plans last minute due to overwhelming worry, while their partner, Riley, sometimes feels too low to get out of bed. They learn to check in daily, offer gentle support, and celebrate small victories like going for a walk together.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Changes in energy, motivation, or social life
- Difficulty making or keeping plans
- Misunderstandings about “laziness” or “disinterest”
- Can lead to isolation or resentment

### **Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Increased empathy for others' struggles
- Often skilled at self-reflection

**Practical Strategies:**

1. Establish daily check-ins and routines
2. Encourage breaks and self-care
3. Use therapy and support groups if needed
4. Communicate openly about feelings and limits
5. Celebrate small steps and be patient with setbacks

**Further Resources:**

- Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
(<https://adaa.org>)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (<https://nami.org>)



## **8) Tourette's/Tics**

### **What is Tourette's/Tics?**

Tourette's syndrome is a neurological condition involving repetitive, involuntary movements and sounds (tics). Tics can be simple or complex and may vary over time.

### **Marcus' Story**

Marcus sometimes blurts out sounds or words and makes sudden movements, especially when stressed. His partner, Jen, learns to ignore the tics, reassure Marcus when he's embarrassed, and advocate for him in social settings.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Embarrassment or anxiety in public or group settings
- Misunderstandings if tics are seen as intentional
- Can lead to teasing, isolation, or self-consciousness
- Tics may increase with stress

**Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Resilience in facing social challenges
- Often a great sense of humor and perspective

**Practical Strategies:**

1. Learn about Tourette's together; educate friends/family as needed
2. Develop signals for when support is needed
3. Practice patience and avoid drawing attention to tics
4. Build routines and safe spaces to reduce stress
5. Encourage professional support if tics impact daily life

**Further Resources:**

- Tourette Association of America (<https://tourette.org>)
- Tourettes Action (UK) (<https://www.tourettes-action.org.uk>)

## **9) Chronic Pain/Fatigue**

### **What is Chronic Pain/Fatigue?**

Chronic pain and fatigue are ongoing physical symptoms that persist for months or years, often associated with conditions like fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, or autoimmune disorders.

### **Taylor's Story**

Taylor sometimes cancels plans last minute due to exhaustion or pain flare-ups. Their partner, Jamie, learns to adapt plans, offer comfort, and celebrate days when Taylor feels well enough to go out.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Unpredictable schedules and last-minute changes
- Limitations on physical activities or intimacy

- Emotional stress for both partners
- Can cause guilt, frustration, or feelings of helplessness

**Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Strong communication and empathy skills
- Deep appreciation for good days and small joys

**Practical Strategies:**

1. Plan flexible, low-energy activities and backup plans
2. Communicate openly about daily limits and needs
3. Divide chores/tasks according to current ability
4. Prioritize comfort and rest for both partners
5. Seek medical/professional support as needed

**Further Resources:**

- US Pain Foundation (<https://uspainfoundation.org>)
- ME Association (<https://www.meassociation.org.uk>)

## **10) PTSD/Trauma History**

### **What is PTSD/Trauma History?**

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop after exposure to trauma and may include flashbacks, anxiety, emotional numbness, and avoidance of triggers.

### **Jordan's Story**

Jordan sometimes startles at loud noises or avoids crowded places. Their partner, Chris, learns to ask about triggers, offer grounding techniques, and join Jordan in therapy sessions for support.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Avoidance of certain people, places, or activities
- Sudden mood changes or emotional distance
- Difficulty with intimacy or trust

- Can trigger anxiety, anger, or withdrawal

**Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Heightened empathy for others' pain
- Strong coping and survival skills

**Practical Strategies:**

1. Learn about trauma and triggers together
2. Practice grounding or calming techniques as a couple
3. Create safe words/signals for overwhelming situations
4. Support therapy or professional help
5. Be patient and celebrate progress, no matter how small

**Further Resources:**

- National Center for PTSD (<https://www.ptsd.va.gov>)
- Sidran Institute (<https://www.sidran.org>)



## **11) ARFID (Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder)**

### **What is ARFID?**

ARFID is an eating disorder characterized by extremely selective eating and avoidance of certain foods based on texture, appearance, taste, or past negative experiences—not related to weight or body image concerns.

