

# MY PERSONAL SOCIAL SUCCESSES

BY: JASON BUNN-PARSONS  
REVISED: SATURDAY, APRIL 20, 2019

The defining characteristic of Autism is what non-Autistics consider to be social deficits, although many of us Autistic/Aspie Self-Advocates would challenge their notion that everything different about us constitutes a deficit. This is especially true when some of them have an adverse response to us demonstrating superior abilities to theirs in certain areas. When some non-Autistics/Aspies use my diagnosis as THEIR "get out of jail free card," because all conflicts between Autistics/Aspies and non-Autistics/Aspies must be the fault of the one with the label that is defined by their social deficits, I cannot help but notice that such individuals have just as much difficulties getting along with each other as they do with us. So, some social skill deficits may not be unique to Autistics/Aspies, but is part of the human condition that only become problematic when individuals are intolerant of the differences of others. Nevertheless, all of this can be discussed at another time.

## OBJECTIVE

The biggest problem with how all Autism related issues are address is the entire focus of almost all "the experts" is, what is wrong with us and what can they do to fix it. Nevertheless, there are many of us that have had pre-diagnosis success in these areas. As far as social skills go, I had for more pre-diagnosis success than I have had since being diagnoses at the age of 40. The reason for this is the stigmas associated with Autism are such that I am often denied the opportunity to do what I have previous done. It is therefore my intent to not only provide a list of venues that I have had a lot of success in, but also to show the common denominators in order that you might look for them in other venues that I have not listed.

## SOCIETAL CHANGES THAT MAY MAKE SOME OF THESE VENUES LESS HOSPITABLE FOR AUTISTICS/ASPIES

My intent of this section is not to scold those who are exercising their right to do things "the modern way," but to point out the benefits of "the old school ways." This is not just good for Autistics/ Aspies, but for anyone who goes to any group for emotional support and their personal development.

The root issue is those whose #1 objective is to grow their group as large as possible. For those groups that are purely social, that is not a problem because every group does not need to accommodate those who prefer smaller groups. However, if your clearly stated #1 objective is emotional support and personal development, their can come a point in which putting too much emphasis on growth and not enough on developing sufficient support staff/volunteers undermines this objective.

I therefore urge anyone who has a leadership position in a group with a clearly stated mission of providing emotional support and personal development to make an honest assessment of your group is actually doing. Ask yourselves, are your specific strategies actually producing fruit in accordance to your mission, or are you just packing as many as you can into your meetings? It is great for your group to eventually grow big as long as it also grows strong so it can meet its clearly stated #1 objective.

## THE COMMON DENOMINATORS OF THE NON-AUTISTIC/ASPIE GROUPS/VENUES THAT I HAVE HAD THE GREATEST SOCIAL SUCCESS IN

I am starting with this section before listing the actual groups that I have succeeded to keep you as open minded about what types of groups you might try. Not only do these attributes work for me, but everything that we know about Autism should make these common-sense principles that should be common knowledge.

**Common Interest:** A couple of days before I wrote this, I listed the groups to a couple of 1<sup>st</sup> timers to my weekly Autistic Support group. I had aske them to note the common denominators that they pick-up on as I did, and this was the one that jump right out at one of them. We then discussed how we can

be “rock stars” to non-Autistics who share these interests with us. I believe that it is a much better option for us to go to specialized groups that are perfect for us, instead of generalized groups (such as office and/or Christmas socials) in which we are fish out of water.

The #1 tool that I advocate for finding such group is [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com), which is the most effective social media site that have found for networking with people near you. Although it is free for anyone to join, the current cost of promoting a group there is \$89.94 for 6 months<sup>1</sup> (as of November 2018). The special interest groups that I have seen promoted their include hiking, dog walking, board and/or card games, computers, video games, motor cycle clubs, politics, advocacy, performing arts, etc.

