

# FACT SHEET



## ASD IMPACT ON FAMILY

Having a child with ASD is likely to take up a lot of your time and energy. This can often conflict with the need and desire to spend time with others in your family unit. The dependency on you that you experience may amplify the carer / rescuer in you. This can mean that you may have a tendency to neglect your own needs and self-care. It is really important that while managing the pressures and conflicts for your time you ensure that you do prioritise your own well-being.

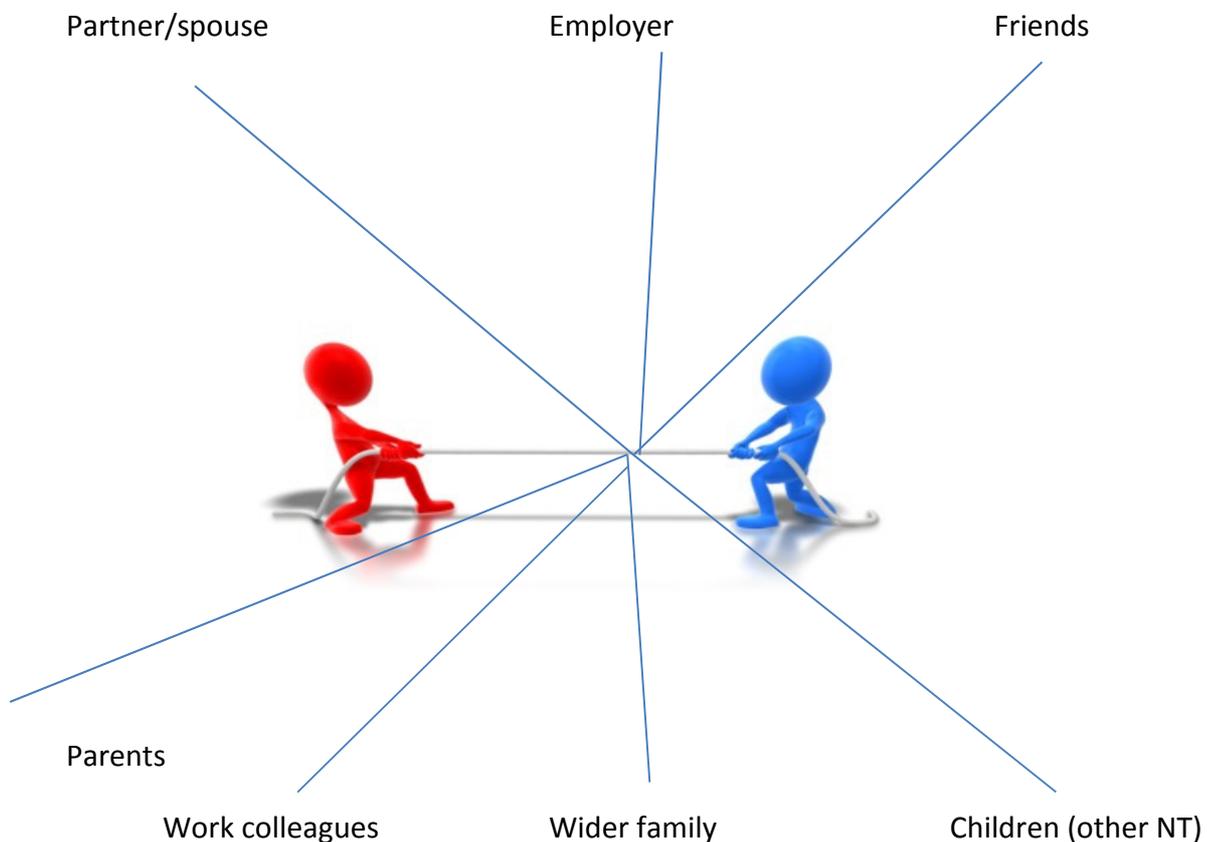
Self-care suggestions:

- ✓ Ensure you have regular healthy, balanced meals as well as making them for everyone else.
- ✓ Find ways to exercise conducive to your needs (e.g. a walk, a swim, gardening etc.).
- ✓ Maintain a good hydration – ensure you drink sufficient water, minimise alcohol and caffeine intake (this includes tea and some soft drinks).
- ✓ Building up your own neuro-typical (NT) support network. E.g. meeting up with friends.
- ✓ Building up your support network linked to ASD e.g. attending a parent support group or online support forum.
- ✓ Negotiating partner support, if in couple relationship, (or support from a trusted family member) to enable shared responsibility.
- ✓ Seeking external support from local charity groups and Social Care to assist with day or night time relief if necessary.
- ✓ If you are struggling, then talking to a professional can assist e.g. GP, counsellor or Family Support Worker. Remember you do not need to be on your own with this responsibility.

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## Your family

Every family is unique. These may be some of the relationships that are causing conflicting demands on you:



When you have a child with ASD how you accommodate their needs on a day to day basis can be all consuming. This can impact significantly on other children in your family. Your other children may feel isolated (e.g. because it is difficult to have their friends round), ignored or invisible (your attention balance towards the ASD child has been skewed) or distant and withdrawn (always at their friend's houses), increased vulnerability (they may seek inappropriate or abusive relationships to increase their sense of worth and belonging e.g. joining a gang/radicalisation or unhealthy sexual encounters).

Your other children may be a huge support to you and help to support you and their AS sibling. This assistance, if offered occasionally can help to build their sense of belonging and self-worth. However, if it is always expected and sustained indefinitely it is more likely to have a negative impact.

It is important that you ensure you can have quality time with your other children and that they can have time away to be a child themselves.

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- ✓ Support and encourage them in their interests and hobbies.
- ✓ Enable them to choose some of their preferred food at mealtimes.
- ✓ Age appropriate dedicated time together e.g. watching a TV programme, going shopping, going to a sporting event.
- ✓ Engaging in young carer social activities.

If you are in a couple relationship, caring for a child with ASD can impact significantly on the quality of this adult relationship. Some of the difficulties are:

- Loss of shared sense of humour can be one of the first things to disappear.
- Feelings of loss / anxiety / tiredness / and low mood can impact negatively on intimacy e.g. sex drive.
- No time to chat and connect with each other about the day.
- Communication itself can be distorted / disrupted due to stress and pressure.
- Resentment brought about by either one partner doing too much all the time or by one partner not being seen to “do their share”.
- Role conflict “parent versus lover” / “parent versus provider” etc.
- Conflicting parenting styles and abilities, especially if one is also on the spectrum.

## Suggested Coping Strategies:

- ✓ Remember what first attracted you to each other, smile often and try to be playful.
- ✓ Try to make small caring gestures, offer “no strings hugs” or a massage.
- ✓ Stay in touch by short texts.
- ✓ Schedule “you time” on the family calendar. Start with half an hour at first.
- ✓ Remember to always check out what you have both heard / understood.
- ✓ Introduce a family tasks rota, include the children, age appropriately to help out.
- ✓ Alternate contact / connection with the children, so both carers build equal bond, as able.
- ✓ Try to explore and resolve pressure each feels about financial and emotional security.

\*The National Autistic Society website has helpful information on ASD [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

\*The Relate Derby telephone helpline is open every Tuesday 10.30am – 4.30pm and Thursday 1.30pm – 4.30pm. Call **0808 178 9363** and speak directly with a Relate trained counsellor. Also available is our LiveChat dropin on Wednesday 2pm – 5pm. Visit our website for further information [www.relatederby.org.uk](http://www.relatederby.org.uk)