

Autism Parenting Magazine

Issue 104

10 Ways to Slay Morning Routine Stress Without Meltdowns

Ways to Address Executive Functioning

Useful Tips to Help Adapt to Homeschooling

Ways to Help Your Picky Eater Explore More Foods

What is Leaky Gut and How Does it Affect Children?

Keeping Your Family Safe Financially

TRANSITION STRATEGIES FOR KIDS WITH AUTISM

CONTRIBUTE

Autism Parenting Magazine

Do you have a story to share? Perhaps you have information that would be helpful to other parents with ASD kids and want to share the info. Why not share your story/info with us? Autism Parenting Magazine wants parents and caregivers to unite to help each other. Our writing guidelines are simple.

Ideally, the topic needs to be relevant to the magazine. Any topic that is related to parenting a child with autism or being a person on the spectrum that is parenting would be a relevant topic. Released on a monthly basis, the magazine features the latest news, tips, and advice for parents of children with autism. With helpful advice that covers subjects like: behavioral tips, sensory processing issues, mitigating meltdowns, special education needs and getting access to services, we are confident that the magazine will become a must read for parents of children with autism.

We do ask that you submit a topic, title or idea of the article to make sure that someone hasn't already covered the same thing by emailing the editor. You may use a blog post that you have posted on your blog already.

THE ARTICLE SHOULD BE A MINIMUM OF 300 WORDS. FONT DOES NOT MATTER. WE DO ASK THAT IF YOU USE SOURCES TO PLEASE CITE YOUR SOURCES AT THE END OF YOUR ARTICLE TO AVOID PLAGIARISM.

At the end of your article please include a few sentences about yourself and your writing or autism related background with links to your site or products.

Please note that we cannot post your article without a small bio. So please do not forget to send a few sentences about yourself with your article.

If you have something interesting or informative to share please email editor@autismparentingmagazine.com.



SUBSCRIBE TO Autism Parenting Magazine

for the price of one cafe latte per month



- Get helpful parenting tips
- Find useful techniques for working with sensory issues
- Learn the best ways to gain access to services
- Get the latest news from around the world
- Stay connected with the latest techniques and treatments
- Gain access to monthly Q&A from parents just like you

All of this delivered straight to your iPad automatically every month

GET STARTED AND CLICK THE SUBSCRIBE BUTTON BELOW NOW!

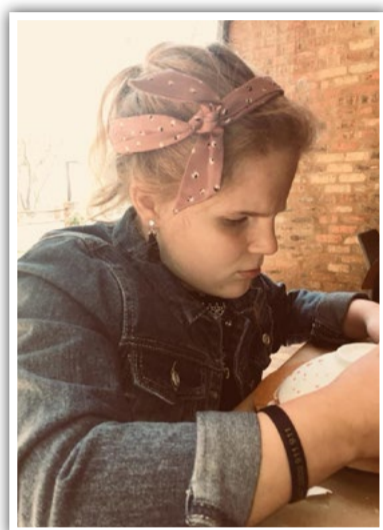
SUBSCRIBE

Table of Contents

7 TIPS FOR HELPING KIDS WITH AUTISM TRANSITION BACK TO LEARNING AFTER A LONG BREAK

Learn strategies to help prepare your child for jumping back into learning when schools reopen.

Caitlin Koob and Amy Wagenfeld, PhD, OTR/L, SCEM, FAOTA



12 EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING: FOUR AREAS TO ADDRESS AT HOME

Learn to recognize executive functioning difficulties and various ways of addressing them in the home.

Chris Abildgaard, LPC, NCC, NCSP, Jocelyn Theriault, Nicole Murphy, and Lauren Scully

18 USEFUL TIPS TO HELP ADAPT YOUR CHILD WITH AUTISM TO HOMESCHOOLING

Discover the potential benefits of homeschooling and how to make learning at home work for your child.

Betti Wilson

22 10 WAYS TO SLAY MORNING ROUTINE STRESS WITHOUT THE MELTDOWNS

Discover how one autism mom found a way to reduce morning stress for her family.

Ruthangela Bernadette

25 TOP STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT AUTISTIC GIRLS IN MAKING A SMOOTH TRANSITION BACK TO SCHOOL

A young woman with autism shares her best tips to work on how to help your daughter thrive when the new school year begins.

Siena Castellon

29 JOB READINESS AND THE VALUE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FOR PEOPLE ON THE SPECTRUM

Discover the career preparation benefits of volunteer work and internships for students and young adults on the autism spectrum.

Sara R. Colorosa, PhD

32 SPECIAL YOGA TO HELP AUTISM FAMILIES COMBAT ANXIETY DURING THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES

Learn how the breathing and stretching in yoga can help the whole family manage anxiety.

Jyoti Jo-Manuel

35 LIFE DURING COVID-19 WITH MY AUTISTIC BROTHER

Read about how COVID-19 impacted one spectrum family with guidance on how to lessen the stress for the people you love.

Sofia Palacios



38 SELF-CARE: THE ANTIDOTE TO CAREGIVER BURNOUT

Learn simple ways families can prioritize self-care for all members.

Heather Cushing-Gordon, MAdS, BCBA

41 FINALLY BRAVE ENOUGH

Read on as a mother shares how she has moved past her initial fear of sharing her son's autism diagnosis.

Erica Braun

43 WHAT IS LEAKY GUT AND HOW DOES IT AFFECT CHILDREN WITH ASD?

Learn what leaky gut syndrome is and how intestinal health can significantly affect cognitive health.

Denise Voight, MS

46 AN OPEN LETTER FROM A WOMAN WITH AUTISM

Read a first-hand perspective on misconceptions, prejudice, and what it means to be an autistic woman.

Wenna Fullerton

47 TOP GUIDANCE FOR PREPARING AN INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

Learn how to become an empowered parent when preparing your child's IEP to ensure educational needs are addressed.

Dr. Laurie Wellner

50 POETRY CORNER DON'T TAKE MY TOYS

Rachel Alexander

51 POETRY CORNER NAVIGATING AUTISM

Mary Kangas

52 HOW I KNEW SOMETHING WAS DIFFERENT IN EACH OF MY KIDS WITH AUTISM

Read a father's story about how he discovered his sons are on the autism spectrum.

Alex White

54 HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH AUTISM NAVIGATE THE PLAYGROUND: PART II

Learn ways to help your child develop social skills during recess and in playground settings.

Annette Nuñez, PhD



57 WHAT'S NEW ON THE BOOKSHELF? DAD SHARES THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY OF HIS SON WITH AUTISM IN NEW BOOK

Find out how Peter George and his family successfully tackled the daily challenges of autism.

59 WHAT'S NEW ON THE BOOKSHELF? ENLIGHTENING NEW BOOK HELPS FAMILIES SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE AUTISM

Behavioral specialist and autism parent Ericka Wharton helps decrease the anxiety surrounding an ASD diagnosis while providing strategies, services, and treatments.



60 DEALING WITH POLICE OR EMERGENCY RESPONDERS: HOW WE CAN HELP OUR LOVED ONES ON THE SPECTRUM

Find ways to educate emergency responders and police on how to best interact with individuals with autism to ensure better understanding and safety.

Kate Foley

62 AUTISM WARRIOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER WITH AUTISM FIGHTS FOR MARGINALIZED KIDS

Nicole Vander Meulen, the first openly autistic individual to serve on a school board in the United States, shares her advice for families affected by autism.

Claire Delano

63 A LOOK AT THE CONNECTION BETWEEN AUTISM AND WATER

Read on for a look into possible factors and dangers involved in a fascination with water often seen in those with ASD.

Christopher Bloh, Ph.D., BCBA-D

66 HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH A.U.T.I.S.M. SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

Great tips to remember on ways to encourage your child with autism to thrive during the school day.

Dr. Ron Malcolm



69 CREATING SPECIAL MEMORIES ON THE FOURTH OF JULY WITH MY NOISE SENSITIVE CHILD

A mother of a boy on the autism spectrum encourages families to seek out fresh and interesting experiences when typical holiday celebrations may be overwhelming.

Laura Yeager

71 AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT AUTISM WITH LOLA DADA-OLLEY

Meet Lola Dada-Olley, a mother with loved ones on the spectrum from two generations.

Derrick Hayes

74 WAYS TO HELP YOUR PICKY EATER EXPLORE MORE FOODS

Discover great ways to manage the daily challenge of putting together meals for selective eaters.

JC Ellinger

78 KEEPING YOUR SPECIAL NEEDS FAMILY SAFE FINANCIALLY

Learn how a financial plan can keep your family member with autism safe when there is a world crisis such as COVID-19.

Ryan F. Platt, MBA, ChFC, ChSNC



Disclaimer: Please note the advertised businesses and products are not endorsed or guaranteed by *Autism Parenting Magazine* or any of its employees.

Editor's Letter

Change can be hard, but for families affected by autism, any variation from routine can be overwhelming. The past few months have proven this with the abrupt closing of schools and businesses worldwide due to COVID-19. There was no time to transition home or say farewell to teachers and friends. Parents and teachers scrambled as classroom instruction suddenly went online, and for many, therapies were halted. Life was placed on hold, and families struggled.

As we enter the traditional back to school time of year, it is no wonder it's with great apprehension for many. Whether your children will be returning to the classroom or will be schooled at home, the transition to yet another new schedule is likely to be tough. Kids on the autism spectrum often have a harder time when a routine is disrupted, which may make heading back to a rigid school schedule more challenging. We are here to help you work through this process and hopefully lessen those jitters and anxieties during these uncertain times.

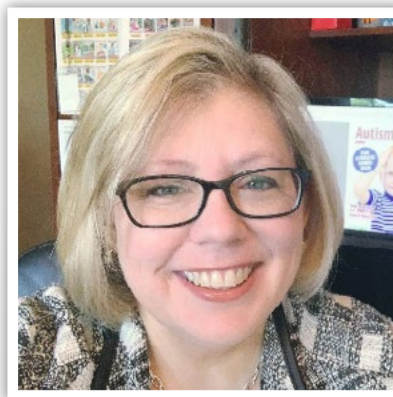
Kids on the autism spectrum will need to feel adequately supported now more than ever when it's time to return to academics, said Amy Wagenfeld, PhD, OTR/L, SCEM, FAOTA, and Caitlin Koob. To learn expert strategies for helping your child jump back into learning this fall, take a look at their piece, *Tips for Helping Kids with Autism Transition Back to Learning After a Long Break*. Their advice will help you put a strategy in place and make the change as smooth as possible.

Seventeen-year-old award-winning neurodiversity advocate and author Siena Castellon has shared tips and tricks she has used in the past to make transitioning to new environments less stressful. Please read *Top Strategies to Support Autistic Girls in Making a Smooth Transition Back to School* as she addresses some of the unique challenges she has faced as a girl with autism.

Do you dread going back to a morning routine filled with disorganized kids and chaos? Autism mom Ruthangela Bernadette has put together a list of steps to reduce morning stress for her family in the piece, *10 Ways to Slay Morning Routine Stress Without the Meltdowns*. Check it out as her advice can help you find a stable routine to keep your child grounded.

The bumpy transition to online learning last semester made some families reconsider their schooling methods. Child psychologist and autism parent Betti Wilson shares her advice on the potential benefits of homeschooling and how to make learning at home work for your child. Read *Useful Tips to Help Adapt Your Child with Autism to Homeschooling* to learn the benefits of learning at home and ways you can encourage socialization and participation in the real world.

Finding ways to help your child with autism build social skills is essential to growth. Annette Nuñez, PhD says play time can be very complex for children with autism, but it's crucial to so-



cial skills development. And since playgrounds and parks can be unpredictable and chaotic at times, it's important to find a way to make them inviting. Take a look at Annette's piece, *Helping Your Child with Autism Navigate the Playground: Part II*, a follow-up piece to her previous article that covered tips on building confidence and social skills while playing with others on the playground.

Another critical topic this time of year is executive functioning, the term used to describe the tasks our brains perform to think, solve, and act. When children with autism have executive functioning difficulties, it affects the learning of new information and utilizing what has previously been learned to solve problems. Chris Abildgaard, LPC, NCC, NCSP, Jocelyn Theriault, Nicole Murphy, and Lauren Scully have tackled this topic in their piece *Executive Functioning: Four Areas to Address at Home*. Take a look as their article addresses how to work through the barriers that may exist at home so your family can start feeling more successful in day to day life.

Our writers have covered so many valuable topics in this issue, including how intestinal health can significantly affect cognitive health, ways to help picky eaters explore more foods, the value of experiential learning for people on the spectrum, and guidance for preparing an Individualized Education Program. We also have an informative piece on how the whole family can combat anxiety during these uncertain times using simple yoga techniques.

Congratulations to our photo contest winners Anina Botha (12), Nirvana Anicama (7), and Nicholas Grindrod (8) whose images are in this issue. And a big congrats to young Lawrence Musisi, who will be featured on our upcoming special edition, *Best of APM – Education at Home and at School*. Be sure to look for it!

Please continue to reach out to us for guidance. Together, we form a remarkable autism community that will meet today's and tomorrow's challenges. Support one another and stay well.

Amy KD Tobik
Editor-in-Chief

Disclaimer:

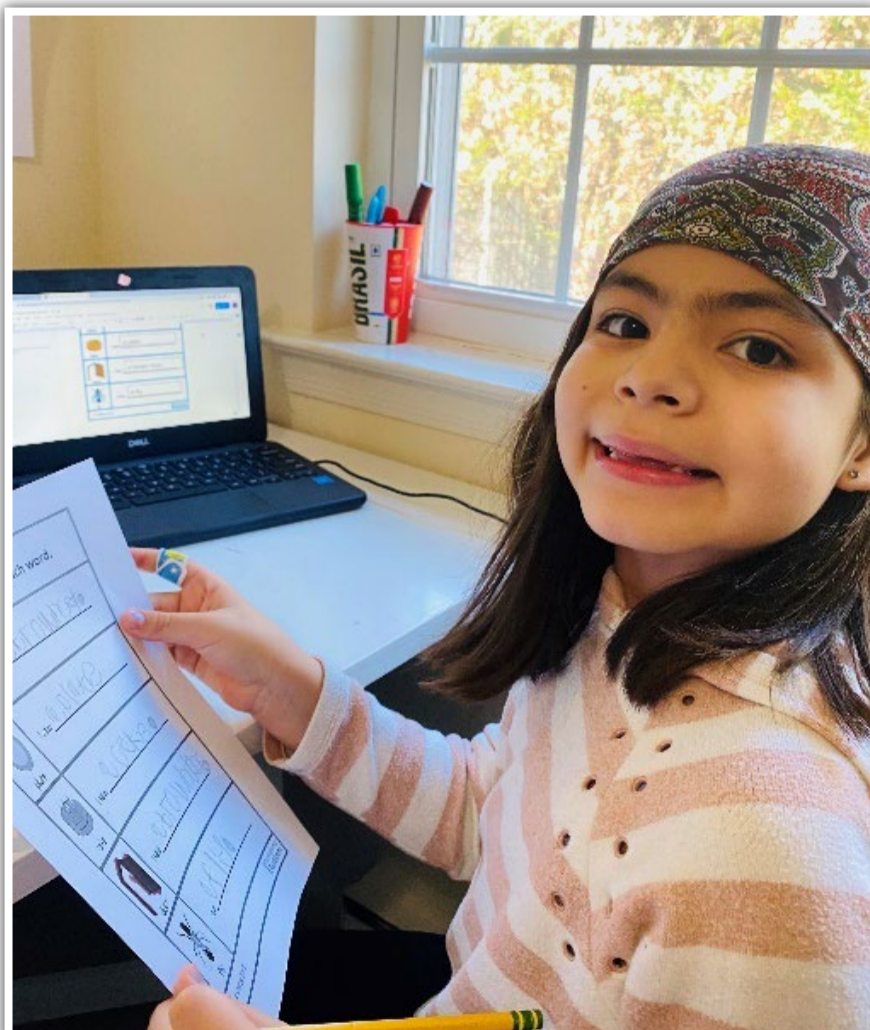
Autism Parenting Magazine tries to deliver honest, unbiased reviews, resources, and advice, but please note that due to the variety of capabilities of people on the spectrum, information cannot be guaranteed by the magazine or its writers. Medical content, including but not limited to text, graphics, images, and other material contained within, is never intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of a physician with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition, and never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read within.