A solution that I have witnessed a couple of Autistic/Aspie utilize is what I call “micro-special interest” groups. In other words, you not only need to have the same interest(s) as theme, but you also have to be an Autistic/Aspie. The problems that I have observed with this approach are:

- 1) Their special interests appear to be so unique that they have a hard time connecting with any fellow Autistics/Aspies with the same interest, so no one has RSVPed for their Meetup groups.
- 2) This strategy is grounded, not only in their complete and total lack of self-confidence when it comes to his ability to have successful social interaction with non-Autistics/Aspies, but also their inability to believe that any Autistic/Aspie can succeed. This is an ultimately self-defeating mindset.

**Smaller Attendance:** The conventional strategy of larger groups/venues gives an individual more options backfires with individuals who have sensory processing issues and/or difficulties in reading people. Smaller groups/venues mean less sensory processing to filter out, as well as the ability to focus on learning to read others who can give you more individualize attention. This is only possible if there are few others vying for their attention.

**Adequate Adult Influence:** I chose this wording because groups designed for young children need adult supervision and guidance, while those designed for adults should need little more than appropriate structure and depend on the group members to act like the adults they are supposed to be.

Of course, there are the occasional bad apples that may come. If the group’s mission is to provide emotional support and personal development, then it needs to have an effective method of dealing with them as quickly and painlessly as possible. If not, the conflict could rip the group apart while creating a stressful environment that those who need the most emotional support cannot deal with.

**Teaching of values that will make good citizens:** More emphasis on making better citizens = less bullying. This does not necessarily mean that you will change the hearts and minds of every bully, but that hopeful the ones you cannot reach will not be interested in attending your group.

**Less sensory stimuli:** This is a major issue for many Autistics/Aspies and has become a bigger problem for me as I have aged. In fact, a lot of us function better nocturnally because of the reduced stimuli that we have to manage after everyone else has gone to bed.

Unfortunately, many businesses have found it financially lucrative to find new ways to stimulate the senses in order to draw more customers. I refer to this as artificial stimuli, because it is unnecessary to have while performing the task or activity, in contrast to the inherent stimuli that is naturally generated from the activity its self. The best example of this is bowling, which is going to have significant auditory stimuli because of how the game is played. However, it has become common practice for bowling alleys to blare loud music through their PA systems. This wrecks my inherently poor motor

---

<sup>1</sup> Your subscription actually allows you to promote 3 separate groups and unrelated groups on separate pages.

coordination, concentration, ability for all but minimal verbal communication and my ability to enjoy myself.

Nevertheless, several business owners have realized that there is a niche customer base that doesn't want all of this artificial stimulation, and I am not just talking about Autistics/Aspies. Hopefully we can use public awareness to get more businesses to create sensory friendly environments, or at least follow the lead of a few movie theaters who have sensory friendly showings once or twice a month.

**My most meaningful friendships have been with those who are 30+:** It has been my experience that the older they are, the more successful I have been in developing meaningful friendships with. Some of this has to do with people maturing over the years, many of whom become more appreciative of what other with different personalities can be "the spice of life." I have also had many positive experiences when attending self-improvement meetings in which people who are old enough to be my parents or grandparents feeling compelled to take me under their wings.

#### **ANALYZING SPECIFIC NON-AUTISTIC/ASPIE SOCIAL GROUPS/VENUES THAT I HAVE HAD THE MOST SUCCESS IN**

**Cub/Boy Scout:** It is well known that Autistics/Aspies tend to be more successful in well-structured environments, making scouting one of the most ideal environments for us to try and see if we like it.

- **Common Interest:** Truth be told, scouting was just a passing interest that I had during a couple of brief phases during my upbringing. The various activities they offered was somewhat interesting, but not enough for me to commit my time and energies pursuing. Nevertheless, I cannot think of a single interaction with anyone that was negative.
- **Smaller Attendance:** Most meeting probably had fewer than a dozen peers. With the exception of a pinewood derby and Jamboree that I attended once, both of which brought several different troops together, largest I can remember probably was still shy of 2 dozen.
- **Adequate Adult Influence:** The scout masters presented activities that were well structured, enabling them to create the most positive atmosphere possible.
- **Teaching of values that will make good citizens:** The #1 goal of the scouts is to make the best citizens possible out of the children and youth under their charge.
- **Less sensory stimuli:** A lot of the scouting events are outdoors wilderness activities which will have nothing but natural stimuli.
- **Involvement of those 30+ years old:** Some of the scout masters might not have quite hit the 30 years mark, but everyone I have ever met have had an inherent desire to provide their scouts with all of the benefits that I previously mentioned for this attribute.

