

JULY 2013

Autism World

Magazine



**DARE
TO
DREAM**

Regulating your meltdowns

with **Malcolm Mayfield**

Malcolm Mayfield is a certified practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, a qualified presenter and trainer, and co-author and Australian distributor of the AAPC book “The Hidden Curriculum of Getting and Keeping a Job: Navigating the Social Landscape of Employment.”

Malcolm was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in his late 30s.



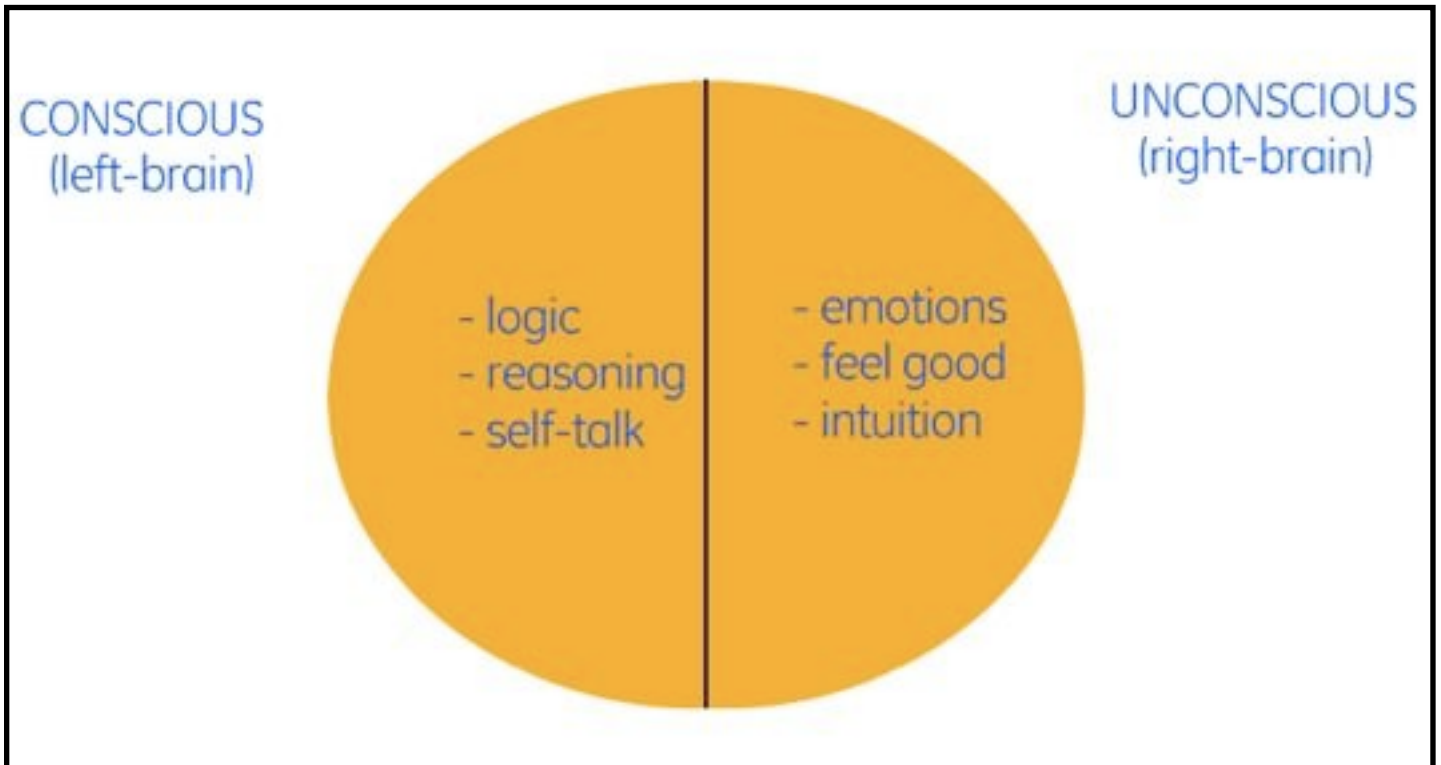
What happens to your child once they turn 18? This is the question troubling many families. Autism World Magazine hopes to answer some of your concerns in our 18 PLUS Section.

There are several factors that contribute to the low employment rate of autistic individuals in our society. The first and foremost of those factors is a lack of understanding of autism. In a tie for second are “the hidden curriculum” and the autistic meltdown.

Today I would like to address the autistic meltdown; what it is and how we as individuals on the spectrum can identify our position on the meltdown meter and then institute responses to regulate ourselves back to a more functional state.

