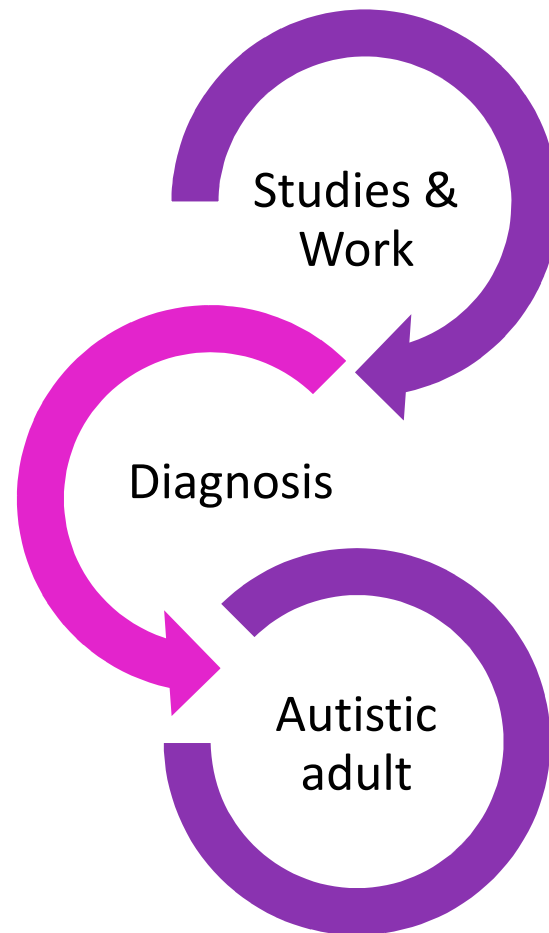


Planning for children and family life



Rachel Townson
@_WoollyThinker



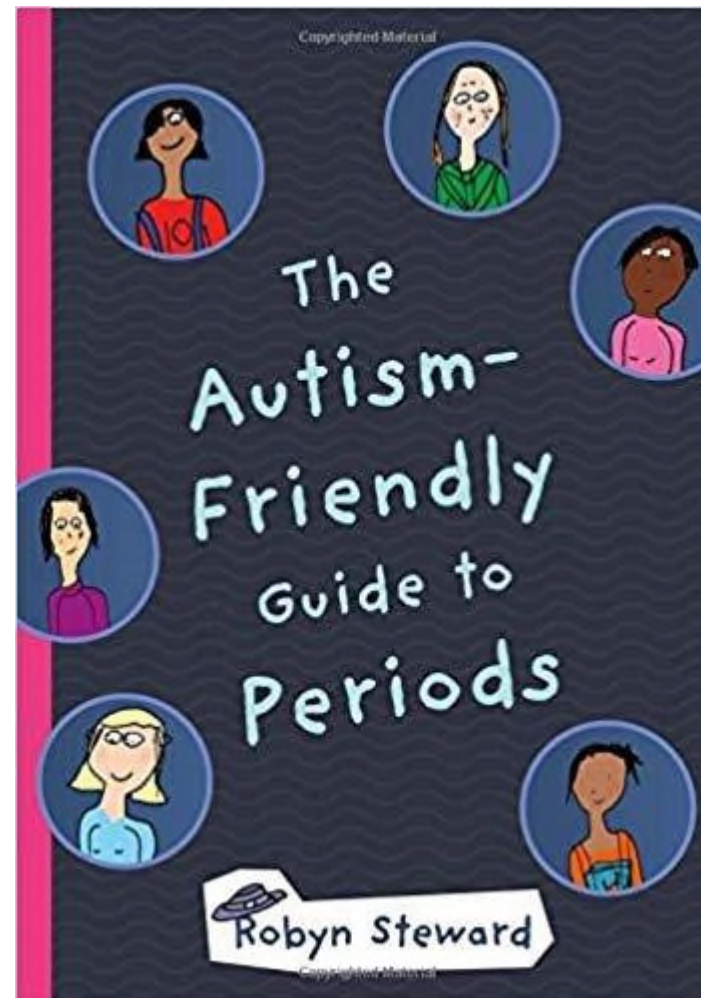
Discussing some difficult topics and intimate topics in this session. Excuse any emotional processing – although I'm hoping I am in presenter mode and this won't happen.

Topics will include

- ☐ Trying for a child
- ☐ Pregnancy
- ☐ Parenting
- ☐ Lessons learned.

Menstruation

- Lack of knowledge
 - Pregnant even when not had sex
- Sensory sensitivities
 - Internal and external
 - E.g. cramps and sanitary products
- Change and hormones
 - Lack of control
- Practical issues – Executive functioning
 - Process to follow when menstruating
 - Being prepared



Trying for a child & Pregnancy



Why may an autistic women struggle at this time?