**Youth League Bowling:** Because youth bowling uses handicaps, which gives more additional points to those with the lowest averages, there is no reason for those with lower averages<sup>2</sup> to fear being bullied. This is because all someone needs to do to carry their own weight is to bowl at or above their average. So, someone with an average of 90 bowling a 110 does more to help their team to win than someone with a 150 average bowling a 130.

- **Common Interest:** This is a venue that is not as Autistic/Aspie friendly as it used to be because of the modern-day trend of pumping a rock concert through the sound system. It seems to me to be an attempt to get more people who are not actually interested in bowling to come to a more exciting

---

<sup>2</sup> This would include myself, who 120s+ average was well below the 140s+ that youth bowlers with my years of experience typically have.

environment. If someone would open an old school bowling alley that was designed for people who are serious about bowling, I could recommend such a venue as something for Autistics/Aspies to try out to see if they like it. However, until someone does, I believe that you will be hard pressed to find an Autistic/Aspie who actually enjoys going into such a sensory hostile environment.

- **Smaller Attendance:** The standard maximum size of a youth bowling team is 4, although there is the rare necessary to have a couple of 5-person teams. When you include the 4 team members of your opponents, the standard layout of bowling alleys essentially gives you a “semi-segregate” environment of 8 peers. Of course, you can still go and quickly visit with your friends on other lanes between turn, which is why I would not call it a completely segregated environment, but the fact that you pretty much the same 8 peers the entire day makes it a lot easier for those who have trouble reading people.
- **Adequate Adult Influence:** With 8 bowlers per lane pairs, there are plenty of parents that can do the score keeping and make sure to let the next 1 up know its their turn when they are too busy socializing with their peers to pay attention. They also instill “bowler’s ethics,” which the code of courteous conduct. Although there are occasions when they need to speak up when a bowler has a minor tantrum because they are not happy with how they are performing, that does not happen all that often. That is the most intervention that I have ever seen an adult have to make during youth bowling.
- **Teaching of values that will make good citizens:** Bowler’s ethics stipulates that you should not distract someone whose turn it is, not only not talking to them, but also breaking the concentration of the bowlers on the lanes on either side of you by stepping on to the approach until they have finished their turn. If the bowler on your left needs to yield to you, but you need to yield to the one on the right, you tell the one on your left to go ahead and go. If 2 bowlers step on to the approach at the same time, the 1 on the left yields to the 1 on the right. This may seem trivial; but showing consideration of those around you is something that is in short supply these days.
- **Less sensory stimuli:** Bowling does not actually score that well in this area for reasons already mentioned.
- **Involvement of those 30+ years old:** The benefits that I previously mentioned for this attribute are outside the purview of youth bowling.

**Sunday School & Other Bible Studies:** There are a lot of people who will refuse to try this option for religious reasons. My purpose for writing this is not to propagate my religious views, but to provide insights to those who already embrace them.

- **Common Interest:** It is true that the interest of children and youth who attend church is 100% in common. Some are required to attend by their parents, while some youth and single adults are there for more carnal pursuits. Many churches that I have attend refer to such individuals as “wolves.” They do not come to meetings to learn about the Bible or any other self-development, but to seduce Christians into abandoning their Christian values.

Nevertheless, Autistics/Aspies are known to be far more successful brushing off peer-pressure. Furthermore, my ability for memorizing scripture and commentating on any Biblical doctrine enables me to be a rock star in Bible studies filled with those who are serious about learning and developing their faith.