### **Morgan's Story**

Morgan finds most foods unappealing or even frightening, especially those with certain textures. Their partner, Sam, used to feel frustrated when their favorite meals were rejected, but after learning about ARFID, Sam gets creative—offering safe foods and joining Morgan in exploring new options without pressure.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Challenges with shared meals, dates, or social eating situations
- Limited food choices causing frustration or misunderstandings
- Stress or anxiety around cooking, meal planning, or eating out
- Risk of nutritional deficiencies or health concerns for the ARFID partner

### **Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Heightened sensory awareness and attention to detail
- Builds creativity and empathy in problem-solving together

### **Practical Strategies:**

1. Have open, nonjudgmental conversations about food preferences and triggers

2. Plan meals around “safe foods” and gradually introduce new options
3. Avoid pressure or shaming around eating—celebrate even small steps
4. Prepare for social situations by bringing safe foods or eating beforehand
5. Seek support from dietitians or therapists familiar with ARFID if needed

**Further Resources:**

- National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA): [ARFID Information](<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/learn/by-eating-disorder/arfid>)
- ARFID Awareness UK: [arfidawarenessuk.org](<https://www.arfidawarenessuk.org/>)

## **12) Demand Avoidance (PDA/Pathological Demand Avoidance)**

### **What is Demand Avoidance (PDA)?**

Demand Avoidance, sometimes called Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA), is a profile on the autism spectrum characterized by an extreme avoidance of everyday demands and expectations, driven by anxiety rather than willfulness.

### **Taylor's Story**

Taylor often resists even simple requests, like “Let’s get ready for dinner,” and can become anxious or distressed when pressured. Their partner, Jamie, used to feel rejected or frustrated by this behavior, but after learning about PDA, Jamie starts offering choices and uses collaborative, low-pressure language, which helps Taylor feel more in control and connected.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Resistance to requests or everyday routines, even for preferred activities

- Anxiety or distress when feeling controlled or pressured
- Sudden mood changes or emotional outbursts in response to perceived demands
- Strain or misunderstanding when one partner feels ignored or defiant

**Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Highly creative, resourceful, and adaptable in finding ways to navigate the world
- Deep empathy for others experiencing anxiety or overwhelm

**Practical Strategies:**

1. Use indirect, collaborative language (e.g., “Would you like to...?” or “What’s a good time for...?”)
2. Offer choices and options rather than direct instructions
3. Reduce pressure and allow extra time for transitions or decisions
4. Recognize anxiety as the cause, not willful defiance
5. Celebrate small steps, and be patient with yourself and your partner

6. Seek support from professionals who are familiar with PDA if needed

**Further Resources:**

- PDA Society (UK):

[[www.pdasociety.org.uk](http://www.pdasociety.org.uk)](<https://www.pdasociety.org.uk>)

- National Autistic Society (UK): [PDA

Information](<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/diagnosis/pda>)

## **13) Procrastination**

### **What is Procrastination?**

Procrastination is the habitual or intentional delay of starting or completing tasks, often despite knowing there may be negative consequences. It is common in neurospecial individuals, especially those with ADHD, anxiety, perfectionism, or executive function differences.

### **Jamie's Story**

Jamie and Alex both want to tidy up their apartment, but find themselves distracted by screens, snacks, and other activities. Jamie feels guilty and overwhelmed, while Alex gets frustrated with last-minute scrambles. After learning more about procrastination, they try breaking tasks into tiny steps, set “work together” timers, and celebrate small wins, making chores feel less daunting.