Firstly, what is the function of a meltdown? I have found that asking this simple question will initially elicit judgments and labels such as ‘disruptive’ or ‘attention seeking’ or even ‘attempt to control’. These and other judgments cloud the true function of the meltdown, which is to provide solutions to overwhelming situations.

You may not be aware that we are people of two minds; the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. The conscious mind is often associated with the left hemisphere of the brain.



It is highly analytical and is easily overwhelmed by new experiences and information.

The unconscious mind is associated with the right hemisphere of the brain and thinks globally. It is responsible for storing all of our knowledge and experiences, for regulating the body systems and for running tasks that have become automatic for us. Some examples of unconscious mind operations are driving a car or playing a computer game. When we become proficient at these activities, we no longer pay attention to what our hands, eyes, feet and other body parts are doing; they become unconscious. This frees up the conscious mind to analyse new things.

In an autistic meltdown, the conscious mind has become so overwhelmed that it overloads and retreats into sometimes deep recesses of self.

In this state a person can be very vulnerable, so the unconscious mind installs protective measures to ensure that other people do not disturb the process. In other words, the 'keep away, construction in progress' sign is erected.

Unfortunately, most people are drawn toward an individual who is melting down in an effort to provide help and comfort – this action often serves to intensify the 'keep away' defences and the meltdown escalates as a result. Once the defence perimeter is established, the unconscious mind begins the task of analysing the source of the overwhelm and creating strategies to manage the situation that can then be installed as maps into the individual.

This is the true function of the meltdown behaviour and it is what enables those of us on the autism spectrum to achieve greater success. It is also the reason why the ability to better manage meltdowns is directly proportional to the age of the autistic individual; we become more proficient at mapping.

When the mapping process is complete, the conscious mind is restored to full control and the new responses are tested. At this point both the conscious and unconscious minds are looking for external feedback as to the success of the new maps. If the feedback is positive, the new maps are permanently installed and utilised from that point on.

If the feedback is negative, the new maps are considered to be failures and are deleted. This will then instigate another meltdown in search of a different response. Unfortunately this may never be found because of one fatal flaw in the checking system – the source and nature of the feedback.

Often observers will respond to the meltdown that has been witnessed and will not notice the product that has been created as a result of the process. The observers will then place judgment on the meltdown ‘behaviour’ and unwittingly give negative feedback to the unconscious mind about the new map.

It is therefore critical that more attention is paid by observers to the outcome of a meltdown and providing positive and constructive feedback to that outcome.

It is also important that autistic individuals learn to become more adept at providing their own positive feedback.

Chapter four of my book, “*The Hidden Curriculum of Getting and Keeping a Job: Navigating the Social Landscape of Employment*” provides instructions on how to map your meltdown state and then on how to identify regulatory responses applicable to each level of your meltdown. The chapter uses a tax accountant named Lilia as a case study.

Lilia’s regulation plan is broken into four stress levels: None, Low, Medium and High. **See table below.** In the example, Lilia has identified what her stress level looks, sounds and feels like. She has also identified how she can regulate her stress level and how she can respond to outside stimuli while at the medium level.

Lilia’s regulation plan for a medium stress level		
Stress Level	Regulation Plan	Personal Reminder
<p>Medium:</p> <p>Extraneous drumming on computer keyboard, rubbing eyes, lag time between reading and understanding written words</p>	<p>Increase regulation assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn on white noise maker • Switch to lamp lighting as opposed to overhead fluorescent light; • Take a short walk (i.e., use restroom, deposit outgoing mail, refresh drink) 	<p>The unexpected will annoy me:</p> <p>Do: Intentionally smile; exhibit positive, friendly body language. Inhibit annoyance.</p> <p>Say: “Okay,” “Yes,” “I’ll add that to my list,” or “I’ll get back to you in just a moment. Do you mind if I ask any questions I may have then?”</p>

Following her regulation plan and being more aware of her own stresses can allow Lilia to continue to perform at the best of her ability in the workplace.

Become the master of your own meltdown. Use it to create fantastic maps of the social world around you and become the star that you were born to be. The neurotypical world can be a difficult place to live as an autistic individual, but it can be done and with a high level of success.

Malcolm Mayfield
Managing Director
Autism STAR Pty. Ltd.
Adelaide, Australia



Click on book picture
to order

**Malcolm Mayfield is co-author of
“The Hidden Curriculum of Getting
and Keeping a Job: Navigating the
Social Landscape of Employment.”**

Got a question or issue you'd like
Malcolm to address in 18+?

Got a story to share with other
members of the global autism
community/

You can contact us via this email:
contact@magswest.com