- **Smaller Attendance:** Please take into serious consideration my concerns in the section, “*Societal Changes that May Make Some of These Venues Less Hospitable for Autistics/Aspies.*” Although the section applies to all groups/venues, this is the one that I was primarily thinking about as I wrote it.

- **Adequate Adult Influence:** The youth/adult single's groups who format disregards the concerns that I brought up in *SMALLER ATTENDANCE* have opened the door for the "wolves" I mentioned in *COMMON INTERESTS* to operate with impunity.
- **Teaching of values that will make good citizens:** If you want your youth/single's groups to teach its members anything positive, then the leadership team needs to be sufficiently developed so they can exercise greater influence than the "wolves."
- **Less sensory stimuli:** General rule of thumb, the larger the church and the greater their commitment to growth, the greater the stimuli. If you want less stimuli, you may need to go to smaller churches.
- **Involvement of those 30+ years old:** All churches should score high when it comes to having leaders that will provide the previously mentioned benefits of this attributes. Although most of them do, a few do not.

**12 Step Meetings (Mostly "New Wine"):** Although almost all my recovery experience has been with 12 Step groups, I realize that there are numerous other recovery formats that are completely different. My assessments are based solely on the formats I am most familiar with. Completely different formats could have completely different results.

- **Common Interest:** Although the majority of members who show up want to be there, there are those who do not. Some are court ordered to attend, while others have been given an ultimatum by significant others.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, although most have a genuine desire for self-improvement, others have other ulterior motives, such as wanting nothing more than to have others feel sorry for them in order to validate their pity parties.

The "wolves" that I addressed in *SUNDAY SCHOOL & OTHER BIBLE STUDIES* also prey upon those in recovery, especially the most emotionally vulnerable new comers. AA and other 12 Step groups refer to individuals who engage in this behavior as 13<sup>th</sup> stepping, the using of the meeting for something beyond what they are intended for. Different groups have different policies for dealing, or not dealing, with them. Some have "watchdogs" that will try to chase them away, while others say nothing while consenting adult to do whatever they wish.

Nevertheless, noting which ones are most committed to self-improvement will enable you to gravitate towards those who will be most supportive of you. Just stick with them and you will not need any of the others that will do nothing but hold you back. My mom and I have both come across groups that have been completely overrun by those who are negative influences, but there is no need to get stuck in these groups when there are so many others to choose from.

- **Smaller Attendance:** New Wine was a hybrid group because attached a discussion group element to a program that was centered around small groups. After finishing the large group activities, we would go to our small groups that were no larger than 12 members. All the experts that I know of who teach about small groups, whether your talking about recovery groups or home Bible studies, states that the more your small group grows beyond 12 the more the advantages of a small group diminishes.
- **Adequate Adult Influence:** New Wine and AA both use "facilitators," but have entirely different concept about their roles should be. New Wine groups were run by properly trained facilitators who would make sure that the group stayed focused its mission, as well as emotionally safe from those who's personalities are an extreme detriment to the group. They will not only have the training and

---

<sup>3</sup> I do not know the percentage, but I do know that many attend 12 step meeting because they are court ordered to do so, and/or because of an ultimatum of a significant other.

authority act unilaterally if they feel it necessary, but as effectively as possible in order to achieve the most positive results possible. Hopefully, this means that the problematic individual eventually changes their attitudes and might pursue a path of self-improvement. Of course, if the problematic individual has no desire to grow and become a constructive member of the group, then it will be the job of the facilitator to ask them to leave for the sake of those who do.