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Frustration or tension when tasks are delayed or left unfinished
- Stress from last-minute rushes or missed deadlines

- Feelings of guilt, shame, or resentment in both partners
- Can lead to conflict about shared responsibilities and expectations

**Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Creative problem-solving under tight timelines
- Flexibility and adaptability when plans change

**Practical Strategies:**

1. Break big tasks into small, manageable steps
2. Use “body doubling” (working alongside your partner for accountability)
3. Set short, timed work sessions (like the Pomodoro Technique)
4. Prioritize celebrating progress, not perfection
5. Establish shared routines or checklists for recurring tasks
6. Practice self-compassion and openly discuss struggles with procrastination

**Further Resources:**

- “Procrastination: Why You Do It, What to Do About It Now” by Jane B. Burka and Lenora M. Yuen



- ADDitude Magazine: [Procrastination & ADHD  
Resources]

(<https://www.additudemag.com/category/manage-your-life/time-management/procrastination/>)

## **14) Rejection Sensitivity**

### **What is Rejection Sensitivity?**

Rejection sensitivity is an intense emotional reaction to perceived or actual rejection, criticism, or disapproval. It is especially common in people with ADHD, autism, and those who have experienced trauma or bullying, and is sometimes referred to as Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD).

### **Ava and Chris' Story**

Ava's partner, Chris, comes home tired and forgets to greet her with a hug. Ava immediately feels hurt and worries that Chris is upset with her or falling out of love. When Chris notices Ava withdrawing, he reassures her that he's just exhausted. They talk about Ava's feelings and come up with a simple check-in routine whenever something feels "off."

### **How It Can Affect Relationships:**

- Misinterpreting neutral actions as personal rejection

- Avoidance of honest conversations to protect against hurt
- Emotional outbursts or withdrawal after perceived criticism
- Increased anxiety in situations involving feedback or conflict

**Strengths or Unique Perspectives:**

- Heightened empathy and sensitivity to others' feelings
- Strong desire to connect, support, and maintain harmony

### **Practical Strategies:**

1. Develop open communication about feelings and triggers
2. Use gentle, explicit reassurance and clarify intentions (“I’m not upset with you, just tired”)
3. Create check-in rituals for moments of uncertainty
4. Practice self-soothing techniques (deep breathing, positive self-talk)
5. Work together to recognize and challenge distorted thoughts
6. Consider therapy or support groups if rejection sensitivity severely impacts daily life

### **Further Resources:**

- ADDitude Magazine: [Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD)](<https://www.additudemag.com/rejection-sensitive-dysphoria-adhd-emotional-dysregulation/>)
- CHADD: [Understanding RSD](<https://chadd.org/adhd-weekly/rejection-sensitive-dysphoria-and-adhd/>)

## **Closing Thoughts**

Living and loving as a neurodiverse couple can involve navigating a complex landscape of needs, sensitivities, and strengths. By learning about co-occurring conditions—and supporting each other with openness, curiosity, and compassion—you strengthen the foundation of your relationship.

Remember that challenges don't define you or your partnership. Instead, they can become opportunities for greater understanding, teamwork, and resilience. Don't hesitate to seek out professional support, connect with others who share your experiences, or adapt these strategies to fit your unique story.

Above all, celebrate the creativity, adaptability, and empathy that come from facing life's complexities together. You are not alone, and every step you take toward understanding and supporting each other is a victory.

## Chapter 32: Resources for Continuous Growth

No matter where you are on your relationship journey, you're never alone. There's a vibrant world of resources—books, communities, workshops, and professionals—ready to support your growth as a neurodiverse couple. Think of this chapter as your launching pad for ongoing discovery, learning, and connection. Explore what resonates, try things together, and remember: reaching out for support is an act of strength, not weakness. Your relationship deserves every chance to thrive.

### 1. Recommended Books and Websites

Expanding your toolkit as a couple can be both fun and empowering. Here are some of the most helpful books, websites, and media for deepening your understanding of autism, ADHD, and relationships:

#### **Books:**

- New Release - *You, Me & AuDHD: Real World Strategies and Survival Skills* by Dr. Lili Castille

Easy-to-read, easy-to-do tools for handling a wide range of neurodiverse experiences, with real-world examples, research, and actionable tips.

- *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome* by Tony Attwood

A comprehensive, accessible reference for understanding autism at all ages and stages.

- *Driven to Distraction* by Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey

Classic, insightful guide to living well with ADHD, packed with practical advice.

#### Websites & Online Communities:

- Autism Speaks

([autismspeaks.org])(<https://www.autismspeaks.org>)

Articles, toolkits, and community stories about autism.

