



Navigating Love and Life: A Supportive Guide for Neurodiverse Couples

———— RABBI SHLOMO SLATKIN, MS, LCPC ————

www.themarriagerestorationproject.com

Introduction

Brief Overview of Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to the wide range of neurological differences that exist among individuals. These differences can include conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, and more. When neurodiverse individuals come together in a romantic relationship, it can bring unique challenges and opportunities for growth.

This guide is designed to help neurodivergent couples better understand and navigate their relationship. By fostering empathy, communication, and mutual support, you can build a strong and fulfilling partnership.

With best wishes for your relationship success,
Rabbi Shlomo Slatkin, M.S., LCPC

Personal Experiences and Understanding of Neurodiversity

This exercise aims to help you explore your personal experiences and understanding of neurodiversity. It will lay the foundation for further discussions and self-awareness in your journey of understanding and supporting neurodiversity.

SELF-REFLECTION

Take some time to reflect individually on your own neurodivergent traits and how they impact your relationship. Consider the following questions:

- What neurodivergent traits or conditions do I have?
- How do these traits affect my daily life and interactions with others, especially in the context of our relationship?
- What strengths do my neurodivergent traits bring to our relationship?

RECOGNIZING DIFFERENCES

List the neurodivergent traits or conditions that each partner has. This exercise can help both partners understand each other better.

Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

Next, discuss the differences in your neurodivergent traits openly and without judgment. Acknowledge the unique perspectives and experiences each partner brings to the relationship.

EMPATHY AND COMMUNICATION

Empathy is crucial in any relationship, but it's especially important in neurodivergent couples.

Discuss ways to improve your communication and understanding of each other's needs. Consider the following questions:

- How can we actively listen and show empathy when one of us is struggling due to neurodivergent traits?
- Are there certain communication strategies that work better for us than others?
- How can we create a safe space for discussing sensitive topics related to neurodiversity?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

SETTING BOUNDARIES

Discuss and establish clear boundaries in your relationship. Boundaries can help create a sense of security and comfort for both partners. Consider the following:

- **What are some specific boundaries that can help us manage potential challenges related to our neurodivergent traits?**
- **How can we respect each other's boundaries even when our neurodivergent traits may affect our ability to do so consistently?**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Factsheet about ADHD

Fact: ADHD is a disorder that makes it difficult for a person to pay attention and control impulsive behaviors. It is not just about 'too much energy' or being 'unfocused'.

Fact: ADHD is Not Just for Kids: While ADHD is often associated with children, it can persist into adulthood. In fact, it's estimated that around 60% of children with ADHD continue to experience symptoms in adulthood.

Fact: Gender Differences: ADHD is often underdiagnosed in girls and women, as they may display different symptoms and coping strategies compared to boys and men.

Fact: Individuals with ADHD often process emotions differently, which can lead to intensity, impulsivity, and sensitivity. They express deeply, care passionately, but may also find conflict and confrontation more challenging.

Fact: ADHD doesn't necessarily hinder a relationship. It presents unique patterns of interaction like spontaneity and intensity that, when understood and managed properly, can foster an exciting and thriving relationship.

Fact: With understanding, patience, and strategies, couples where one or both individuals have ADHD can build strong and meaningful relationships.

Factsheet about Aspergers* or Autism Spectrum Disorder

***Aspergers is no longer used as a clinical diagnosis but since many people still identify with it we will continue to use it for teaching purposes.**

Fact: Named After Hans Asperger. Asperger's syndrome is named after the Austrian pediatrician Hans Asperger, who first described the condition in the 1940s.

Fact: Unique Interests and Specializations: People with Asperger's often have intense and focused interests in specific topics. These interests can lead to expertise in various fields.

Fact: Social Challenges: Individuals with Asperger's may struggle with social interactions and non-verbal communication. However, they can also have strong, deep relationships with a few close friends.

Fact: Routine and Predictability: Many people with Asperger's find comfort in routines and predictability. Changes in plans or unexpected events can be challenging to handle.

Fact: Overlapping Conditions: Asperger's often co-occurs with other conditions such as anxiety, depression, and ADHD, making diagnosis and treatment complex.

Fact: With understanding, patience, and strategies, couples where one or both individuals have ADHD can build strong and meaningful relationships.