Although I am not an alcoholic, it is permissible for me to attend AA meetings that are designated as “open groups” so I can learn more about their struggles by listening to them. I have never witnessed anyone causing such a problem at one of their meetings, but my mom has. She told me that when something like that happens, several members of the group will speak up and put the individual in their place. Based on my experiences with my fellow human beings, I have serious concerns about using in this method for the following reasons:

- 1) Some groups are hesitant to act because they do not want to drive away the problematic individual without giving them a chance to change, allowing them to drive people away who cannot handle the stress of being around them. I witnessed something like this happen at an English class that I was a volunteer teacher and van driver for. We were trying to be as merciful as possible with a certain student with a combative personality, until we had no choice but to suspend her do to her crossing the line. I did a home visit with 1 of the other students who was particularly hurt her conduct to make sure she would come back. She asked me bluntly, “Why do you care now?” She then told me flat out that the student that we have been trying to be as merciful as possible to in order to not drive her away had already driven away dozens of others.
- 2) A lot of people respond to conflict in a manner the escalate it, rather than deescalates. This can turn a small conflict that could and should be easily remedied into a major conflict that can rip a group apart.
- 3) Another who is a bad apple at heart, although has been behaving because they are required to attend the meetings against their will, may side with the one causing the problems.

Again, I have never actually witness any of this happen at the few AA meetings that I have attended, but my experiences with other human beings leads me to be concerned that it could happen.

- **Teaching of values that will make good citizens:** Anything that improves your personal development and helps you overcome your past and present adversities, will make you a better citizen.
- **Less sensory stimuli:** I have never seen a self-improvement support group meeting in which this was an issue.
- **Involvement of those 30+ years old:** All support groups should score high when it comes to having leaders that will provide the previously mentioned benefits of this attributes. Although many of them do, many others do not.

**Cross-Cultural Outreach:** The best thing about Autistics/Aspies doing outreach to those who are foreign to their culture, the foreigners do not know that there is anything different about Autistic/Aspie social skills compared to others of their culture. By the time they do figure out there is something different, they do not care because they are so grateful to anyone who is willing to help them.

Furthermore, many Autistics/Aspies feel like they have “been born on the wrong planet” (some may believe this literally, while others just use this as an analogy) because they just don’t feel like they fit in. Immigrants from cultures that are foreign to their upbringing have similar feelings; and are therefore very relatable to Autistics/Aspies. They also are very

- **Common Interest:** Whatever your special interests are, there are opportunities for you to utilize them to better the lives of immigrants. Anyone who is fluent in their native language can teach their

native language to others. If computers, math or science is your specialties; you can tutor those who are going to school. If US History is your best subject, not only can you tutor their schooling, but also US Citizenship. Auto mechanics and those that can figure out how the bureaucracies operate are also blessings to this community, just to name a few of their community's needs.

- **Smaller Attendance:** Anywhere from one-on-one, plus a translator if necessary, to a class of two dozen or so students.
- **Adequate Adult Influence:** This is rarely an issue because the adults that come to you need and want your help. If you are having discipline problems while working with the children, their parents will have your back.
- **Teaching of values that will make good citizens:** Being a good citizen to others influences them to become good citizens themselves.
- **Less sensory stimuli:** The only way I could possibly see this becoming an issue is if you accept an invitation to some cultural celebration that is too energetic, but I have never actually been to one that I had a problem with in this area.
- **Involvement of those 30+ years old:** Although you may not be 30 yet, you can still provide the benefits of this attributes to refugees and other immigrants that need help acclimating to life in America. Many of those who I have done so for have reciprocate to me during my times of need when I have asked.

### CONCLUSION

Again, the previous lists were never intended to be all encompassing, but to provide Autistics/Aspies, and their loved ones, with some ideas of how to get started looking for social groups that would be perfected for them. Feel free to make up your own list of attributes that are most important to you, then look for groups/venues that match that list.

It is possible that you might go to a group/venue that does not work for you due to specific problems that are unique to that group/venue, but you can still go to different group/venue of that same type. I have seen others speak negatively about groups/venues that have been very helpful for me. Maybe they just had a bad experience, or maybe that individual had a bad experience. The top two examples of this are religion and the 12 Steps. I will not jump to conclusions about which side is right in a conflict in which I do not have both side of the story; but give both sides the benefit of the doubt as I continue to focus my efforts on finding more solutions that work for me.