- Understood.org

([understood.org])(<https://www.understood.org>)

Support, tips, and resources for people with ADHD, learning differences, and their families.

- The Mighty

([themighty.com])(<https://www.themighty.com>)

A welcoming online space for people to share neurodiverse experiences and find community.

- Facebook Groups & Online Forums
- Neurospecial-affirming therapists and relationship coaches
- Online communities: [Wrong Planet](<https://wrongplanet.net>), [NeuroClastic](<https://neuroclastic.com>), [ADDA](<https://add.org>)



Media:

- Autism and Love (documentary)

A heartfelt exploration of relationships featuring individuals on the autism spectrum, perfect for watching together.

Tips for Using These Resources:

- Browse together and discuss what stands out—turn it into a book club or documentary night!
- Try out exercises or conversation starters from books and articles.
- Join online communities for encouragement, advice, and a sense of belonging.

## **2. Support Groups and Workshops**

Connecting with others who share your experiences can be transformative. Whether online or in person, support groups and workshops offer space to share stories, learn new strategies, and realize you're not alone.

Support Groups:

- Online forums (Reddit, Facebook, Discord): Connect any time, ask questions, and share wins or struggles.
- Local meetups & community centers: Many cities have neurodiverse-friendly groups—try searching Meetup.com or asking your local autism/ADHD organizations.
- Couples-specific groups: Some are just for partners navigating neurodiverse relationships, providing a safe and validating space.

#### Workshops:

- Focused on communication, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and more.
- Led by therapists or coaches who “get it”—offering practical tools and interactive exercises.
- Great way to build new skills, get feedback, and meet other couples.

#### How to Get the Most Out of Support:

- Try a few different groups or workshops to find your best fit.
- Keep a journal of insights, questions, and new ideas from meetings or sessions.
- Don't be afraid to participate—your story might help someone else.

- Celebrate the courage it takes to reach out and connect!

### **3. Professional Help When Necessary**

Sometimes, the most loving thing you can do is ask for professional guidance. Therapy isn't just for crisis—it's a path to deeper understanding, better communication, and renewed intimacy.

When to Consider Professional Support:

- Arguments or misunderstandings seem to repeat, no matter how hard you try.
- You feel distant, stuck, or unsure how to move forward.
- Communication feels like a struggle, even on simple topics.
- One or both partners are experiencing burnout, anxiety, or depression.

Finding the Right Therapist:

- Look for professionals with experience in autism, ADHD, or neurodiverse relationships.

Use directories like Psychology Today, TherapyDen, or local neurodiversity organizations.

- Read reviews, ask for recommendations, and don't hesitate to interview potential therapists—both partners should feel comfortable and understood.
- If possible, choose a therapist who is neurospecial themselves or has a strong track record with neurodiverse couples.

#### **Making the Most of Therapy:**

- Set small, realistic goals together: better communication, more fun, or learning to manage stress as a team.
- Be honest about what's working and what's not—therapy is your safe space to try, learn, and grow.
- Remember: seeking help is an act of hope and love, not failure.

### **Chapter Highlights**

#### **Books & Websites:**

- Explore together—books, documentaries, and online communities can spark growth and new understanding.

#### **Support Groups & Workshops:**

- Find your tribe. Sharing your journey with others can ease loneliness and inspire new strategies.

**Professional Help:**

- Therapy is a tool for thriving, not just surviving. The right support can transform your relationship.

**Closing Thoughts**

Your journey together is unique and ongoing. Every couple faces ups and downs, but with the right resources, support, and willingness to reach out, you can continue to grow side by side. Don't hesitate to try new tools, seek connection with others, or call in expert help when you need it. The most important resource you have is each other and your shared commitment to learning, loving, and thriving as a team.

Thank you for letting this book be a part of your story. Here's to your continuous growth together.

## Thank You

I appreciate your reading this book all the way to the end.

Before you go, would you please **post a review on the Amazon platform** to support my work?

It would be very helpful to get your feedback. Thank you!

**Leave a review on Amazon US <<**

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