Tips for Helping Kids with Autism Transition Back to Learning After a Long Break

By Caitlin KOOB and Amy WAGENFELD, PhD, OTR/L, SCEM, FAOTA

While children often experience a “summer downslide” after spending months away from school, teachers and parents have extra concerns about the impact of this year’s long break away from the classroom due to COVID-19. The abrupt shift from the daily routines of the school year into a time of uncertainty and constant change has already caused significant disruption to children’s lives—particularly those with autism. Layered onto the typical summer downslide, this disruption will likely worsen. Now more than ever, children will need to feel adequately supported when it’s time to return to school.

Each new school year is an exciting yet challenging time for students (and parents!). They face many



transitions: meeting new teachers and classmates, learning different classroom procedures, adjusting routines, and encountering general academic opportunities and challenges. Some children must adapt to and navigate new school buildings, adding another set of obstacles to manage. The more familiar a place, group of people, routines, or set of demands are, the more confident and successful children can be.

In this article, we provide suggestions to ease your child's transition to the new school year. We fully appreciate that this upcoming transition might be more difficult than most due to the prolonged break from school and additional challenges caused by COVID-19. It is important to note that because of the circumstances, your child may experience more of a delay in adapting to the new school year than in previous ones. Regardless, we hope these tips will help you and your child prepare for and overcome the challenges of this transitional season! The tips are suggestions; we imagine you might consider ways to adapt them to best meet your family's needs.

1. Set and implement a regular bedtime

While we may struggle with this, research confirms that establishing a regular bedtime (and routine to get there) sets the stage for a better night's sleep and an easier time waking up and getting ready for the day. A predictable routine, right down to how the covers are drawn back and the pillow is plumped, is a helpful way to transition to bedtime.

Extra ideas:

Write down every step needed to help your child hop into bed, no matter how small or insignificant it seems. Start slowly: introduce step one, let your child

master it, add the next, and so on as you help him/her prepare for bed. A predictable routine may help your child more easily get to bed at a regular time.

As each bedtime routine task is completed, your child could check it off the list, ring a bell, or in some capacity associate a completed task with an "I did it" acknowledgement. Positively reinforce the little things, which in reality, are big things!

2. Make a morning routine to get ready for school

At least six weeks prior to the first day of school, plan and implement a morning routine. This may include a visual chart with images organized in sequential order of what needs to be done to get out the door and head to school. Be as detailed with this visual as best suits your child. Just like preparing for bed, start slowly—introduce task one, let your child master it, and add the next. A first task might be to get out of bed, the next to walk to the bathroom, and so on. What is most important is establishing (or re-establishing) a routine that matches your child's skills and helps your child feel great about accomplishing these important self-care tasks, so he/she can leave the house and go to school.

Extra ideas:

As each task is completed, your child could check it off, ring a bell, or any type of "I did it" acknowledgement. As in tip one, reward the accomplishments!

3. Keep up with academics over the summer

In anticipation of the start of school, it is helpful to have your child participate in academic activities to maintain his/her knowledge and make sure he/she is prepared for the upcoming year. While this might seem boring for children or challenging for you, there are several ways to make it fun while lessening the downside effect from months away from school. If you can even slightly offset the downside effect, your child may be more prepared to transition back.

Extra ideas:

You and your child might play school together, or your child might be motivated by a sticker, treat, or some sort of positive acknowledgement for doing his/her hard work.

It might be helpful to reach out to your child's teacher for additional resources to work on through the



“ Ask your child’s teacher to send a photograph of himself/herself. Print and post the photo in a place your child will see often. Like other learning, reinforce who this person is. ”

summer months, or you can make your own worksheets. There are many free or low-cost online resources available.

4. Revisit and rethink sensory diets

Sensory diets are scheduled activities intended to help children self-regulate, making them better prepared to learn and engage in daily activities. If your child has a sensory diet that has been disrupted by summer break, think about a jumpstart prior to the beginning of school. Check in with your occupational therapist (via HIPAA-compliant telehealth as needed) to revise the sensory diet so it best meets your child’s needs.

Extra ideas:

If your child’s sensory diet entails going to a park and that is not possible now, think creatively about doing similar activities at home.

5. Meet classmates before school starts

It can be overwhelming to enter a classroom of new people on the first day of school. To avoid dis-regulation, encourage your child to meet with classmates prior to the first day. Set up a short play date at a neutral site or “virtual” meetups with classmates prior to the start of the year. Begin by meeting with one or two classmates, then work up to bigger groups. If your child has a friend or two in class, he/she will likely feel less anxious about the first day of school and might even look forward to it!

Extra ideas:

Help your child create a list of questions to ask his/her new classmates, whether he/she asks them alone or you assist.

6. Meet the teacher before school starts

If meeting face-to-face in the summer is not possible, arrange a virtual meeting so your child can meet and

get to know his/her teacher to add some familiarity to the start of the school year! A familiar face in the crowd reduces anxiety. Every teacher has different rules and expectations, which can be overwhelming for students. Meeting his/her teacher beforehand gives your child one less thing to be uncertain of on the first day of school.

Extra ideas:

Ask your child’s teacher to send a photograph of himself/herself. Print and post the photo in a place your child will see often. Like other learning, reinforce who this person is.

7. Let your child get used to the commute

Take a walk or drive by the school before the start of the year, or even make going by the school a part of your daily routine. Consider the transition to school. We usually think about all it takes to get ready in the morning and how our children need to adapt once there. However, do not overlook the commute to school, be it by car, bus, or walking. Your child will also need to find the right entrance, head to the classroom, and get acclimated to the school’s outdoor environment. The more familiar and comfortable your child is with getting to school, the easier the transition will be.

Extra ideas:

Walk your child to the entrance door or practice dropping him/her off in the carpool line. This daily practice will make it much easier for your child to follow your morning routine once school begins again.

8. Practice a lunchtime routine

Practice preparing, eating, and cleaning up lunch as if your child was at school. Your child can start by helping plan the ingredients for lunch, then he/she can gradually set up, eat, and clean up. The unpredictable environment of a school lunchroom can be overwhelming, but familiarity with his/her meal and

“ As needed, encourage and teach your child to complete self-care skills independently. At school, your child may be expected to be independent during bathroom breaks and lunchtime. ”

the set-up/clean-up responsibilities will help ease some of the anxiety of returning to school.

9. Teach independence

As needed, encourage and teach your child to complete self-care skills independently. At school, your child may be expected to be independent during bathroom breaks and lunchtime. While it may be faster to do some of these tasks for your child at home, you are helping by letting him/her do it independently! Start with a small first step towards independence, then gradually add more. This can be done one task at a time until your child is independent in each skill needed for school. Eventually, the tasks will become easier and take less time. Try to start this process well before the school year begins, so there is time for your child to get comfortable doing these tasks at home before he/she is expected to adapt to the school's environment.

10. Practice wearing school clothes

While we love wearing our pajamas and comfy clothes all day, have your child practice wearing school clothes and shoes well before the new school year begins. Clothing textures, tags, and shoes add another sensory challenge that can exacerbate difficulties associated with transitioning back to school. Start slowly by having your child wear shoes with his/her preferred clothes, adding his/her favorite shirt, and eventually working up to a full school outfit.

11. Address your child's emotions

Transitioning to a new school year brings many feelings to the surface. You can use a feelings chart to help your child explain which emotion he/she is feeling about the transition back to school and address it together. Once school begins, continue to talk with your child about how he/she feels and what scenarios at school might bring about certain feelings.

Extra ideas:

A feelings chart can be as simple as a series of emoticons, many of which are online and in the public domain. It is helpful to include emotion “pairs” such as happy-sad and angry-calm. Depending on your child's level of cognitive and language development, a feelings chart could be more complex and include simple whole-body figures that clearly express emotions. If technology is not available, draw simple emoticons on a sheet of paper.

When sharing the chart with your child, use your words and pair them with body language that corresponds with the feeling your child is experiencing. For example, you might say, “Are you feeling sad?” while making a sad face and slumping your shoulders. Customize this according to your child's skill level.

The transition back to school for children with autism is usually challenging, even without the complications of COVID-19. However, we hope these tips will help you put a strategy in place and make the change as smooth as possible.

Caitlin Koob is an occupational therapy student currently completing her second Level II fieldwork rotation and is about to begin a PhD program in Applied Health Research and Evaluation at Clemson University in the fall. She has ample experience with pediatrics and hopes to devote her career to working with children with developmental disorders.

Amy Wagenfeld, PhD, OTR/L, SCEM, FAOTA is Principal of design+cOnsulTation, an organization that works with designers to create therapeutic landscapes and evaluate their outcomes. She is also the co-author of many articles and books, including Therapeutic Gardens: Design for Healing Spaces, published by Timber Press.



MY SPECTRUM HEROES

Heroic Nutritional Support For Your Child's Developing Brain

with extra support for children on the spectrum



Let your child reach new heights with My Spectrum Heroes

Quality nutrient supplementation up to the task of supporting your little loved one's growing mind.

To shop Super Powers Visit www.AutismParentingMagazine.com/SpectrumHeroes

10% OFF YOUR FIRST ORDER!

USE CODE: **AutismParenting10** AT CHECKOUT

Executive Functioning: Four Areas to Address at Home

By Chris ABILDGAARD, LPC, NCC, NCSP, Jocelyn THERIAULT, Nicole MURPHY, and Lauren SCULLY

Ever wonder why your son or daughter always has a hard time holding on to directions you give? Or, ever wonder why when you give the direction “Clean your room,” it never looks exactly how you pictured it in your head? Sure, children, adolescents, and young adults, at times, choose to listen to certain things.



They look like they heard you; they may even be able to repeat back to you what you asked them. Yet so many parents tell me, “But they still don’t do it!” With the start of a new school year upon us and for many who have not been in school for months, this transition may make things even more difficult. Although things can get extremely frustrating and look behavioral in most instances, we also have to be aware of and consider how one’s invisible defi-

cits may be impacting that individual. One of these “invisible deficits” most individuals on the autism spectrum deal with is executive functioning (EF).

So, what are these invisible executive functioning deficits? From a traditional sense, EF involves the basic skills of self-management that allow us to set goals and achieve them. They include such areas as managing our emotions, taking initiative, staying focused, being organized, planning, prioritizing, and

“ **Having the ability to regulate and recognize your emotions is part of one’s executive functioning. Think of it as your on/off switch to emotions and how you show them.** ”

recognizing when we’re off track and figuring out how to recover. Deficits in such EF skills may impact how someone organizes his/her backpack or his/her desk, prepares to do homework, remembers the steps to cleaning one’s room, etc. Based on our work in social cognition and development, we also understand various EF skills (including cognitive flexibility, goal orientation, attentional control, information processing, and emotional recognition) impact one’s social development and adaptive skills.

These are cognitive skills we use on a daily basis. We will have days where our EF looks stronger than other days. This is impacted by one’s level of anxiety, mood, other life stressors, etc. If we look within each of us, we all have times when our EF is not where we would like for it to be. We rely on others to help support those areas of EF that are weaker. Kids and adolescents can’t “hire” an assistant or delegate items to be done. We expect their brain to just do it, and at times, especially for individuals on the autism spectrum, that’s taxing and overwhelming. Here are four EF areas and ways to address these barriers at home so you (and your son/daughter) can start feeling more successful in day to day life.

0-100: Coping with emotions

Does anyone have a son or daughter who has elephant-sized reactions to ant-sized problems? When you ask him/her to get off the video game, he/she yells, “I can’t right now,” or maybe says things when he/she is upset because he/she knows it will hurt you and get you off his/her back. Having the ability to regulate and recognize your emotions is part of one’s executive functioning. Think of it as your on/off switch to emotions and how you show them. The problem comes when we have emotional reactions that don’t fit the situation or the context. It’s okay to have emotions, and it’s even okay for kids to be pissed at their parents (we all were at some point in our lives). However, we need to be able to recognize what we are feeling when we are feeling it, and how

to manage or cope with that feeling in an appropriate way, hence the term emotional regulation.

You may have found asking your son or daughter to “calm down” in the moment doesn’t always work. In fact, in some cases it only increases his/her emotional reactions. The trick is to catch him/her before he/she reaches that level where his/her emotions, body, and language all start to lose control at the same time. A positive family routine to establish is a way to “check in” with family members as to how they are feeling. Start when you notice people feeling calm and in a good place. Having them rate where they are (on a 1-10 scale with 10 being the highest level of stress or negative emotion) is a great way for parents to gauge their kids’ emotional state. This scale can be modified for younger children as needed (maybe use a 1-5 scale or colors, like what is talked about in the “Zone of Regulation” curriculum). This idea of checking in also opens up some communication about emotions. The trick here is that everyone in the house should be “checking in,” not just the person on the spectrum! The most important part of this process is how we handle when someone says, “I am angry” vs. when someone just “shows” he/she is angry. Many of my clients tell me they don’t know what mom or dad will say or do if they learn they are angry or mad at them. Allowing them to identify their emotions and then responding to their perceived emotions in a calm and matter of fact way can be a huge turning point in one’s ability to regulate his/her emotions. We have to take the “guessing” out of what our response will be. It’s okay to say, “I am sorry you are mad,” or for older kids, “Yeah, I would be pissed too.” Modeling how we identify and what we do with those emotions is critical to developing one’s emotional regulation skills.

Visuals are key to EF improvements

Planning and organization are two executive functioning components that go hand-in-hand. These skills help our children make sure they are complet-



A great way to increase organization skills is to create a list of all of the things you need for the task before you begin working on it.



ing all of the tasks they need to when they need to be. To ensure we complete the tasks we are responsible for, we first have to figure out when to do them. One easy strategy to use is to make a schedule. In this case, the schedule serves as more than just an indicator of when an assignment is due or when someone's birthday is. This type of schedule is for laying out exactly when a task is going to be worked on and for how long. For example, if your child has a test coming up at the end of the week, his/her schedule might look something like this: *Monday—study from 4 pm to 5 pm; Tuesday—study from 4:30 pm to 6 pm; Wednesday—study from 4 pm to 5 pm; Thursday—review all test material from 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm.* There are two key aspects to these types of schedules. First, they should be *visual*. Have fun with this—make it unique to your child and/or your family! Visual schedules help us to physically see what we need to be doing, so they can help to eliminate the anxiety of the unknown as well as allow the individual(s) using them to be in control of their responsibilities. Secondly, they should be *visible*. Making a schedule is a great strategy, but if it is put in a spot where it cannot be easily seen, it cannot serve its purpose. These visual schedules should be located somewhere that is accessed regularly. This could mean it hangs on the refrigerator door, is pasted on the table or desk where your child does homework, or even is taped to your child's bedroom door. No matter where it is located, it should be seen regularly to get the most out of it.

Once the plan is set, the focus shifts to making sure we are able to complete the tasks with the appropriate tools, materials, and information. A great way to increase organization skills is to create a list of all of the things you need for the task before you begin working on it. For example, if your child has a baseball game in the afternoon, but you are worried he/she might forget his/her glove or cleats, have him/her make a *Baseball Preparation List*. Here, your child can write down everything he/she needs for his/her game, then check it off once it is packed and/or ready

to go. These types of lists are great because not only do they help make sure your child has everything he/she needs, but they can also be made for any type of activity and reused in the future. So, even when this year's baseball season ends, your child will still have access to his/her *Baseball Preparation List* next year. With the implementation of strategies like schedules and organizational lists, your child will be developing his/her executive functioning skills without even realizing it.