CELEBRATING STRENGTHS

Take time to acknowledge and celebrate the unique strengths that each partner's neurodivergent traits bring to the relationship. Write down three positive aspects of each partner's neurodiversity.

Partner 1:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Partner 2:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Common Challenges in Neurodiverse Relationships

Neurodiverse couples may encounter unique challenges due to differences in sensory sensitivities, communication styles, and more. This section will help you address and resolve these challenges effectively.

MISCOMMUNICATION

Neurodiverse individuals may have different ways of communicating, which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, necessitating patience and understanding from both partners.

DIFFICULTY EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

Some neurodiverse individuals might have trouble expressing their emotions and understanding their partner's feelings, which may create tension in the relationship.

DIFFERING SENSORY SENSITIVITIES

Partners in a neurodiverse relationship may experience varying levels of sensory sensitivities that require adaptation and compromise.

DIFFICULTY MANAGING IMPULSIVITY

Impulsivity can be challenging to manage in neurodiverse relationships and might lead to conflicts.

READING NON-VERBAL CUES

Neurodiverse individuals may struggle to interpret non-verbal cues, making it harder for their partners to communicate emotions or needs effectively.

SOCIAL STIGMA AND IGNORANCE

Unfortunately, social stigma and misunderstandings about neurodiversity might exacerbate these difficulties, leading to additional stress in the relationship.

Understanding Common Challenges in Neurodiverse Relationships

We're here to explore and support each other in understanding the unique challenges neurodiverse couples may face. In doing so, we learn to empathize, care and create a deeper bond within our relationships.

Reflect on each challenge listed below and discuss ways you can approach them with empathy and understanding.

CHALLENGE 1: COMMUNICATION STYLES

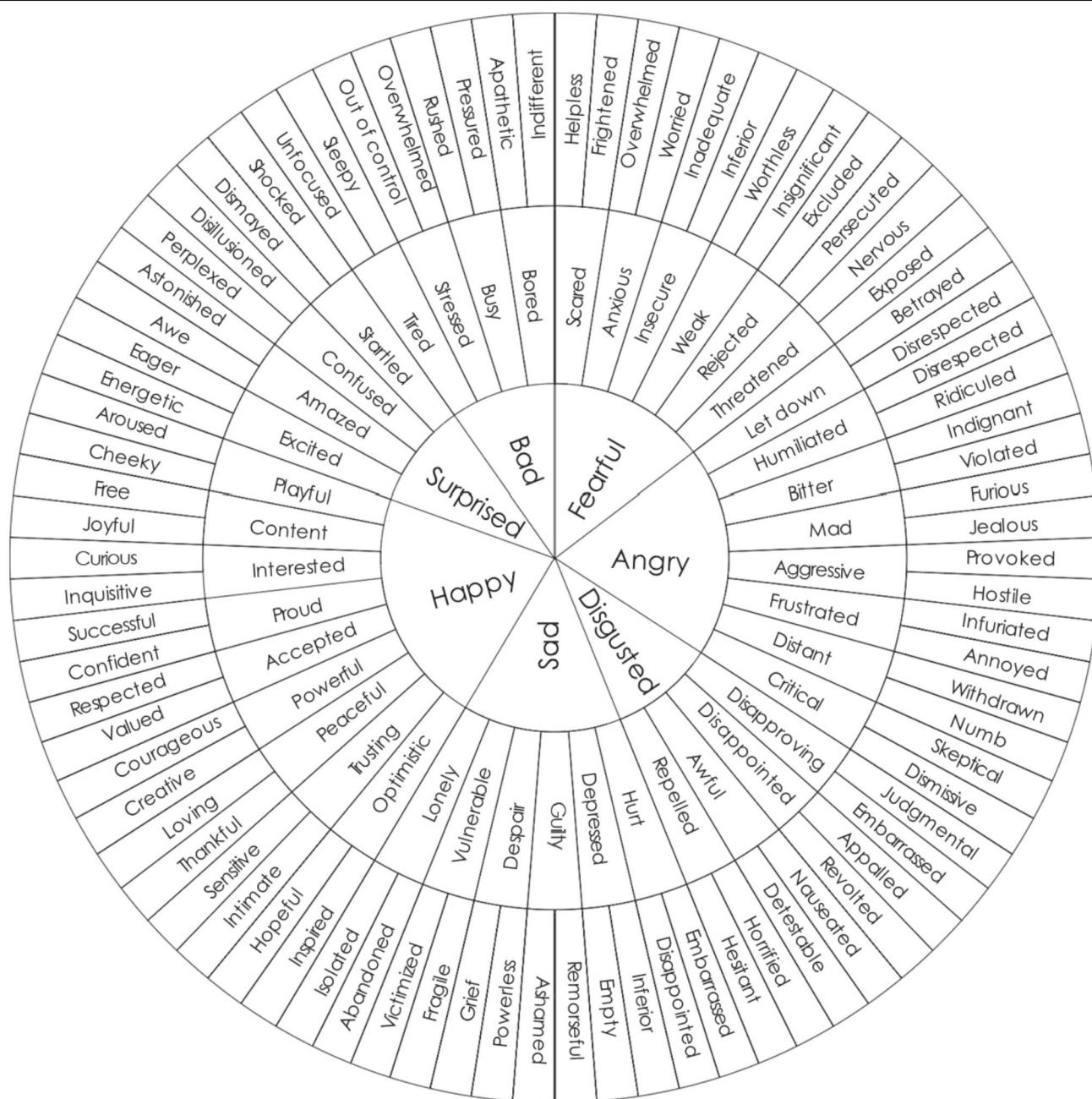
Think about a time your different communication styles led to a misunderstanding. Describe the situation:

Discuss your feelings and thoughts during that situation. Your feelings and thoughts:

Now, let's brainstorm a strategy that could help bridge this communication gap. Your chosen strategy:

Emotion Wheel Worksheet

Name	Date
------	------



Using the above emotions wheel, choose the word(s) that describe your feeling(s) as closely as possible.

I feel...

Questions to think about:

What situations make you feel this way?

- Emotion wheel developed by Dr Gloria Wilcox

Name	Date
Questions to think about: (Continued)	
Is this a positive or negative emotion for you?	
What thoughts do you have when you feel this way?	
What physical feelings tell you that you are having this emotion?	
What is your behavior when you feel this way? i.e. what do you do?	
Additional Notes	

CHALLENGE 2: NAVIGATING EMOTIONAL SENSITIVITY

Share a moment when heightened emotions made a situation challenging. Describe the situation:

Let's discuss ways to support each other in such moments. Your chosen support strategies:

CHALLENGE 3: SETTING BOUNDARIES AND UNDERSTANDING LIMITS

Identify personal boundaries that are important to each of you. Your important boundaries:

Let's come up with a strategy to respect and communicate these boundaries to each other. Your boundary strategy:

CHALLENGE 4: ADJUSTING TO ROUTINE AND STRUCTURE

Discuss a circumstance where a change in routine caused stress or discomfort. Describe the situation.

Let's think of ways to communicate effectively about changes to help ease transitions. Your chosen strategy:

CHALLENGE 5: HANDLING SOCIETAL MISUNDERSTANDING AND STIGMA

Share an instance where societal perceptions or stigma affected your relationship. Describe a situation:

Let's affirm that our relationship's strength comes from within, not from societal opinions. Write an affirmation or reminder.

Remember, it's okay to face challenges and grow through them. We're in this together, learning and growing is part of our journey.

Encourage each other, be kind, understanding, and supportive.

You both are doing great!

Resources:

- <https://www.streettherapy.ca/navigating-neurodivergent-relationships-challenges-strategies-and-references/>
- <https://www.gottman.com/blog/two-different-brains-in-love-conflict-resolution-in-neurodiverse-relationships/>
- <https://www.marriage.com/advice/mental-health/neurodivergent-relationships/>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/adult-adhd/symptoms-causes/syc-20350878>
- <https://www.allohealth.care/healthfeed/sex-education/aspergers-relationships>
- <https://autismspectrumnews.org/couplehood-and-asperger-syndrome-improving-important-relationships/>

Contact Us

*Speak to a Marriage Counselor at
The Marriage Restoration Project*



443.570.7598



rabbishlomoslatkin@gmail.com

Book a time to talk

www.themarriagerestorationproject.com