Testing & Line eyes

Researching

Logging

Planning ahead
and mental
preparations

Grief



Experiences from autistic women



It's a time of solitude, and lack of control I didn't realise how hard it can be to fall pregnant. I would have panic attacks waiting for the pregnancy test to develop and have no one to talk to.

Each month that I didn't conceive I found myself struggling with my identity. I found myself struggling to see myself as a woman. I felt dysfunctional.

I realise now I was too literal. I thought I would fall pregnant as soon as I had unprotected sex. That's what I was taught at school.

Call for action: trying to conceive

- We need to collaborate experiences and set up support services and guidance to help during these difficult times
- We need to understand if there are any reasons medically why autistic women might struggle more than the non-autistic population in conceiving a child
- Safe places for autistic women to meet online or socially in order to share and support each other during the times of uncertainty.
- Medical practitioners need to understand the extremity of the persons need for information and support them. Not dismiss concerns or the severity of anxiety they may be experiencing.

Pregnancy Loss and Infertility

Miscarriage, still birth and infertility are topics often shied away from in general.

In the autistic academia they seem almost invisible.

We need to consider how autistic processing, need for completion, literal thinking, need for stability, masking and catastrophising can all impact on the person, in addition to the grief which already accompanies these experiences.





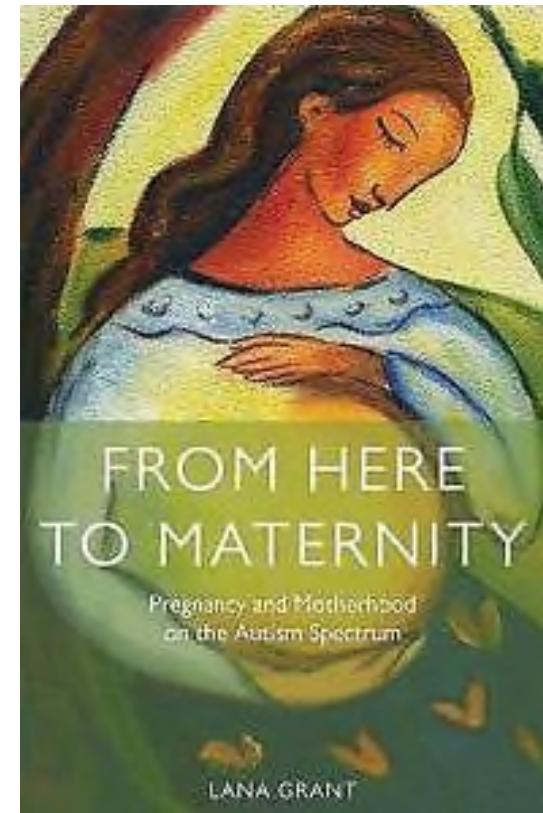
“Not long after my autism diagnosis I was diagnosed with Turners syndrome. Which means I am going through menopause early. Difficult thing to try and fit into your identity as a woman, being infertile, especially when you have autism related struggles with identity already!”

Anonymous, 2019

Experiences differ as within the non-autistic population.

But the intensity seems to differ – from stories shared.

Lana Grant shares her experiences in her book.



My experience of pregnancy included;

- **obsessive need for reassurance.**
- **Researching everything and anything day and night**
- **losing 2-3 days of sleep at a time**
- **Frequent fear of miscarriage**
- **HG Sickness**
- **Sensory sensitivities were multiplied**
- **I was more direct and less able to mask**
- **I was hyper-aware of my body**
- **And midwifery services were awful. They were socially fluffy and inconsistent.**

Motherhood



- More likely to have pre or post-natal depression
- Higher risk of anxiety
- Worry significantly more about others judging them as a mother
- Higher allegations of Fabricated Illness Syndrome“

All Discriminative towards autistic mothers





“I think more needs to be done to show how autistic parents actually parent. Not just anecdotal stories, but actually do some case studies on families.

That just hasn't happened.

The other thing I would love is for more autistic parents to come out to tell their story. There are a few places here and there where you can find other autistic parents, but those places are usually well hidden for fear of discrimination. I feel like there should be more safe places for autistic parents, whether in local communities or online.”

Melody Latimer

Conclusions



- Research – Infertility and its impact on autistic people, pregnancy experiences, processing of these life changes.
- Better information for autistic people, and more training for medical professionals or anyone in contact with autistic women.
- Imposter syndrome is spoken of frequently in autistic forums why is it not taken seriously elsewhere
- Mothers on the autism spectrum need better support and less fear of judgement





Thank you for listening

Any questions?