Understanding the passage of time

What do five minutes feel like? When working towards strengthening time management skills, it could be very helpful to incorporate a visual timer. Visual timers help children develop a more concrete understanding of time. An easy way to introduce a visual timer to your child is to use it when he/she is engaging in a preferred activity. For example, you can set a timer for 10 minutes when he/she is crafting, or playing pretend. Many different kinds of timers can be used; you may choose to use the timer on your phone or even the one on the microwave! Either way, be sure the timer is close to your child's play so it can be easily referenced. During the interval, it is critical to consistently remark on the passing time. Comments like, *"It has already been two minutes, we have eight more minutes left,"* or *"Look at our timer, we have played for five minutes, which is half of our playing time,"* could be very effective. Pairing the visual timer with a preferred activity will make it easier to incorporate the timer into a less preferred task at a future time.

When using a visual timer to help increase your child's ability to work independently, it is essential to start small. For example, encourage your child to work independently for 10 minutes. For younger children, this time can be reduced. It is important to use your discretion and consider the unique characteristics of your child when setting an appropriate time. Set the visual timer close to his/her workspace, and when the

timer goes off, allow your child to take a break and celebrate the independent working time with a small reward. Doing this will foster feelings of accomplishment and competency within your child. If your child is experiencing continued success with the set time, increase it by three minutes, and follow the same routine. This gradual increase in time will help build your child's stamina with independent work.

The thinking behind behavior

We have all been guilty of getting caught up in the moment, losing track of where we are, what we are doing, and how we are doing at our activities or goals at hand. For kids on the autism spectrum, this too is the case—whether it's playing video games with the volume through the roof, speaking too loudly inside a library, or standing too close to other people in line at the grocery store. But they also have unique deficits that make this much tougher to deal with. Some of our kids struggle with overstimulation, and once that stimulation reaches a threshold, it can seem impossible for them to think and talk about how, why, or when the situation became too much for them. All of these responses involve the executive function skill of having the ability to measure, record, and evalu-

ate one's own behavior: our ability to self-monitor. A great way to help our kids with self-monitoring is to develop a concrete, visual system for measuring, recording, and evaluating how they are doing on a specific activity or goal.

Helping an individual to self-monitor starts with him/her being aware of the expectation. It is important to identify a specific behavior or skill you and your child would like to monitor. Be as specific as you can so there is no guessing what you or your child need to do. For this example, let's say you want your child to be quieter when playing video games. What does quieter mean? It could be reducing an earth-shattering scream to a strong yell. For the sake of everyone's ears, it helps to be specific about what loud vs. quiet means and how to measure that. A great way to do this is to create a visual scale with measurable levels (four to five levels is recommended, depending on the scale). This can be done using numbers, colors, and/or pictures.

It will be helpful to incorporate your child's interests into this scale so he/she develops a greater understanding of the measurement of that behavior. If your child loves planes, at the bottom of the scale,





Executive function skills are cognitive processes an individual will be working on possibly through life. As a child gets older, he/she will develop competencies for those areas he/she is not as strong in. It is important to remember many behaviors observed both at home and at school are a result of these invisible deficits and not just because the child is being oppositional.



there can be a picture of a paper airplane (signifying silence or very quiet volume), and at the top, there can be a picture of a commercial jet engine (signifying extremely loud volume). In between those two extremes can be two to three more pictures of increasingly louder planes. To finish off the scale, you can put a star or another symbol (and make that slightly larger than other visuals) next to the level your child should aim to keep his/her volume at or below. Create a “check-in phrase” with your son/daughter which signifies that you need him/her to “rate” where he/she is on the scale at a certain time. Having him/her say “I am a two, mom,” is a great start to the process of having him/her stop and reflect on where he/she is (behaviorally and emotionally) at a certain time. You may not always agree, at which point I may suggest saying, “You sound like a four to my ears,” and then walk away. If he/she stays within the expected noise range while gaming, reward him/her! Celebrate that success by allowing more time to do a preferred activity. The process of self-monitoring can be a skill a person is working on well through his/her 20s and beyond. Starting to address it at a younger age will only help to make it a part of his/her behavioral habits.

Executive function skills are cognitive processes an individual will be working on possibly through life. As a child gets older, he/she will develop competencies for those areas he/she is not as strong in. It is important to remember many behaviors observed both at home and at school are a result of these invisible deficits and not just because the child is being oppositional. Understanding these deficits are real and do have an impact on individuals from a behavioral, social, and emotional perspective is key to helping a person who wants to improve in this area!

Please remember this new school year will bring its own set of unique challenges and difficulties while getting back into a routine. Take one thing at a time and address those executive function skills most impacting your child’s daily functioning. All the best as we head back to school and new routines!

Chris Abildgaard, LPC, NCC, NCSP, is the owner and director of the Social Learning Center, LLC. located in Cheshire, CT, and an adjunct professor at the University of St. Joseph located in West Hartford, CT. He has been in private practice for over 13 years. Chris is a Nationally Certified School Psychologist, a board-certified national counselor, and a licensed professional counselor with a specialization in autism spectrum disorders. Chris earned a Graduate Certificate from the University of Massachusetts Lowell in Behavioral Interventions in Autism and is currently pursuing his doctorate of Education (EdD) in School Psychology from Loyola University.

Facebook: [@SocialLearningCenter](#)

Instagram: [@sociallearningctr](#)

Twitter: [@SLC545](#)

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/chrisabildgaardslc

Jocelyn Theriault is pursuing her degree at UCONN in psychology and helps to head the Social Learning Center EF Coaching Program. Nicole Murphy has been a part of the Social Learning Center for three years and is a graduate student studying school psychology at UCONN. Lauren Scully is a graduate student studying school psychology from Fairfield University and is part of the Social Learning Center’s EF Coaching program.



HELPING SHAPE THE FUTURE



**Educational
Resources**



**Autism
Help Hotline**



**Advocacy &
Community**

The American Autism Association is a non-profit organization that provides free educational resources and therapeutic programs to individuals and families impacted by autism.

Useful Tips to Help Adapt Your Child with Autism to Homeschooling

By Betti WILSON



Doctors' ability to identify autism spectrum disorder has improved greatly since it was first diagnosed in the early 20th century. Thus, society's relationship with autistic kids is ever-changing. Even if we still don't fully know what causes autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and how to tackle it, we understand much more about it, which makes the lives of children and parents way easier than in the past.

Also, representation in media and popular culture, such as television drama series like *The Good Doctor*, helps decrease stigmatization.

When you have kids, you have to be at least a bit prepared for surprises you might encounter in terms of behavior, education, social life, and so on. With children on the spectrum, surprises can be more significant. Indeed, you have to learn how to efficiently

deal with each autistic child in ways suited to him/her, but that doesn't mean ASD prevents him/her from living regular lives.

The big question parents of kids on the autism spectrum are faced with is whether they should homeschool their children or enroll them in a public school. Since a lot of people contacted me with this issue, I decided to investigate and see what experts have to say.

Reasons to homeschool kids with autism

Parents may decide to enroll their autistic child in traditional school out of the desire for him/her to socialize, get the kind of education all other kids do, and so on.

However, it is essential to consider different factors when you work with kids on the spectrum. The classrooms in both public and private schools are often packed with children. Kids with autism do require more attention and time than neurotypical kids. Often, teachers don't have that much time to dedicate to just one or a few children in the class.

It is also common for teachers in these schools to not have the training and skills necessary for communicating with autistic children. There are many other reasons why enrolling kids with autism in private or public schools isn't an ideal option, and some are related to other children.

Kids can be, and often are, cruel, especially when something is going on that they don't understand. One doesn't have to be on the autism spectrum to be teased and bullied. But when your child does have autism, he/she will likely suffer maltreatment in school because other children rarely learn about ASD behavior and thus don't have the tools to understand it.

I have researched homeschooling children with autism and will now give you some tips on how to make the transition go smoothly.

Work on topics of interest

Children on the spectrum tend to develop a deep interest in particular topics and fixate on them. This can be anything from music to history to biology and more. Try to figure them out and focus on those interests both as a parent and a teacher. These topics are the doors to your child's world, passions, and

talents. You can use standard or specific ASD curriculums, or use them as an inspiration for developing a curriculum that will correspond to your kid's needs. Don't be afraid to explore and adjust study programs as the child grows.

Provide support

Parents can provide a much more supportive environment for their child's education if he/she is homeschooled. They can figure out the best activities for their child and find ways to implement them. Remember, you know your child better than anyone else.



Use computer-based learning

The computer plays an essential role in the education of kids with autism because it's a less stressful way to learn. There are Virtual Charter Schools that provide encouragement, curriculums, and tech devices that can assist in learning and tests. These schools are funded by state governments, which means you don't pay anything. The only thing your kid won't get is one-on-one support, but that's where you come in. Homeschooling definitely should not lead to isolation, and that's why these Cyber Schools are significant. Your kids can meet others, and you can also get to know other parents, exchange experiences, and consult on different topics.

Social skills

After hearing their child is on the autism spectrum, a lot of parents are concerned about the child's ability to socialize and participate in the real world. It is essential to know many people with autism function quite well in society and making social skills

a priority for your child always helps. First, keep in mind there are a lot of excellent games for kids with autism that can help to develop your child's social skills. Also, when children are younger, you can use toys like Peaceful Pals to provide comfort in stressful situations such as social encounters. These toys help relieve the stress the child may feel when he/she meets someone new. Also, you can incorporate the topics he/she finds interesting into social activities to help your child feel comfortable. As an example, if your child developed a particular interest in dinosaurs, you can take him/her to the Museum of Nature or Paleontology, which is something unlikely to happen in regular school.

Develop talents

A lot of kids with autism are talented in a particular area. But, with so many children in traditional classrooms, teachers don't have time to give specialized attention, let alone to understand your kid is an exceptionally talented painter. When you are homeschooling, you can quickly figure this out and develop your child's talent in the right direction.

Therapy opportunities

Most schools have counselors, but that doesn't mean they are equipped with the skills necessary to work with children on the spectrum or that they will have the right approach. Some kids do much better when they have the support of a skilled individual therapist who can truly dedicate attention to them.



Conclusion

After talking with experts but also parents of children with autism, I believe there are many advantages to homeschooling your child. Are you or your child on the spectrum? Or do you know someone who is? What are your thoughts on the topic?

Betti Wilson is a child psychologist and aunt to a ten-year-old with Asperger's syndrome. She used to work in school and now runs classes for adults to support them through the challenges they face as the parent of a child with ASD.

Autism Parenting Magazine



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



League School's Residential Program

Providing the Environment That Students With ASD Need to Prosper

At the League School of Greater Boston, it is our job – and our joy – to provide an environment at both our residences where growth is always happening. We reach out to our students and their families to provide them with the support and skills they need to be as happy, productive, and as self-reliant as they can be. At League School, we offer:

- Two state-of-the-art on-campus residences serving up to 32 students
- Life skills learning including self-care, cooking, laundry, and leisure
- Private rooms with access to game and exercise room
- 24-hour care with on-call medical supervision
- Weekly and nightly activities to increase students' independence and community skills

To learn more about our program, please contact League School's Admissions Coordinator, Gayle Ferland at T: 508-850-3900, X171 or E: gferland@leagueschool.com.



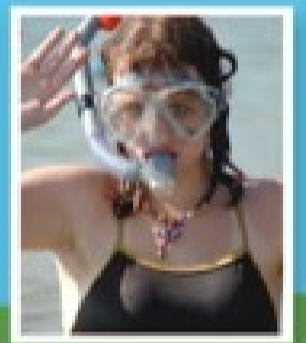
Excellence in Autism Education
leagueschool.org

SUMMER CAMP

GRACE & ACCEPTANCE



CHARIS HILLS



For children with Asperger's, HF Autism, ADD/ADHD

Charis Hills is a residential, recreational and educational summer camp for 7-18 year old children with learning and social difficulties. Our campers make new friends, discover a highly personalized, fun-filled and nurturing environment while meeting their heart's desire to be accepted and succeed in new activities. We have over 25 activities to choose from. Our campers play with a purpose!



CARING & SHARING CHRIST WITH HIS KIDS

JUN: KIDS 7-14
Session 1
START SAVING!

JUL: TEENS 13-18+
Session 4
START SAVING!

1 TO 4 WEEK SESSIONS

940.964.2145
WWW.CHARISHILLS.ORG



10 Ways to Slay Morning Routine Stress Without the Meltdowns

By Ruthangela BERNADETTE



The lazy summer mornings are but a distant memory as kids are returning to school for another year and their mothers rejoice at the thought of some well-earned peace and quiet once more. So why, when our little ones are getting back into a stable routine that helps keep them grounded, are so many moms tearing their hair out at the mere thought of the morning alarm clock?

Could it be morning routine stress? Could our little angels also be little morning demons?

Take it from an autism mom who knows first-hand how difficult it can be to get our future Einsteins out of their

scratchers, washed, dressed, fed, and on the school bus on time every morning. She is a confessed ex-yeller, ex-nagger, and ex-threaten-with-consequences mom who has finally cracked the secret of extricating our sweet darlings from their blissful slumbers and onto the school bus—without the meltdowns!

Here are her top 10 tips to slay morning routine stress:

1. Leave plenty of time

Set your alarm for enough time for you to get a cup of coffee, showered, dressed, and your bed made before your child's alarm goes off.

2. Have your child take responsibility to get himself/herself up

Buy him/her an alarm clock and put it beside his/her bed. Have a strict policy on how many times the snooze button can be pressed. Ruthangela recommends just one ten-minute snooze.

3. Let your child relax in the bathtub

Kids can relax in a bath (scented if they like it) and gather their thoughts for the day ahead. Fake battery-operated candles can provide a safe and relaxing atmosphere in the bathroom. You might also want to consider music your child likes or finds soothing.

4. Make bath-time fun-time

My daughter thinks it's really cool to eat her breakfast in the bathtub! Pick something your child likes and is easy to eat, such as a banana or a grilled cheese sandwich, and a drink. Not only will this save you time, but your kid will appreciate the novelty.

5. Serve, serve, serve

If your child is old enough to be left unattended in the bath, make the bed for him/her during bath time. It's so much easier for a child to get himself/herself organized when the room itself is neat. Pick pajamas and books up off the floor and straighten things up. Turn on the light and get your child's clothes ready. That way, you minimize stress as he/she doesn't have to worry about making appropriate clothing choices. Help your child find things he/she needs as the brain hasn't fully woken up yet.

6. It all starts with you

We all know our superkids are little sponges. They are sensitive to our moods, so if we are stressed, so are they. If we are positive, so are they. It all starts with you. Check your attitude. Be happy and upbeat with your child. Make jokes. Remind him/her of something to look forward to that day, such as, "Friday is soccer day at school!" Don't *tell* your child to do things; *ask* him/her.

7. Have something your child can focus on if waiting

If your child finds himself/herself hanging around in the morning, either waiting for his/her siblings to

get ready or looking out for the school bus to come along, have something he/she can quietly focus on while waiting, such as a book or an iPad. Again, give your child the responsibility to ensure he/she is ready for the bus on time. Open the curtains and have your child sit by the window with a book or iPad so he/she can keep an eye out for the bus.

8. Stay positive

Don't forget to send him/her off with a positive thought! Say, "I love you!" "Have an awesome day!" or "I can't wait to hear about your Show and Tell when you get home!"

9. Take a deep breath; you got this

When you close the door behind your little darlings, exhale loudly and tell yourself what a good job you are doing!

10. Get going to work!

Now it's time for you to get yourself out the door to work!

Ruthangela Bernadette, author of [Special Kid to Super Kid](#), is a supermom whose passion is to inspire and empower parents to help their children make friends, gain confidence, and thrive in school, but that's only her day job. Her real job is raising her eye-rolling, door slamming, makeup-wearing superdaughter, and of course, saving the universe before dinner time.

Website: ruthangelabernadette.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ruthangelabernadette/?modal=admin_todo_tour

Instagram: www.instagram.com/ruth_angela_bernadette

YouTube: www.youtube.com/channel/UC-vpM-0tt-wGR4f1cD6JelDA?view_as=subscriber

Book: www.amazon.com/gp/product/B08465L3F6?pf_rd_r=MZE0SAGVMT25X6Z-2BAMQ&pf_rd_p=2d1ab404-3b11-4c97-b3db-48081e145e35

If Your Child Is On The Autism-Spectrum...

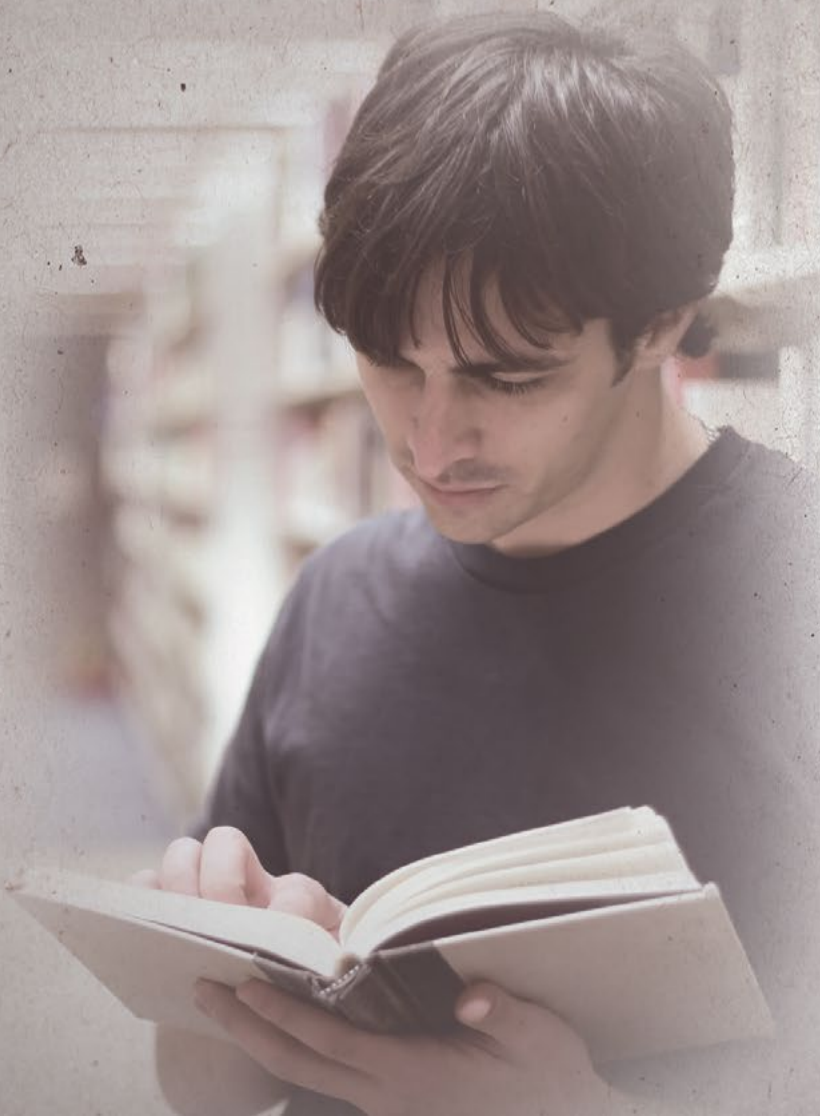
You Should Be On Our Website.

Get the information, skills and confidence to help your child, including one-on-one coaching from an Autism specialist physician.



AutismRecoverySystem.com

LIFE AWAITS.....



Relevant, real time life strategies.

Everyone feels the pressure of social situations. If these pressures become too much to bear, there are people who can help.

At Pasadena Villa, we specialize in guiding individuals on the autism spectrum towards fulfilling lives.

You don't have to manage alone. If you or a loved one needs help, please call 407.391.1937.

Visit PasadenaVilla.com to learn more about our treatment programs for autism and *other mental health conditions*.

Pasadena Villa

The Villa Orlando - Florida
The Smoky Mountain Lodge - East Tennessee
Outpatient Center-Raleigh - North Carolina



Top Strategies to Support Autistic Girls in Making a Smooth Transition Back to School



By Siena CASTELLON

Going back to school after the long summer vacation is daunting. While most students feel a mix of excitement and nervousness at the prospect of having new teachers, new classes, new friends, or even a new school, autistic girls are likely to find these changes scary and overwhelming.

To make matters worse, the uncertainty and turmoil caused by the coronavirus pandemic make going back to school this year even more difficult than it usually is. While we are in uncharted territory in terms of how the pandemic will affect our lives, schools, and students in the months to come, below are some tips and tricks I used to make my transition back to school less stressful. It includes the unique challenges I faced as a girl with autism.

Get back into a sleep routine

One of the advantages of being on summer vacation is that we can have a more laid-back sleep routine. However, suddenly switching to waking up earlier

can be a challenge. The best way to avoid this is by gradually tweaking your daughter's sleep and rise times a week or two before school starts. In order to have a positive start to the day, ensure your daughter has enough time in the morning to comfortably have a shower, get dressed, and eat breakfast without having to rush or stress about being late for school.

Establish a morning routine

Many autistic girls struggle with time management. This can make sticking to a morning routine challenging. Since I easily lose track of time, I time my morning routines to music. I have playlists and specific songs that help me stay on track when showering, getting dressed, and putting on my makeup. In order to help



Minor changes can have a huge impact on your daughter's school day. Once you have identified the main autism-related issues that negatively impact her, raise them with her school and propose a solution.



your daughter establish a good hygiene and grooming routine, make a checklist of the steps she needs to take each morning and post it in the bathroom. For example, she'll need to shower, put on deodorant, and brush her teeth and her hair. Before your daughter goes to bed each evening, encourage her to select the clothes she wants to wear to school the next day and encourage her to prepare her school backpack. By organizing herself in advance, she will have a less hectic and stressful morning and will be less likely to forget her homework or a book she needs for class.

Address organizational issues

Many autistic students have organizational issues. I often struggled to bring the correct books to my classes. To avoid the humiliation of repeatedly forgetting to bring the right books, I eventually bought a huge backpack and started carrying all of my textbooks to all of my classes. This was not an ideal solution! Eventually, I designed a color-coding system that made it easier for me to organize myself. If possible, ask your daughter's school to provide you with a copy of her class schedule in advance. Color code her class schedule by assigning a different color to each class. Buy a folder, notebook, and plain stickers in each of the different colors. For example, if you assign math the color purple, buy a purple folder, purple notebook, and a plain purple sticker to stick on the spine of your daughter's math textbooks and workbooks. Determine how many items your daughter should take to her math class and write that number on the sticker. This will make it much easier for your daughter to know which books and items she needs to bring to her math class.

Address directional challenges

Many people with autism are directionally challenged. I often struggled to find my classroom, especially if I had to navigate through a crowd of students who were all racing to get to their next class. Ask your daughter's school if they can provide you with a map of the school in advance. Identify the

right room for each of her classes on the school map and fill it in with the color you assigned to the class (i.e., purple for the math classroom). If possible, contact her school to ask if you and your daughter can go there a few days before school starts so you can locate the classrooms and practice getting from one classroom to the next. In addition to marking a route to get from classroom to classroom and to my locker, I also add landmarks that stand out to me and let me know I am heading in the right direction. For example, a water fountain or a particular display cabinet.

Identify and organize her school locker

Ask your daughter's school if they can provide you with the number and location of your daughter's locker in advance. If your daughter will be using a locker for the first time, consider giving her plenty of opportunities to practice opening and closing a combination lock at home. Combination locks can be fiddly. Some autistic students may require a lot of practice in order to master how to consistently open their combination lock. One way to help your daughter ensure she can easily find the books she needs for each of her classes is to encourage her to group each of the colors together. For example, if she groups all the items with purple stickers together, it will be much easier for her to find the books, folders, and other items she needs to take to her math lesson. Your daughter should also stick a copy of her color-coded class schedule inside her locker, as well as keep a copy on her phone and in her backpack.

Identify the main autism-related issues and ask for accommodations

Minor changes can have a huge impact on your daughter's school day. Once you have identified the main autism-related issues that negatively impact her, raise them with her school and propose a solution. For example, if your daughter finds the transition between classes overwhelming, ask her school if she can be allowed to leave her lessons five minutes early. This will give her the peace of mind of knowing

she can avoid the sensory overload caused by having to make her way through the chaotic, loud, and crowded school hallway.

Navigating the school cafeteria

The school cafeteria can be the cause of significant sensory overload and social anxiety. School cafeterias often have harsh lighting and are noisy and packed with people. The smell of lots of different foods mixing together can be nauseating. I always struggled to balance my tray and lost sleep worrying over the humiliation I would suffer if I dropped my lunch tray in front of everyone. To make matters worse, school cafeterias are social hubs where students are expected to sit together and socialize. The social landscape at the school lunch table can be difficult for autistic girls to decipher and navigate. There are so many complex and unwritten social rules that govern lunchtime interactions. For example, where you sit, who to talk to, when to talk, and what to talk about.

I found the combination of sensory overload and expectation to socialize so overwhelming I avoided going to the cafeteria and often went the entire school day without eating. My school eventually gave me permission to have my lunch at an alternative location. If your daughter finds the school cafeteria too distressing, ask her school if she could be allowed to eat in a quieter and less chaotic location, such as an empty classroom. If your daughter eats the food made at the school cafeteria, you may also want to ask that she be allowed into the cafeteria a few minutes early so she can avoid getting jostled by the crowds and reduce the amount of time she spends waiting in line. Of course, you should discuss any decision that differentiates or sets your daughter apart from her peers with her beforehand.

Minimize the risk of being bullied

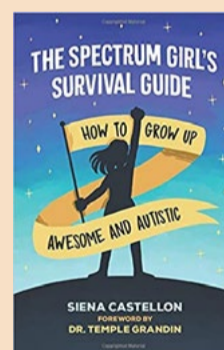
One of the main worries I had about returning to school was being bullied. This is a valid concern. Unfortunately, girls with autism make easy targets. The best prevention against bullying is for your daughter to have a few close friends who protect and stand up for her. However, many autistic girls prefer their own company and have few, if any, friends. This makes them especially vulnerable to being mistreated. I found the best way to minimize being bullied was to identify and avoid bullying hotspots. For example, bullying usually happens during less structured time, such as during breaktimes and lunchtime and in un-

supervised locations like the cafeteria, the bathrooms, playgrounds, and stairwells. I found the best way to avoid being bullied was to spend my break times in places that had more structure and supervision, such as in the library or at a supervised lunch club.

Develop a positive relationship with school and teachers

It is also important for you to develop a positive relationship with your daughter's school and teachers so you can have an open line of communication. It is likely some of your daughter's teachers have little or no experience in supporting and teaching autistic girls. If this is the case, consider providing these teachers with articles or books you have found particularly informative and helpful. I suggest you also provide your daughter's teachers with an organized document that includes specific information on how to support her, such as her likes and dislikes, her sensory sensitivities, strategies that have previously been successful, and her particular challenges.

Going back to school can be an exciting time full of promise and possibilities. The best way to ease your daughter's transition back to school is for you to work together to identify the areas she finds challenging and to come up with imaginative solutions. The best gift you can give your daughter is letting her know you are her biggest supporter and that you will help her with any unexpected challenges she faces throughout the school year. Never forget you are your daughter's best advocate!



Siena Castellon is a 17-year old, multi-award-winning neurodiversity advocate and author of The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide: How to Grow Up Awesome and Autistic. Her book includes a foreword by Dr. Temple Grandin and is a best seller on Amazon.



US: https://www.amazon.com/Spectrum-Girls-Survival-Guide-dp-178775183X/dp/178775183X/ref=mt_paperback?encoding=UTF8&me=&qid=

UK: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Spectrum-Girls-Survival-Guide-Autistic/dp/178775183X>

delicious meals cocktails beautiful scenery

Labeled and loved Retreat

October 9-11, 2020
San Antonio, TX RIVERWALK

honest couch talks river cruise breakout sessions

A Weekend long event for Special Needs Moms

Register NOW at

www.labeledandloved.org

An ENTIRE weekend to focus on YOU!
We can't wait to meet you!



Sensory Enrichment Therapy @ HOME

www.mendability.com/autism



Telehealth System for Home Implementation

Evidence-Based Environmental Enrichment

Improves Core Autism Symptoms in Clinical Trials

You can do it by yourself or we can coach you.

Verified in randomized controlled trials.

Makes everything else you do work better by boosting brain plasticity.

Short, simple, sensory activities to do every day. Takes about 10 minutes, twice a day.

- Video instructions
- Assessment tools
- Goal-setting
- Outcome tracking
- Access to coaching & community support

The brain stimulation piece of the puzzle

Starts at **\$30/m**



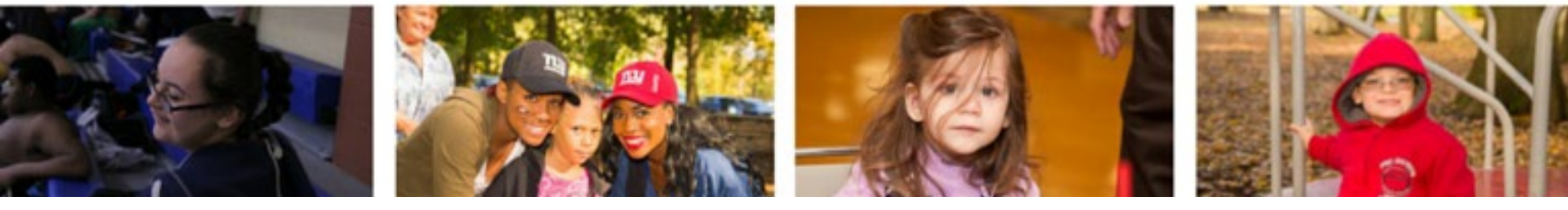
autism radio™

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE AUTISM COMMUNITY

HOPE®

SAVES THE DAY

www.AutismRadio.org



Job Readiness and the Value of Experiential Learning for People on the Spectrum

By Sara R. COLOROSA, PhD

Internships and volunteering can aid students and young adults in gathering skills and exploring career options. There is a lot of value in starting this process early by trying different types of organizations or exploring interests.



In order to become job-ready, students and young adults are encouraged to try jobs, volunteer, and participate in internships—like trying on hats—essentially, to try new experiences and see what fits; if it does not fit, they can find something else. By starting early in job exploration, students and young adults gain valuable skills for overall job

readiness, as an individual can gain new skills to pair with his/her talents, refine his/her interests, and prepare for long-term career success.

Students and young adults may have been on a path due to an interest. For example, if a person likes chemistry, he/she likely engages in every activity he/

she can while in school by joining clubs and spending his/her free time experimenting at home. However, becoming a chemist may not align with the student's learning style, and being a chemist may be vastly different in a professional setting. A great way for a student and young adult to determine if he/she is on the right path is to participate in an internship or by volunteering in a field of interest. Once a student and young adult can get experience, he/she may be able to more clearly see his/her path forward and plan as needed.

What are some of the important lessons learned through an internship or volunteering?

1. Environment

Through an internship or volunteering, a student or young adult will have the chance to explore what he/she may want to do for eight hours a day, five days a week. This type of structure is very different from school, and once in a professional setting, students and young adults may understand what it takes to work in their areas of interest. They may find certain environments work better for them than others, such as working in a cubical, being outdoors, and performing physically demanding tasks. By trying different types of work environments, students and young adults can be more prepared to pair a career with an interest or be able to ask for workplace accommodations to meet their needs.

2. Presenting the work self

Typically, the interview process for internships and volunteer positions is less formal than an interview for a professional level role. These opportunities allow the student or young adult the opportunity to share his/her skills, education, interests, and much more through the interview process and when meeting new co-workers. As a new career professional, learning how to talk about yourself can be daunting. By interviewing and interacting with teammates, students, and young adults get the chance to become more comfortable in their overall communication skills.

Additionally, interviewing and starting a new job may require getting new work-related clothes. This is a great opportunity to try dif-

ferent types of clothing that are appropriate for the internship or volunteer position. These experiential positions give the student and young adult the opportunity to see if he/she is comfortable "looking the part." There are many inexpensive clothing stores from which to purchase work clothing, and some schools even provide discounts to local shops.

3. How can my student or young adult get the most out of his/her internship and volunteer position?

This is a great time to fill in holes in previous skills, knowledge, and training. It is highly encouraged that the student or young adult think about two or three things he/she wishes to learn. These items should be presented to the supervisor as potential training opportunities. Students and young adults are also encouraged to talk with people within the business about their career paths, educational background, and their insight on career paths; this is a great opportunity to learn from others.

As autism experts Carole Grey and Temple Grandin state, internships and volunteer positions are a great time to try things and make the unfamiliar familiar. These opportunities can solidify career paths or provide direction to make changes in schooling and skill building before a permanent position is obtained. Students and young adults should be encouraged to seek these positions out and use the time to learn about themselves and various types of organizations and adjust their path accordingly.



Sara R. Colorosa, PhD, is the owner of The Engagement Catalyst, LLC. She has completed a research study in an organization where employees and managers shared their experiences about aligning with people's diverse skills, abilities, and interests with career opportunities. Sara understands the gap between theory and practice and focuses on adult learning styles, diversity in the workplace, and a leader's roles in organizational success. She is passionate about helping individuals develop their executive functioning, organizational skills, and studying habits to achieve career goals. To learn more about Dr. Colorosa and her practice, visit www.theengagementcatalyst.com.



Comprehensive Solutions
for Families & Physicians

Leading the way in collaborative care using
Telehealth to address the complex needs
of individuals with autism since 2010



OUR PROGRAMS

- Autism Think Tank Telehealth
- Clinical Care Navigation
- Bridges To Transition
- College Life Mentoring
- Physician Education
- Physician-Parent Network
- Parent Wellness Workshops
- Family Outreach Events
- Webinars & Seminars

Serving families & physicians across the US
(732) 667-7778 | www.autismhc.org

STUBBORN CHILDREN

the way to make them flexible and sociable

A new book by Professor Norio Ando



This book explains how to handle headstrong children including those who have autism.

Prof. Ando tackles the subject and explains how to understand our children better.

Prof. Ando is a certified clinical psychologist and professor at Uekusa- Gakuen University in Japan.

AVAILABLE FOR KINDLE IN AMAZON:
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B085H7PBYS>

Autism Parenting Magazine



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW

Special Yoga to Help Autism Families Combat Anxiety During These Uncertain Times

By Jyoti Jo-MANUEL

As we all know, this period in time is unprecedented. We are facing the unknown, with our health, wealth, the planet, and actually our whole existence. As changes seem to be happening globally on a daily and moment to moment basis, we are being invited to work with our fear, our anxiety, and our hearts to navigate this experience in the best way we can.



What we do know is that anxiety and fear reduce our immunity, so we have a responsibility to both ourselves and to those around us to do the best we can to take care of ourselves.

As parents, we particularly need to self-care during these unsettling times so we can be the best ves-

sels to support our children. Children on the autistic spectrum are generally susceptible to high anxiety daily, and of course, for those children who manage the anxiety with a daily routine, being out of school and at home more will change that.

We don't know how long we are going to be at home with our kids, so it's best to make a daily plan. Whe-

“

Breathing deeply makes a huge difference for our nervous system. Our breath as the parent becomes a form of communication for our child(ren). The deeper we breathe, the calmer we are, and the calmer they are.

”

re I do think things have the potential to change for the better is by using this time well by offering our children a daily practice—it could even be twice daily—to bring their nervous systems into balance, to give them time to embody the practices that could be used throughout the day or “in the moment” when needed, to really learn to calm and regulate themselves, to support their sensory systems, and to help them to manage the world around them. You, as parents, can do the practices too. Calm parent, calm child, calm home.

For you, as parents, Dr. Kristen Neff (and mother of a son with autism) shares a beautiful practice in three parts. First is to acknowledge this moment is horrible/unpleasant/I hate this or whatever language best describes for you the uncomfortable experience. The second stage follows the Buddhist principle that the world is suffering, and therefore we are not alone. It’s not that we want anyone else to suffer; it’s just that there are many other people at this moment having an equally horrible and challenging time. The third stage invites us to give to ourselves what our best friend would give to us—kind words and a loving, reassuring hug, hands on your heart, or both.

I also tend to remind myself this is just a moment in time, and it too will pass. That generally helps me to breathe more deeply and find a deeper internal connection to the peace that is elusive in these moments.

Breathing deeply makes a huge difference for our nervous system. Our breath as the parent becomes a form of communication for our child(ren). The deeper we breathe, the calmer we are, and the calmer

they are. Sometimes we need to move with the breath to help. To reduce anxiety, we want to try and get a breath ratio of 2-4. Breathing in for the count of two and breathing out for the count of four. Ideally, we want to breathe in and out through the nose.

We can use a beautiful hand movement to help here. Bring your palms upwards in front of your belly, breathing in counting 1-2. Turn the palms downwards and move your hands down in front of the body as you count 1-2-3-4. This can be increased to breathing in for three and out for six, or in for four and out for eight, etc. The idea here is to slow the breath down and extend the exhalation, which increases the relaxation response in the body.

Another way of increasing the exhalation is through making sound. The vibrational sound of Om helps to create vagal tone, a good way of regulating the nervous system. You can create a rhythm with several Oms, or you can just see how long you and your child can make the Om sound for. This practice wouldn’t necessarily work with a child who has sensory sensitivity to sound, but if you find the right tone, he/she may respond to it and make a similar sound.

A couple of stretches are always helpful as stretching increases the release of serotonin into the system; serotonin is the coping chemical we all need more of in our brains. From lying down legs straight out and together, you’ll then want to take your arms over your head and literally stretch the fingers and toes as far away from each other as possible. Take a couple of breaths here and there and bring the knees up, hugging/squeezing the knees in towards the chest.

“

A couple of stretches are always helpful as stretching increases the release of serotonin into the system; serotonin is the coping chemical we all need more of in our brains.

”

Repeat the stretch and squeeze several times. If you are doing this with your child, you might want to be holding his/her legs just above the ankles so you can give him/her an extra stretch, or you might want to do the same from the arms.

With knees to chest, a very soothing movement is to rock the knees together from side to side (left to

right). At a certain point, you would want to hold the knees to the right side and the head to the left for a few breaths. Then change sides, so the knees are on the right and the head to the left (this is known as a spinal twist in yoga). This is a super helpful movement that helps to balance the right and left hemispheres of the brain, bringing equilibrium. It also helps to release tension from the spine.

Special Yoga has been delivering the Yoga and Mindfulness for Autism & ADHD training in person since 2009, both in the UK and around the world, to parents, pediatric professionals, teachers, SEN support, yoga teachers, and therapists. The consistent feedback is how well the children and young people are doing after practicing. To sign up and access Special Yoga's online meditations, classes, and courses, including their flagship Yoga and Mindfulness for Autism and ADHD course, which offers modular learning for parents who want to work with their own child(ren), go to <https://specialyoga.thinkific.com>.

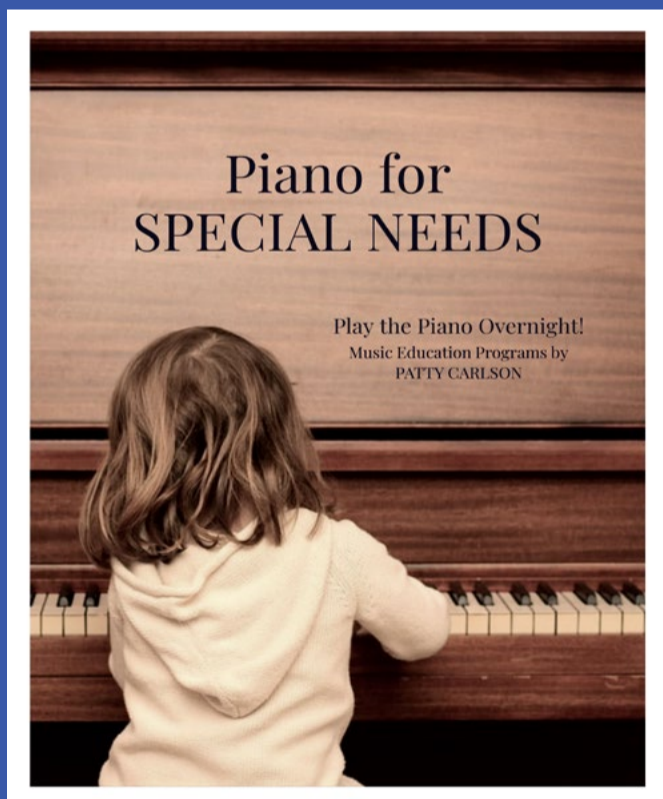
Jyoti Jo-Manuel is the founder of Special Yoga, a global non-profit organization supporting children and adults with additional needs with breath, body, and mind practices. Jyoti has devoted her life to increasing awareness, knowledge, and practical experience in the therapeutic effects of Special Yoga and making the practice available to as many children as possible.

Website and tutorials: specialyoga.org.uk

Twitter: twitter.com/special_yoga

Facebook: www.facebook.com/specialyogaglobal

Instagram: www.instagram.com/specialyogaglobal



“Never underestimate the HEALING POWER of MUSIC!”

PATTY CARLSON

PianoforSpecialNeeds.org

DID YOU KNOW YOU CAN IMPROVE AUTISTIC BEHAVIORS BY ENCOURAGING RELAXED PLEASURE?

EMOTIONAL CURE FOR AUTISM:

Unknown Contribution of Relaxed Pleasure

By Professor Norio Ando



Autistic children tend to express tensioned pleasure which promotes a rigid mind and narrow range of consciousness. Look as Professor Ando explains how to elicit relaxed pleasure and ease tensioned emotion in this book in detail.

Norio Ando is a certified clinical psychologist and professor at Uekusa-Gakuen University, in Japan. He has treated autistic children for 37 years focusing on emotional development.

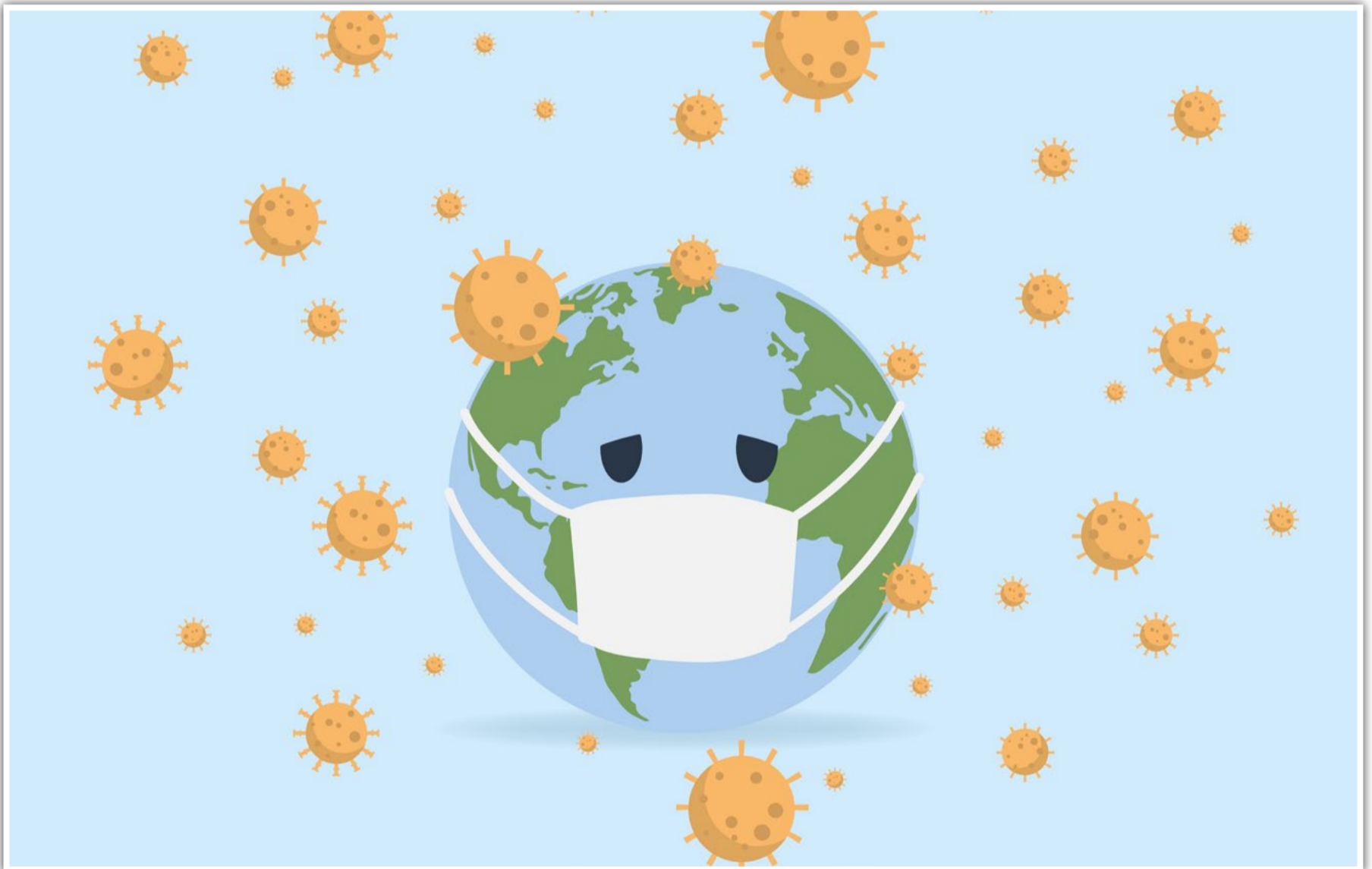
Available for Kindle on Amazon:



Life During COVID-19 With My Autistic Brother

By Sofia PALACIOS

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected billions of people around the world physically, economically, and socially, including, of course, those on the spectrum and their families. People with autism have a completely different perception of life, and this pandemic has impacted them in ways which most people aren't able to understand or even be aware of.



Anxiety levels are at an all-time high worldwide, but they are even higher within the autism community. As the sister of a teenage boy on the spectrum, I can confirm this. "When are we going back to school?" is a question Gabriel, my brother, asks at least twice a day while we are quarantined. Our response of "We don't know," not only aggravates him but perplexes him. It is beyond his under-

standing, just as it is beyond our control to give a definitive answer to his question. Not only is Gabriel anxious, but he is utterly confused; he's angry at the situation and doesn't know how to handle it properly. He's stressed about having to stay home for an unknown period of time, he's confused about what the virus really is and when it will end, and he's upset he can't go to school to see his friends, get dinner at a restaurant, or go to the park to ride his scooter.

“ My parents and I tried countless times to explain the situation and what we needed to do to help ‘flatten the curve,’ but despite our efforts, Gabriel’s mind refused to accept the information. His brain believes COVID-19 is something with a certain time limit; it began on a certain day, so it should end on a certain day. ”

I felt helpless, not being able to help him grasp the magnitude and intricacy of the issue at hand. My parents and I tried countless times to explain the situation and what we needed to do to help “flatten the curve,” but despite our efforts, Gabriel’s mind refused to accept the information. His brain believes COVID-19 is something with a certain time limit; it began on a certain day, so it should end on a certain day. But no one knows when this outbreak will finally end, which is what confuses, angers, and triggers him on a daily basis. He is normally a very sweet, outgoing boy, but this whole situation has made him grumpy and frustrated. Gabriel feels the need to blame someone for the unwanted situation, and being quarantined, it’s limited to either my parents or me, depending on the day. It’s almost like trying to sneak into the kitchen in the middle of the night—tip-toeing and moving slowly trying not to make any noise, because we knew if we did, *he* would wake up, and we didn’t want that.

We try to make every conversation about him—every movie or show we watch, every song we listen to, every board game we play. It’s not healthy, but to us, it is what’s easiest. Of course, we want to talk about the stats at dinner time, or maybe about a movie trailer that looked good, but we always end up talking about Legos one way or another, all to engage with him and ensure he won’t “break.” It is truly exhausting to have to act a certain way around Gabriel to protect ourselves from major chaos, especially since we don’t have any distractions outside of the house. Truthfully, though, my parents and I prefer surrendering to my brother than having him declare war on us, because we are in it together, just us, for an extended amount of time that keeps elongating itself.

I am sure every household in the world with a family member on the spectrum can relate to what my

family and I have been going through. It’s not easy having to put him before ourselves, especially at a time where we all need to feel loved, safe, and calm. But in the end, that is why we did what we did, so we all, as a family, can remain as calm as possible during such a difficult time.

Easing back into reality is never easy, whether it is coming back from vacation, or in this case, coming out of quarantine. Most of us are getting used to not going out, snacking whenever we feel like it, and having no set schedule for meals and maybe even work! Because of how long we’ve been confined to our homes, getting back to your previous daily routine may take quite some time, especially for those with autism and their families.

As a family, we always try to make it as easy as possible for Gabriel to adjust back into his routine. In the past, something we’ve done to ease this transition is mentally prepare Gabriel. A couple of days before our vacation is over, we start reminding Gabriel our time off is coming to an end. Hearing this several times before the vacation actually ends helps him mentally prepare for what is coming, so going back to reality is not a complete shock.

We also return from vacation one day prior to re-starting our routine. For example, if we took a week-long trip, we would most likely come back on a Saturday, so Gabriel has Sunday to relax at home before having to start up again. We found this to be really helpful after many failed attempts to return from vacation and resume normal life within forty-eight hours. Although this usually means sacrificing one extra vacation day, this time, it means gaining a “vacation” day! Since we are already at home due to quarantine, once it’s time to go back to the real world, take the day before off and use it to decompress instead of doing chores and

“ Another important thing we all need to do is to simply put ourselves into the shoes of those with autism. ”

working. This may help the transition for many children with autism like it helps my brother.

Now, once you have gone back to normal life, there won't be as much time to bond as there was during quarantine. The transition will be hard for everyone, especially those with autism. Try to be there for them in any way you can: listen to them, take them on a walk, play with them, watch a movie, bake some cookies. Just be there for them because they need it and will appreciate it very much, even if they don't ask for it or show their gratitude.

Another important thing we all need to do is to simply put ourselves into the shoes of those with autism. Imagine how hard it must be to live through this pandemic, not truly understanding what is happening, all while confined within your home without any human contact besides your family. Try to be understanding. I'm not saying you should let them get away with whatever they want, but pick your battles. If they are kind of grumpy and don't want to eat their vegetables, for example, should you really pick on them for it? Put it in perspective; they are already going through a lot, and so are you. Give them a break; give yourself a break.

Lastly, I want to conclude by saying positivity and optimism will get us through this. We are all in this together, and we will all have a hard time going back to normal after being secluded for so long. But know this: almost everyone in the world feels just like you do. You're not alone! Make some time for yourself so you can also be there for your family member on the autism spectrum. You need to be okay and put together, so he/she follows after you, and most importantly, you have to give off positive energy for him/her to feed off of, as well as lots and lots of love. This situation is not easy, but we must live one day at a time. We will get through this, and so will you.



Sofia Palacios is originally from Guatemala City, Guatemala, but resides in Miami, Florida. She will be a senior this upcoming fall at Miami Palmetto Senior High School. Sofia runs her own at-home business, 'Scrumptious Bakery,' as a hobby. She lives with both parents and her 12-year-old brother, Gabriel, who is on the spectrum. Advocating for her brother and spreading autism awareness is something Sofia is extremely passionate about; in fact, she raised over \$700 for University of Miami's Center for Autism and Related Disabilities during March and April 2020, so they could keep helping others in the autism community like they helped her family. Sofia also loves writing and hopes to pursue a career in journalism one day.

HEALIGENIX
THERAPY SYSTEMS

COMMITTED TO BRINGING CBD PRODUCTS TO INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM



HEALIGENIX PRODUCTS ARE SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE OF ALL AGES ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM.



- **Zero THC** formulas
- **Low-dose** CBD options
- **Formulated** for those with sensory aversions
- **Clear**, simple dosage information
- **Guaranteed** potencies
- **Personal help** when you need it



HEALIGENIX.COM

Self-Care: The Antidote to Caregiver Burnout

By Heather CUSHING-GORDON, MAdS, BCBA



So, you have a diagnosis

It breaks my heart the moment a family arrives in my clinic with the fresh news their son or daughter has recently been diagnosed with autism. Please don't get me wrong, I am not the pitying kind; in fact, it's the complete opposite. I feel very strongly in arming families with the truth about their new reality. I want them to understand this new life is a marathon, not a sprint, and that it is vitally important for each parent to understand he/she will each come to terms with it at his/her own pace and in his/her own way. Some parents begin their autism journey by enrolling in every single program they can find, spending hours on Google locating the best treatment options, and making connections in every online autism community. Whereas other families come fresh out of the gate without much of an understanding of what has just happened or what the future holds. But no matter where a family

falls in their journey, when we meet, at some point in the conversation all families eventually ask me this one question: "Will my child be okay?" Each time this question is asked I unfortunately have to admit I have no idea. I have been working with children and their families for 20 years and no two have the same trajectory, although some may have similar abilities. One thing is for certain: caregiver involvement is a definite predictor of success in any family and thus holds true in families with children diagnosed with autism.

Breaking down the family unit

The strength of a family takes many forms. Often in my work I see a variety of families who are comprised of members who take on specific roles. It is not only mom or dad who takes the lead in their autism navigation. In my practice I have encountered either mom or dad taking the leadership role. I very rarely



Self-care has become the newest phrase. We hear about mindfulness daily as well. Even in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) we are beginning to use this language more and more frequently. Self-care is an opportunity for the family member to take time out and focus on the care of himself/herself, even if it is for a short period of time.



encounter a family with both parents involved at the same level, meaning one typically is in charge of the meetings and the organization of services while the other tends to take more of a home-life role. However, no matter the role a family member plays in his/her child's life, stress and burnout are inevitable, and minimizing the effects of this on the family is crucial for the family's mere survival.

Stress in families with children with special needs has been linked to increased anxiety, depression, and even marital discord. Parents and caregivers who practice self-care regularly are more likely to combat associated caregiver stress and burnout more readily than families who do not.

Self-Care for the whole family

Self-care has become the newest phrase. We hear about mindfulness daily as well. Even in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) we are beginning to use this language more and more frequently. Self-care is an opportunity for the family member to take time out and focus on the care of himself/herself, even if it is for a short period of time. Each member of the family tends to have a significant role to play within his/her unit and should therefore be provided with the much-needed time away without feeling guilty for not being expected to be "on" at all moments of the day. The benefits of self-care also allow a person to come back to his/her family with a different mindset, ready to take care of the stress.

The top five things families can do

1. Take breaks, often

Regular breaks from family life day-to-day can help to combat burnout. You do not need a

full week solo vacation, but planned evenings out or an afternoon of shopping can provide a much-needed mental break from the daily grind.

2. Remember your partner

Remember you need to ensure your partner gets attention from you as well as your child. A strong partnership creates a strong family foundation.

3. Socialize

Yes, it is hard to find common ground with those who do not know your reality, but sharing the load can help you feel connected to the rest of the world.

4. Learn to be mindful

Guided meditations can help to ground you in the present moment. This helps you to take a step away from your daily stress, even if temporary.

5. Plan special times to connect with your other children and/or family

Your other children need your attention as well. Spending quality time with your children will ensure a very strong bond develops between you and ensures everyone understands where he/she stands in your family. These same children will eventually be their sibling's caregiver and need to know how much you respect them for that future gift they will be giving you. Your parents will not be around forever. Please do not give up on that connection, even if understanding your life is not easy for them to do.

But how?

Taking care of someone 24-7 is a really difficult job. You can feel as though there will never be a moment for you to take the self-care time you need and deserve. It is, therefore, crucial to set up some specific strategies that will ensure you are able to take care of yourself so you can take care of your family. First, ensure you find appropriate care for your child. Your child goes to school or therapy, your child has some respite dollars, your child has grandparents, or your child has another parent. Second, once you have identified your alternate-caregiver rotation, you need to carve out time for yourself. If you don't schedule it like the dentist, you most likely won't get it in. Make a weekly date with yourself in your calendar and share it with the person watching your child. Finally, automate and delegate tasks. Your time is valuable. Prioritize self-care activities wherever possible.

Self-care is a practice that gets easier the more you do it. It also does not come without some premeditation and planning. You are worth every moment you spend on it, and your family will truly appreciate all of your efforts.



Heather Cushing-Gordon, MAdS, BCBA, is the Clinical Supervisor for Little Treasures Learning Centre in Markham, Ontario. She also provides Supervision for master's students and clinicians through her company HCG Behavior Consulting. Heather is a Parent Coach and uses her unique approach, Life in Balance, to help moms find their Superpower and take steps towards their future selves. Heather has been working with children and their families for 20 years. She uses a variety of techniques to engage families in supporting their children daily using Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) techniques.

Website: www.ltlearning.ca

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/2323554771290875

Instagram: www.instagram.com/behaviourcafe

Email: hcushing.gordon@gmail.com

Phone: 905-554-6191

follow us



Finally Brave Enough

By Erica BRAUN

Shortly after the diagnosis, I remember making small talk with acquaintances, gabbing about our children, school, and other typical suburban parent dialogue. I decided to test it out and see what it would feel like to guide the word from the realm of my personal thoughts to the ears of the unsuspecting listener. I wanted to witness their reaction.



I longed to know if I was brave enough to say it out loud. I imagined that by saying it out loud, it would make it more real, not just something I was imagining or hoisting upon my child. The word “autism” seemed to flow steadily and calmly from my mouth. My heart, on the other hand, could have jumped out of my chest at the rate it was pounding. I braced myself for a reaction. My feelings were still raw and tender. I still doubted myself and the diagnosis. The reaction I received was not unlike what I had been expecting. A flippancy, as if it was no big deal, as if a diagnosis was unreliable and even

unnecessary, and this from a person who had never met my child.

As I tested it out on people who knew me better, I received mixed opinions ranging from “He seems fine to me,” “All kids have their quirks,” to the judgments of “Why does it even matter?,” to the sentiment that labels should be avoided at all costs. It was shortly after the diagnosis, sharing with people, and enduring their reactions and judgments that I decided it was better to keep it quiet. Better to not share this part of my life.

Maybe they were right. Life would be better for my son without labels or diagnosis. Besides, according to the public school system, he was not in need of extra services or considerations. I must have over-exaggerated on the surveys and questionnaires at the Developmental Pediatrician for whom we waited over six months to see. Six long months of wondering if we were crazy, yet knowing deep down that something was different about this little one.

You see, you weren't there when he would only wear shorts to preschool even in the biting cold. You haven't noticed his raw hands and arms from where he wipes his nose because his aversion to tissues is so great. You weren't looking out the window at a little boy on the curb fascinated by his fingers dancing in front of his face while all the other kids biked, scooted, and ran about him, and your husband said, "I think there is something distinctive about him." I bet you didn't know he could spend hours sorting and arranging M&Ms at the kitchen table. You weren't by his side when the broken taco shell brought tears for over an hour.

All these seemingly disconnected moments added up to the conclusion that perhaps neurotypical did not describe him. In all honesty, I guess I was seeking a diagnosis—something to assuage my guilt of being a terrible parent, of not being able to get my child to listen and adhere to the guidance being given. I was searching for a reason why everything was exponentially different and difficult with this one. Every morning getting ready for preschool was exhausting; getting him out the door and then in the door was a challenge each and every day. There were times we just slumped together—one in tears, the other choking them back—in the corner of the hallway desperately trying to get what each of us wanted: me for him to go to class, and him to return to the safety and familiarity of home.

It has been two years since the diagnosis. Two years since we left traditional school for something more manageable for the both of us—the whole family, really. With the steadiness of a comfortable environment, predictable routine, and much fewer times of transition, it almost seems as if the diagnosis was wrong. There is nothing atypical about my child. Yet, I watch his beautiful mind interpret the world in a unique and atypical manner. I remember the year of bi-weekly occupational therapy to assist his fine and gross motor skills that were way behind a child

of his age. I relive the totally unexpected meltdowns that could last for hours. Conversely, I observe him drawing and creating for hours on end with steady focus. I know the diagnosis is not wrong. I know that without it, I would have parented this extraordinary child differently, in a detrimental sort of way. I know a diagnosis is not *carte blanche* for any sort of behavior but, without it, I would be sorely lacking in empathy, patience, generosity, and gentleness. In short, the diagnosis made me a better parent and human being.

What I don't know is if when I meet you and we become friends, if I would tell you this because it feels so deeply personal. And, to be honest, I probably care too much what you will think of me. Will you think I'm making this up? That I'm over-exaggerating? That labels aren't necessary? Or, perhaps, that because his case isn't severe it's not worth mentioning? Maybe you will, but I'm learning to be okay with that because whether you believe it or not, care or not, I have a son on the autism spectrum and that touches every aspect of our family life.

Perhaps even more greatly, I care about how you will see my son. That you will look at him with eyes of pity, examination, or judgement and miss the creative, focused, gentle child who interprets the world in his own beautiful way. But, I don't think you really will. I believe we live in a time endowed with such incredible knowledge of language, understanding, science, and psychology that we are better equipped than ever to regard our fellow humans with generosity of spirit and dignity.

We know all too well that everyone has an untold story and deserves to be handled with love and care in vulnerable, volatile, and mundane moments. So, while we have fleeting moments of judgements, those almost involuntary perceptions do not need to become final rulings and grace can be generously doled out, creating a world where we don't need to be afraid to share our thoughts, our dreams, or even our diagnosis.

Erica Braun is a mom of four and wife of her eighth-grade crush. A lover of languages, teaching, and travel, you can find her writing about their world schooling adventures and family trips on her blog.

Blog: <https://braunsabroad.wordpress.com>

What is Leaky Gut and How Does it Affect Children with ASD?

By Denise VOIGHT, MS



Leaky gut, also known as increased intestinal permeability, is a digestive disorder that develops when tight junctions loosen or become damaged, allowing undigested food, bacteria, or toxins to leak through the wall of the intestine¹. Tight junctions are small gaps in the intestinal lining that promote the transfer of nutrients while preventing undesirable compounds from passing through the intestinal tract into the bloodstream. Unfortunately, when tight junctions loosen, harmful substances begin to accumulate in the bloodstream, and this may cause various types of inflammatory issues². In addition to inflammation, symptoms such as food sensitivities,

bloating, gas, cramps, and additional digestive problems may develop as a result of leaky gut.

Although some healthcare providers do not consider leaky gut to be an actual medical diagnosis, mounting scientific evidence indicates this is a true condition that affects many people and may be associated with the onset of numerous health problems such as allergies, asthma, skin disorders, and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), among other issues [1-4]. Furthermore, many children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, and other forms of developmental delays tend to suffer from digestive issues, including leaky gut [5,6].

“ The development of leaky gut is associated with a number of factors such as bacterial or candida (yeast) overgrowth in the gut, taking certain medications, and eating inflammatory or gut-irritating foods. ”

One of the main reasons mental health is linked to digestive health is because, in addition to playing a role in the transfer of essential nutrients to the brain, the lining of the intestinal tract is comprised of numerous nerves and beneficial gut bacteria that also support optimal cognitive function [5,7]. However, to promote proper nutrient transport to the brain, the intestinal environment must be healthy. Leaky gut causes harmful substances to damage the intestinal lining, and this disrupts normal digestive function. Similarly, if nerves in the gut become inflamed or damaged due to leaky gut, then the transfer of nerve signals that influence mental performance will also be negatively impacted. Therefore, leaky gut can worsen the symptoms of ADHD and autism [5,7].

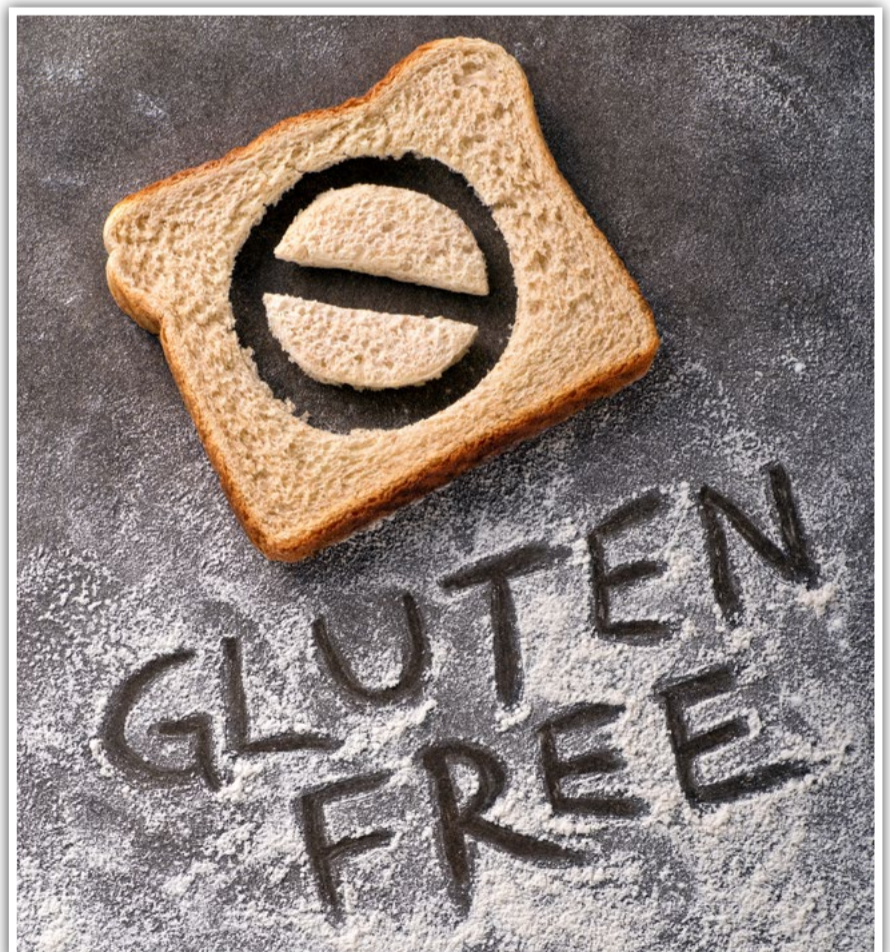
The development of leaky gut is associated with a number of factors such as bacterial or candida (yeast) overgrowth in the gut, taking certain medications, and eating inflammatory or gut-irritating foods. However, two of the main triggers are bacterial overgrowth and gluten intake because they enhance the production of a protein called zonulin. As zonulin levels increase, tight junctions gradually begin to loosen and this causes harmful substances to pass into the bloodstream; the immune system becomes overactive, and it causes children to experience intestinal discomfort [8,9].

There are several strategies that help target leaky gut symptoms in children with ADHD or autism. The first strategy involves eliminating food that irritates the gut or causes inflammation. These include:

- Gluten-based food, as this protein is hard to digest and is a common allergen
- Dairy products, as some children are intolerant to casein (milk protein)
- Corn, soy, and eggs, as these are also common allergens

Eliminating these foods from the diet helps promote natural healing of the intestinal tract, which can be especially beneficial for children with autism or ADHD.

Micronutrient and probiotic supplementation also foster a healthier intestinal environment. Research shows that this type of supplementation helps improve behavior in children with developmental delays [10,11]. Micronutrient supplementation addresses nutritional deficiencies that may be contributing to cognitive impairments. Probiotics improve digestive function by enhancing nutrient absorption, targeting harmful bacteria that cause intestinal inflammation, and releasing enzymes that heighten the digestion of food [6,10]. The combination of these strategies targets leaky gut by supporting the restoration of proper tight junction function. This can improve intestinal and cognitive health for children with autism and ADHD.





Dairy products

References:

1. Maes M, Leunis JC. Normalization of leaky gut in chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) is accompanied by a clinical improvement: effects of age, duration of illness and the translocation of LPS from gram-negative bacteria. *Neuro Endocrinol Lett.* 2008;29(6):902-10.
2. Odenwald MA, Turner JR. Intestinal permeability defects: is it time to treat? *Clin Gastroenterol Hepatol.* 2013;11(9):1075-1083.
3. Farshchi MK, Azad FJ, Salari R, et al. A Viewpoint on the Leaky Gut Syndrome to Treat Allergic Asthma: A Novel Opinion. *J Evid Based Complementary Altern Med.* 2017;22(3):378-380.
4. Simeonova D, Ivanovska M, Murdjeva M, et al. Recognizing the leaky gut as a trans-diagnostic target for neuro-immune disorders using clinical chemistry and molecular immunology assays. *Curr Top Med Chem.* 2018, in press.
5. Molloy CA, Manning-Courtney P: Prevalence of chronic gastrointestinal symptoms in children with autism and autistic spectrum disorders. *Autism.* 2003;7(2):165-171.
6. Ming X, Chen N, et al. A Gut Feeling: A Hypothesis of the Role of the Microbiome in Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders. *Child Neurol Open.* 2018;5:2329048X18786799.
7. Verlaet AA, Noriega DB, Hermans N, Savelkoul HF. Nutrition, immunological mechanisms and dietary immunomodulation in ADHD. *Eur Child Adolesc Psychiatry.* 2014;23(7):519-29.



*Allergens
Corn, soy, and eggs*

8. Fasano A. Intestinal permeability and its regulation by zonulin: diagnostic and therapeutic implications. *Clin Gastroenterol Hepatol.* 2012;10(10):1096-100.
9. Fasano A. Zonulin and its regulation of intestinal barrier function: the biological door to inflammation, autoimmunity, and cancer. *Physiol Rev.* 2011; 91(1):151-75.
10. Rucklidge JJ, Eggleston MJF, Johnstone JM, Darling K, Frampton CM. Vitamin-mineral treatment improves aggression and emotional regulation in children with ADHD: a fully blinded, randomized, placebo-controlled trial. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry.* 2018;59(3):232-246.
11. Sheridan PO, Bindels LB, et al. Can prebiotics and probiotics improve therapeutic outcomes for undernourished individuals? *Gut Microbes.* 2014; 5(1):74-82.



Denise Voight, MS, is a Clinical Nutritionist with a Master of Science in Human Nutrition and Functional Medicine specializing in Nutritional Intervention for autism spectrum disorders and ADHD. She is an expert in applying scientifically proven food and nutrition therapies to improve health, learning, and behavior in children with autism.

An Open Letter from a Woman with Autism

By Wenna FULLERTON

Dear all,

My intention with this open letter is to raise awareness and be an advocate. It's to educate and create a better understanding. Please don't feel sorry for me. I'm fine. I just want you to listen. My hope is this will help someone else. I am stepping out of my comfort zone to be a voice for those who need it. I'm writing this as a mum, wife, daughter, sister, friend, colleague, and autistic woman. I have always been and always will be autistic. I feel it's time I open up about it. It's not really something I tell people because the lack of understanding about autism has ensured many of us are side-lined completely and afraid to disclose.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a lifelong developmental disability that affects social interaction, communication, interests, and behavior. We see the world differently. Autism affects just over one percent of the UK population. Chances are you know someone who is autistic (you do now) but knowing one autistic person means you just know one autistic person. We are all different, and no two autistic individuals are the same. I don't have autism; it's not an accessory—I am autistic. I don't "suffer" with it; it's not an illness, it's who I am. The autism spectrum is not a simple scale. You can't be "a little bit autistic;" you either are, or you're not. Only those who are autistic are on the spectrum.

I am entirely independent and lead a normal life by society's standards. The way autism is portrayed in media is awful, and some medical professionals still don't understand. We are left to explain ourselves time and time again, and what we need is understanding. There are so many people, like me, who were not diagnosed until adulthood. Instead, doctors concluded I had anxiety and depression. Being diagnosed as an adult has opened a huge door in my life. I have a better understanding of myself and finally have the support I need. My autism is invisible, but that doesn't mean it's not there. Over the past decade, there has been an increase in autism diagnoses in both adults and children, but specifically in girls and women. This is because some girls

and women mask it. We mimic behavior and it goes unnoticed, leaving us feeling alone and that there is something wrong with us when there isn't. Masking is exhausting, yet I very much doubt many of you have seen the unmasked version of myself. It's not fake, it's survival.

Many autistic people are perceived as naughty, difficult, weird geniuses who can't make eye contact and have no social skills or empathy. I have average intelligence, can make eye contact, socialize, and empathize. From the outside, I probably look like the most boring and average woman, and I am. Hearing people say, "You don't look autistic" is ridiculous. Autism does not have a look. It's invisible, so whatever you think it does look like, you're wrong. Telling me I look normal is not a compliment; neither is congratulating me for functioning well. Saying "You don't act autistic," or "You can't be that autistic," because I conform more to society's expectations does not mean I am any less autistic. These comments make people who are autistic or seeking a diagnosis afraid to be open about it. It shouldn't be like that.

There are some great support services out there, and I have met some truly inspiring people whilst trying to help others, but the lack of general understanding about autism does not help us move forward. I am extremely lucky to have such amazing family and friends who support me, but not everyone has that, and it can become completely isolating for them. I want to carry on being a voice for those who need it and create a better understanding.

—Wenna

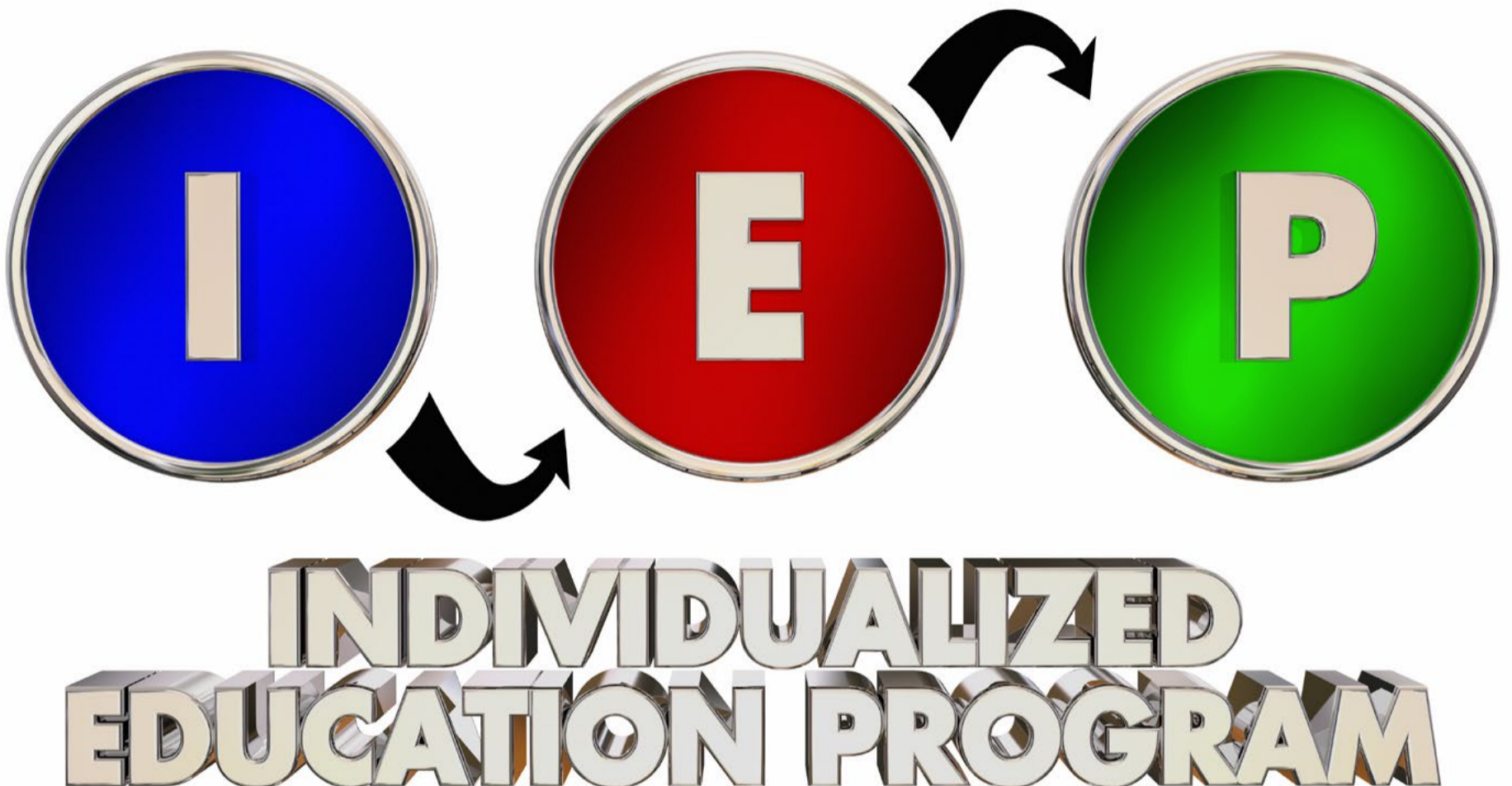


Wenna Fullerton learned she was autistic last year at the age of 30. She lives with her husband, two children, and a Labrador retriever. Although it has been a difficult journey to get to where she is today, she has seen the positive impact it has had on her life. Wenna now feels empowered and liberated and has made it her mission to advocate for a better understanding about autism.

Instagram: [@wenafullerton](https://www.instagram.com/wenafullerton)

Top Guidance for Preparing an Individualized Education Program

By Dr. Laurie WELLNER



In April, my article *The IEP Process: 5 Tips for Success* was the first of a four-part series supporting parents and sharing tips for empowerment. This article was met with great interest, as parents often ask questions of the special education process such as “What does this mean?”, “What do I do when...?”, and “I’m not sure I understand this, what do I do now?” These are all frequently asked questions from parents who are supporting their autistic children through the decision-making process while working with school experts and other personnel. Parent participation (and student participation to the appropriate extent) is essential and cannot be over-emphasized. This edition of the *4 Ps of Parent Empowerment: Proactively Prepare, Plan, and Participate* series

will focus on the answers to some of these questions so you are prepared and confident when meeting with school personnel about your child’s needs and the development of individualized services.

Since 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) has mandated meaningful parent participation in all educational programming for children receiving specialized education services. Through several reauthorizations of this law in 1990, 1997, and most recently in 2004 with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), the development of the child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) continues to be a fundamental process. IEPs confirm the services mutually agreed upon by the parents and

“ The IEP document includes additional details such as the child’s educational goals and benchmarks, modifications, evaluation criteria, and tailored services, as well as the amount and duration of each. ”

school personnel and are directly related to each child’s strengths and areas of need. These customized services and supports are memorialized after the initial meeting in a written document, which then serves as a contract to ensure fidelity of implementation. The IEP document includes additional details such as the child’s educational goals and benchmarks, modifications, evaluation criteria, and tailored services, as well as the amount and duration of each.

Collaboratively planning for these meetings is essential for parents, as key stakeholders, to serve as an active participant and to properly develop the educational plan. It is important to note that parents are not required to participate, and the choice is yours. The IDEA’s founding principles regarding collaboration have helped parents feel more included in the educational decision-making process for their child; however, parents often don’t understand aspects of this complicated activity.

Proactively planning for an IEP meeting can be stressful and intimidating for many parents of children on the spectrum. A large amount of educated and trained personnel is required to be in attendance, and parents have reported feeling overwhelmed, intimidated, and confused by the complicated procedures, discussions, and acronyms used to describe and support their children. There can also be cultural and language barriers that complicate this process. So, here’s what to expect:

1. **Your child needs you to become an advocate**

Being a passive participant may not be enough in some situations. If you simply attend the IEP team meeting without engaging in the discussion, you may not fully demonstrate your desire to be involved. In this case, the term “advocate” refers to someone who speaks up on behalf of your child—that’s you! Asking questions for your clarity and understanding is part of your parental empowerment. Know and be confident the professionals at the table have expertise in a specific area, although they are called to serve your children for a short period of time. Alternatively, you are the long-standing, continuous member of your child’s “team” and you are skilled, knowledgeable, and qualified to serve in the role of the parent and advocate.

2. **Be proactive**

Adopt a positive, collaborative, and inclusive attitude in the meeting. Overlook your feelings of inadequacy by accepting you have a legal right to participate. This recommendation of being proactive does not equate to being rude or pushy, as this can cause the process to backfire and not be constructive. Instead, listen to all participants’ suggestions. Take it all in. In fact, request to record the meeting so you can review later. Take notes if that is helpful. Don’t

“ Adopt a positive, collaborative, and inclusive attitude in the meeting. Overlook your feelings of inadequacy by accepting you have a legal right to participate. ”

make decisions at the conclusion of the meeting. Ask for a copy of the IEP document to take home and review. Then, follow up with the teacher or other representative with questions in case you don't understand something.

3. Your consent matters

Within the IDEA, parental consent means you have been fully informed of all aspects of the child's recommended services and supports and that you agree in writing. There are specific times when your child's school must reasonably obtain your written consent before any changes to services can be implemented. Those times are before an initial evaluation is conducted, before providing specialized education and services to your child, and before any retesting begins. So, at the end of the IEP team meeting, do not feel pressured or obligated to provide your written consent. You have a right to consider the "offer" provided to you, and when you fully understand and agree, then sign and return.

While you may not have all of the answers to these new experiences, challenges, perceived barriers, and complicated processes, know that your involvement and consent is key to the supports and services that schools must provide. Consider yourself integral to the team. Your child depends on it!



Laurie Wellner, EdD is the Vice President of Academic Affairs at Northcentral University in San Diego, California, and has worked in education for the past 25 years. Dr. Wellner specializes in issues regarding autism, special education and organizational leadership, ADHD, Educationally Related Mental Health Services, faculty development, course design and program development, and successful communication and collaboration with stakeholders for the improvement of the educational process. Dr. Wellner has served as an adjunct professor at Claremont Graduate University and Touro College (New York). She has served on many committees pertaining to systems change in education. Dr. Wellner is the author of several articles and book chapters, a meta-analysis of the literature in the area of trust theory, a curriculum guide for Applied Behavior Analysis, as well as other writing, leadership, conferences, and research projects. She regularly chairs and participates in committees for dissertation research at the doctoral level. She is a passionate advocate for the success of all.

Website: drlauriewellner.weebly.com

Twitter: [@LaurieWellner](https://twitter.com/LaurieWellner)

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/lauriewellner



Autism Parenting Magazine

BACK ISSUES



PRESS TO BUY



PRESS TO BUY



PRESS TO BUY



PRESS TO BUY



PRESS TO BUY

Don't Take My Toys

By Rachel ALEXANDER

*The anxiety has taken over
Your face is full of fear
I don't know what started it today
I know you're gone; not here*

*Your fear of losing your toys
It overwhelms you
The thought of them breaking
It consumes you*

*Toys are here to be played with
Toys are meant to be fun
But you're not feeling this at all
You just want to be done*

*Know that it's going to be okay
Nothing is going away
Your toys will always be yours
Forever and a day*

Rachel Alexander is originally from the UK and moved to the US in 2009. She has two children, Max and Isla, and lives in Sugar Land, Texas. In 2014, Max was diagnosed with autism at the age of two. Over the past five years, Rachel and her family has learned to live with and embrace everything that autism brings. It is this journey that inspired her to start writing poetry. Rachel created a website and Facebook page called 'Autism Through Poetry' with the hope that her poems will help others know that they are not alone, and that we are all in this together. Rachel hopes to encourage acceptance and create a better understanding of life with autism; ultimately providing comfort to those who need it most.

Website: www.autismthroughpoetry.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/autismthroughpoetry

Navigating Autism

By Mary KANGAS

*Autism is hard to navigate
Each new day you don't know what's on your plate.*

*Some days are a breeze and some are not
Courage and inner strength, you need a lot.*

*Every autistic child is not alike
So each parent sees things in a different light.*

*Taking your kid out to do things around,
Requires planning to try to prevent the meltdown.*

*You follow the same patterns with your kid each day,
To help them feel structure and find their way.*

*God bless the parents and those autistic kids too,
Because they are all doing the best they can do.*

Mary Kangas is the mother of two children, Dennis and Sara, and has a great husband named Dennis who works very hard taking care of his family. Mary is a stay-at-home mom who likes to write poems and writes a lot about autism to unfold it all in her words. Mary's beautiful and smart son Dennis has autism and works incredibly hard on things. They are very proud of him. Their daughter, of whom they are also proud, is an honors student and a helpful young lady. They feel very blessed.

How I Knew Something was Different in Each of My Kids with Autism

By Alex WHITE

“Always trust your gut!” people tell you throughout your life. Maybe I don’t trust mine enough, but in mid-March of 2017, it was practically grabbing me by the ears and shouting at full volume about my toddler William, who was in a silent crisis.

You see, William’s baby brother George became hospitalized with a serious case of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which landed him in intensive care on oxygen and using a feeding tube. We even came close to losing him at one point, and the entire family was thrown into complete panic and survival mode. My mother and mother-in-law came intermittently to help us during the 10-day nightmarish ordeal, which I will never forget. I stayed home from work the whole time to be at George’s bedside.

William, at two and a half years old, was too young to understand exactly what was going on, but he could tell something was seriously amiss. George had disappeared, dad was gone all day, and mom was gone all night (she was at George’s bedside when he needed it most). Soon I noticed that William, who had begun using close to 200 words (though none used yet for communication; more on that later), suddenly went silent and didn’t speak a word for about a week. He was withdrawn and listless and stopped making eye contact. As I knew from our 18- and 24-month developmental assessments, losing skills at this age was a red flag for autism. This is when my gut would no longer allow me to ignore the other signs, like his spinning in circles until he fell down dizzy, walking on tippy toes, memorizing kids’ books and repeating them verbatim, his fear of the vacuum, and lining up crayons and toy cars.

Lying in bed next to my beautiful sleeping son who bears an eerie resemblance to me, I decided to search online for an informal autism assessment screener.



The test asked about 50 questions. No communication, not pointing to things, not drinking from a cup, not asking for his juice, not asking for his toys—these were not good signs. His verbalizations so far had been limited to repeating nursery rhymes, kids’ TV shows, and children’s books. I wasn’t sure if he knew

what the words meant, but I thought it was a start from which he would naturally grow. By the end of the assessment, the results were clearly delivered: “Your child is at serious risk for autism spectrum disorder; seek an assessment with a specialist,” was the gist. My heart sank into the wash with King John’s crown jewels (look it up as it’s an apt description of my emotions at that moment). It felt like the reverse of when you’re about to die and your life flashes before you; William’s life that would never be was flashing before my eyes, and it was crushing. I laid there next to my innocent slumbering boy who was wholly unaware of the challenges now aligning before him. At my urging, my wife soon booked a visit with his pediatrician, who downplayed my instinctual fears. She said, “Well, I just talk to my daughter all the time about everything, even when we’re in the grocery store, and that’s how they pick up language.” Ashley and I decided to forge ahead and have William assessed at one of our local autism research centers anyway. After a few weeks, the results were in: moderate autism.

Baby George, after his initial hospital stay, ended up requiring hospitalization four more times that year after more respiratory distress from RSV complications. I don’t know how Ashley and I made it through to 2018. I do not remember much of that year. Finally, in December 2017, we found a pulmonologist to prescribe him the right combination of oral and inhaled steroids and a rescue inhaler, which made the difference and allowed his little lungs to strengthen. By 2018, George had uttered only a few words, including “kitty” and “mama,” and then suddenly those words dried up. His eye contact was not consistent. He wasn’t pointing and making syllables. Mostly he was just interested in cuddling with mama and drinking his bottle. He was just delayed from his multiple hospital stays, everyone said. But my gut was back at it, poking me incessantly, until I forced an appointment with his pediatrician (same one as William) who gave me a look usually reserved for a crackpot. “Well, you could try to get him diagnosed, but no insurance company is going to cover autism treatments before age two.” The message I got from her was again to do nothing. I pressed on and asked for a diagnosis of speech delay, and we started some speech therapy at our local autism communication center. George was 22 months old with no words, not walking, not using utensils (even messily). I was angry that it was left to me, someone with less medical training than Neil Patrick Harris, to sound the alarm on both kids, and our pediatrician was not interested in hearing me either time. On his second birthday, we

had George assessed for autism, and to no surprise he was also diagnosed.

Two months after William’s diagnosis and after Applied Behavior Analysis had been underway for two weeks, he handed me his sippy cup one morning and said, “More juice!” I was caught flat-footed because it was the first time he had ever addressed me directly. Then when he wanted us to turn off a TV show, he said “All done!” in a commanding voice. I’d just seen the first glimmers of hope in the very long journey ahead.

George, though he’s not speaking yet, is communicating his food and drink needs and more on his iPad, which is specially fitted out with an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) app from a vendor. He asks for PBS kids (he loves *Sid the Science Kid*) and for apple juice and pizza. “I eat pretzel bites,” he just said to me the other day using his device. He’ll sometimes press the dad symbol and point to me.

Back when George was born, he was given to me alone in a waiting room for a few short minutes after delivery. I knew just what I wanted for him—I broke out my iPhone and played him “Hey Jude” by The Beatles on the tiny speakers. I wanted his first song on planet Earth to be uplifting, melodic, and encouraging. I thought somewhere in his new eyes I could see it sinking in, and so far, he’s lived up to it as he strives day by day with incredible courage and progress. William’s first song was “Here Comes the Sun,” also by The Beatles (yes, I want them to be huge fans), and in retrospect, I couldn’t have picked a better sentiment for him to live by either.



Alex White is the proud father of two boys on the spectrum, William, five, and George, three. By day he is Senior Business Analyst at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where he specializes in financial aid process improvement. He lives in Madison, Wisconsin with his sons, his wife Ashley, and his brother Phil. He enjoys spending time with family, playing music, and reading history. Alex’s work as a writer has been published in the Bucks County Courier Times, The Intelligencer, and Askmen.com.

LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/in/alex-white-cbap®-6144517](http://www.linkedin.com/in/alex-white-cbap-6144517)

Helping Your Child with Autism Navigate the Playground: Part II

By Annette NUÑEZ, PhD

Play is very complex, especially when teaching children with autism, but it is essential to social skills development. Children naturally engage in play on the playground at recess; however, for children with autism, play does not come as easily. The playground is unpredictable, loud, chaotic, and can be an extremely overwhelming place for a child who likes structure and predictability. So, how can you make the playground become an inviting place for a child with autism?



Last month, in Issue 103, I shared three tips on beginning to teach social skills on the playground. The first step is to observe what is happening on the playground during your child's recess. Observe what the kids are talking about and what games and sports are being played. The next step is to expose

your child to the playground culture, which means to start teaching your child how to play the games and sports that are common at recess and to teach him/her about topics other children are talking about. For example, if other children like talking about *Star Wars*, teach your child about the basics of *Star Wars* (i.e., characters, the concept of good vs. evil, etc.)

so your child will be able to relate to his/her peers and have some knowledge of what they are talking about. Last but not least, begin to teach your child how to play simple playground games like Tag, Red Rover, etc. These three steps will help you set your child up for social skills success on the playground.

This is only the beginning. There is so much more to navigate on the playground. In *Helping Your Child with Autism Navigate the Playground: Part II*, I offer the next three steps to help your child build confidence and social skills while playing with others.

1. Facilitated play with an adult

Find an adult who can facilitate play. This adult can be you, an aide, or even a high school or college student who needs volunteer hours to meet school requirements. This adult will facilitate a group of 10 children or less to play the simple games you have taught your child (i.e., Simon Says, Red Light/Green Light, etc.). In the beginning, the adult will facilitate the games, then the adult will start to have peers assist the games. For instance, when playing Red Light/Green Light the adult can let a child lead the game. The adult will slowly transition out of the leadership role and observe to make sure all children are engaged and included. The concept behind facilitated play is to start off with structured games that include everyone in the playgroup, and then morph those games into either sports, complex games, or pretend play directed by the children of the playgroup. The ultimate goal is for the facilitator to back away and to begin having all the children play and be inclusive with one another. Children with autism will begin to identify with this playgroup and feel included, which will motivate them to socialize with these peers at recess.

2. Prompt peers to be inclusive

Just as much as we prompt children with autism on how to play and stay engaged, it is just as necessary to prompt their peers to be inclusive. It is important



to teach peers to ask children with autism to play during recess. Children can include each other by taking turns pushing each other on the swing, going down a slide together, or playing Follow the Leader. Feeling included leads to motivation, and motivation leads to socialization.

3. Observe so you can continue to build on interests

Playground culture is always changing, and it is essential to teach a child with autism to change with it. At the beginning of the year, kids are feeling one another out and trying out new things. Within a matter of months, children will start to play games like foursquare, tetherball, sports on the field, or pre-

“

Find an adult who can facilitate play. This adult can be you, an aide, or even a high school or college student who needs volunteer hours to meet school requirements.

”

tend play on the play structure. Observe every few months and see who and/or what your child is naturally drawn to. See what peers they gravitate to and see what those peers are playing at recess. In a one on one setting, teach the concepts of foursquare or pretend play (this usually involves chase with some good vs. evil incorporated into it) so your child can relate to his/her peers in a social setting. Who your child gravitates to on the playground represents the beginning of friendships because he/she wants to engage with peers who share common interests with him/her. What your child plays on the playground is also a great way to help identify extracurricular activities your child might be interested in, such as drama (pretend play) or sports.

Play is essential to social skills development and is instrumental in helping children understand their social world. When children come together and play, they form a peer culture that is uniquely their own. Through play, children are forced to navigate their social world independently and develop their interpersonal skills and social knowledge. Over time children will begin to form friendships by identifying themselves with the peers they interact with, as well as discover what they like playing based on what they enjoy doing and what they are good at doing.



Dr. