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Can I tell you about Asperger Syndrome?

A guide for friends and family

Jude Welton

Illustrated by Jane Telford

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What did you say? What do you mean?

An illustrated guide
to understanding metaphors

Jude Welton

Illustrated by Jane Telford

Foreword by Elizabeth Newson



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- 1 The apple of your eye
- 2 Bend over backwards
- 3 Have a ball
- 4 On the ball
- 5 The ball is in your court
- 6 Start the ball rolling
- 7 Scrape the bottom of the barrel
- 8 Full of beans
- 9 Spill the beans
- 10 Get out of the wrong side of the bed
- 11 Rings a bell
- 12 Drive someone round the bend
- 13 Miss the boat

- 14 Rock the boat
- 15 A bone to pick with you
- 16 Don't judge a book by its cover
- 17 Too big for your boots
- 18 Cross that bridge when you come to it
- 19 Take the bull by the horns
- 20 Butterflies in your tummy
- 21 Carry the can
- 22 Open a can of worms
- 23 Burn the candle at both ends
- 24 Lay your cards on the table
- 25 Let the cat out of the bag
- 26 Raining cats and dogs
- 27 A big cheese
- 28 Don't count your chickens
- 29 A chip on your shoulder
- 30 That's the way the cookie crumbles
- 31 Too many cooks spoil the broth
- 32 Send someone to Coventry
- 33 Not your cup of tea
- 34 Call it a day
- 35 Don't put all your eggs in one basket
- 36 Walk on eggshells
- 37 Thrown in at the deep end
- 38 Make ends meet
- 39 Find your feet
- 40 Land on your feet
- 41 Sit on the fence
- 42 Keep your fingers crossed

- 43 Put your finger on it
- 44 Wrap someone around your little finger
- 45 Play with fire
- 46 A big fish in a small pond
- 47 Plenty more fish in the sea
- 48 A frog in your throat
- 49 Move the goalposts
- 50 Teach your grandmother to suck eggs
- 51 Lend a hand
- 52 Fly off the handle
- 53 Keep it under your hat
- 54 Bury the hatchet
- 55 Head in the clouds
- 56 Do that standing on your head
- 57 Speak off the top of your head
- 58 Bite your head off
- 59 Bury your head in the sand
- 60 Straight from the horse's mouth
- 61 Break the ice
- 62 Take a leaf out of someone's book
- 63 Turn over a new leaf
- 64 Pull your leg
- 65 Draw a line under it
- 66 A square meal
- 67 Change your mind
- 68 Over the moon
- 69 Face the music
- 70 Hit the nail on the head
- 71 Pie in the sky

- 72 Eat humble pie
- 73 A lot on your plate
- 74 Get the sack
- 75 Come out of your shell
- 76 Get your skates on
- 77 A skeleton in your cupboard
- 78 Something up your sleeve
- 79 A snake in the grass
- 80 Pull your socks up
- 81 The last straw
- 82 Draw the short straw
- 83 The straw that broke the camel's back
- 84 Swings and roundabouts
- 85 Hold your tongue
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- 91 Water off a duck's back
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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Elizabeth Newson, who first introduced me to the world of autism many years ago. A student couldn't ask for a more inspiring, sympathetic teacher. And when autism touched my life more closely than I could have expected, Elizabeth remained an equally inspiring and sympathetic friend, mentor and advocate. Her encouragement and suggestions gave me the confidence to see this book to its completion.

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But most of all, my love and thanks go to my husband David for his help and support with this project and with so much else, and to JJ, our lovely son, who inspired this book.

Foreword

I suppose one of the most surprising and difficult things for parents to get used to in learning to live with a young child who has Asperger Syndrome is what it really means (to them and their child) to be “inflexible”. Every family has its own funny but rueful stories to tell. The stories are funny because you’d be crying if you didn’t laugh; but they’re rueful because we all recognize how truly handicapping this degree of rigidity must be to our child’s personality and growth, and that we ourselves can’t just shrug it off as an inconvenience.

For instance, we’re all used to the idea that most children will try to filch an extra 20 minutes of television time before bedtime, or see how long they can make “one more story” last; but what if your child has such unbreakable rules for himself that getting home one minute late is going to involve an hour’s stamping and screaming? What if his sister also “has to” obey his rule that only perfect biscuits may be eaten, but not by her? Parents of an autistic child as young as two years old can find themselves on a rapid learning curve about recognizing the very real distress that their child experiences when they accidentally break his self-imposed rules of behaviour. Where there are siblings to be thought of as well, making space for what we used to think of as normal family life can seem impossible in the face of “insistence on sameness” exerted over everyone else by the child with autism.

Children who have Asperger Syndrome usually have the great advantage of verbal ability. This doesn’t necessarily mean that they are good communicators, because their poor social empathy makes them fail to notice whether others are making sense of what they are trying to say or are even listening. But they do have the skills of vocabulary and grammar that enable them to put together good sentences which they expect others to understand.

The trouble is that verbal communication is usually more complicated than that. First, we tend to talk to each other in a great variety of ways, listening to each other as we go along and trying to make what we say more interesting. Second, and perhaps especially in English, the way we talk is full of vivid “figures of speech” and visual images, which makes what we say much more lively but also more ambiguous: we play guessing games with each other about what we mean, but we are able to do that easily because of our strong social empathy about what we might mean, which allows us to get it right most of the time. So it probably won't be much of a problem if someone says, “Come on, pull your socks up, get cracking!” or “Keep it under your hat,” or even “She was over the moon.”

But all of this is so much more difficult for a child with Asperger's, who desperately tries to interpret what he hears in a rigid and literal way, maybe protesting angrily, “Don't say it wrong!” when he can't make head or tail (WHAT did you say?) of what his parents and teachers mean. No wonder some parents do their best to avoid using metaphors in their child's hearing, when they clearly cause him so much confusion.

But trying to avoid the forms of speech that come naturally is not really a realistic option, especially in the long term. What Jude Welton has given us here is a truly helpful introduction into the world of metaphor, rich enough to make it clear to the child what metaphors are all about, and how he could join in. To be honest, when we first tried to give children their own metaphoric repertoires, we didn't really have much hope of success. But we soon found that metaphors could have their own fascination for a child with Asperger's, once he got used to the idea that grownups could “mean what they said” in this very strange – and laughable – way. Humour helps; and Jude and Jane have given us plenty of that. The children we worked with on metaphor had a lot of fun adding to their own repertoires, and eventually even experimenting to make up their own as the occasion required.

If we had had a book like this to inspire us, it would have given us a kick-start (a WHAT?). Any parent or teacher working with Asperger's will find it beginning to open the doors of imagination for the child in ways that they might not have thought possible. A lovely and practical book, which children and grownups can enjoy – and giggle over – together.

– Elizabeth Newson
Early Years Diagnostic Centre, Nottingham

Introduction for children

Sometimes words mean exactly what they say. This is called the words' literal meaning.

Sometimes words or phrases have a different meaning from this literal meaning. That's OK, but it might make you feel muddled.

For example, if someone says, "He's let the cat out of the bag," they don't usually mean that someone has literally let a cat escape from a bag. They mean that he has let other people know something that was meant to be kept a secret.

If someone says, "She'll bite your head off," they don't mean that the person will literally bite anyone's head off. What the speaker means is that the person is likely to be so annoyed that she speaks in an angry, "snappy" way.

If someone says, "I've changed my mind," they don't mean that they have got a different brain from the one they had before! They mean that they thought one way about something at first, and then they thought differently about it. They might say, "I didn't feel like going to the park this morning, but I've changed my mind. I would really like to go now."

Expressions such as these that don't mean literally what they say are called metaphors. A metaphor is a saying or expression whose meaning comes from a suggested

comparison with something else. Metaphors usually create a picture in your mind. People use them to make language and conversation more interesting.

Using words in this way can be fun, but it can be confusing. Sometimes, you might feel upset if you don't understand what someone means when they use a metaphor to tell you or ask you something. If you don't understand what they mean, it's OK to ask them to explain.

This book will teach you 100 sayings that don't mean literally what they say. If I know why a saying has a particular meaning, I will tell you. For example, on page 25 you'll find out where the meaning of "to let the cat out of the bag" comes from. Sometimes, no one knows why a saying means what it does, so I can't tell you.

I hope you have fun learning metaphors. I hope you enjoy using them sometimes, and collecting new ones. There are some empty pages at the back of the book, so that you can add new sayings to your collection when you hear or read them. As you will see, there is a frame on each of these pages. You can draw your own illustrations if you'd like to.

What did you say?



What do you mean?

If someone is **the apple of your eye**, it means that you love them very much. It is often used to describe the way a parent feels about a child.

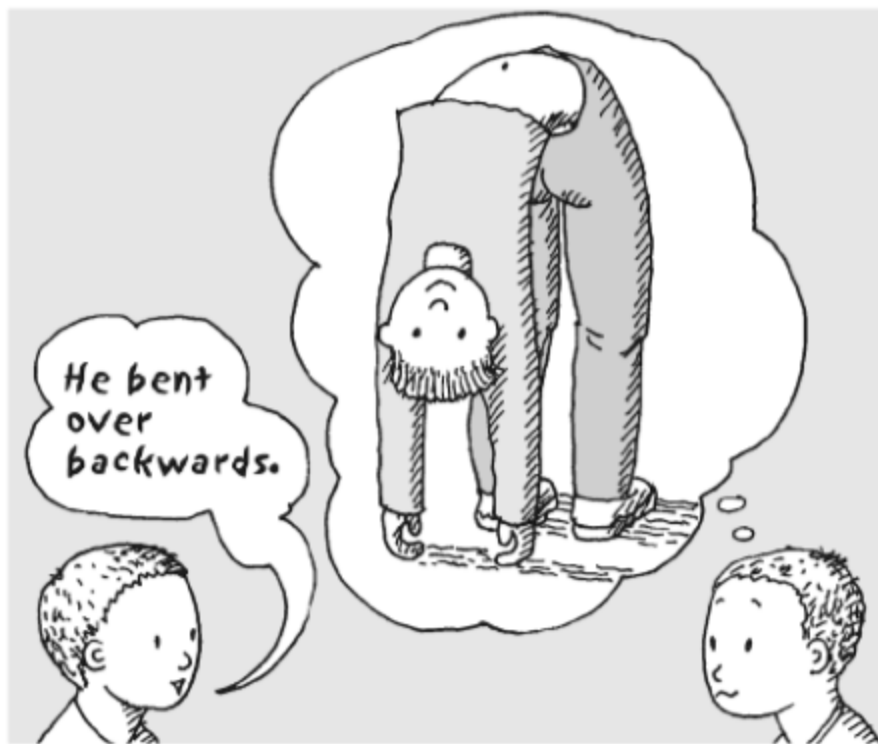
Why does it mean this?

The pupil (the central, black part) of the eye sometimes used to be known as the "apple". This saying suggests that the loved one is central to the person's view of the world.

Example

"He would do anything to make his daughter happy. She is **the apple of his eye.**"

What did you say?



What do you mean?

To **bend over backwards** means to try as hard as you possibly can to do something, usually to please or help someone. People sometimes say to “lean over backwards”.

Example

“He has to be really careful about the food he eats, because he can’t eat gluten. But the people in the restaurant were brilliant. They **bent over backwards** to make sure he had a delicious dinner.”

What did you say?



What do you mean?

To **have a ball** means to enjoy yourself, and have a really good time.

Why does it mean this?

The "ball" in this saying is an old-fashioned word for a dance, where people dress up and spend the evening enjoying themselves. It doesn't refer to a ball that you play with.

Example

"It was the best holiday I've ever had. I **had a ball** every day."

What did you say?



What do you mean?

To be **on the ball** means to be able to understand and deal with things well.

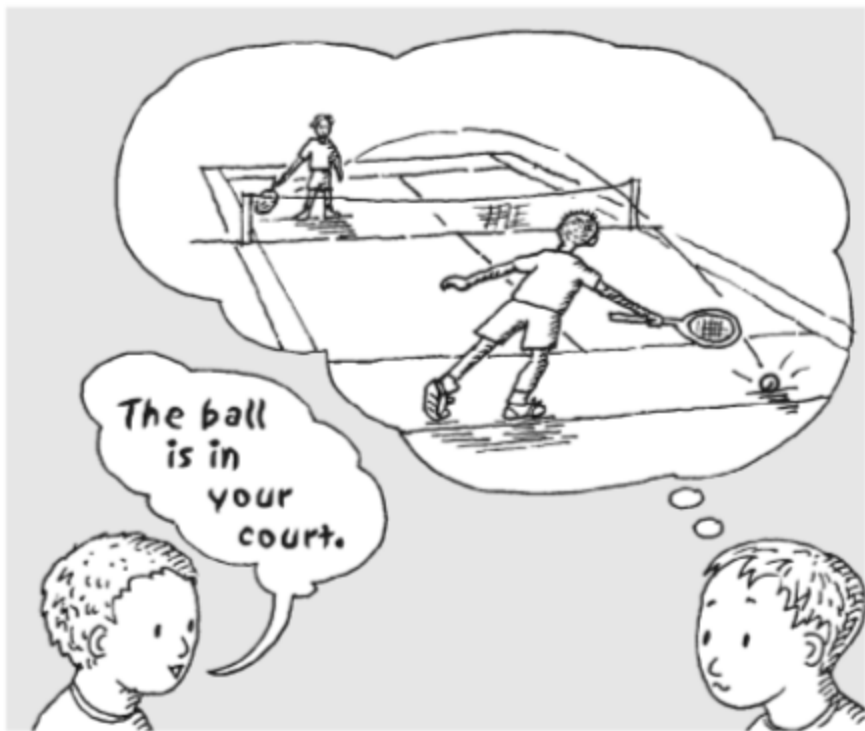
Why does it mean this?

In this saying, the "ball" refers to a football. A player who is "on the ball" – in other words has the ball by his or her feet – is in control of what's happening.

Example

"My grandad is nearly 90, but he's still **on the ball**. He does the crossword quicker than Mum or Dad can!"

What did you say?



What do you mean?

If you say to someone, "**the ball is in your court,**" you are telling them that it is their turn to do something or to decide what to do next before progress can be made.

Why does it mean this?

The expression refers to the game of tennis. When the ball is in someone's court (on their side of the net, in the part of the court in which they play), it is their turn to play the next stroke.

Example

"How shall we carry on from here?"

"You decide. I've told you all the changes I want made. Now **the ball is in your court.**"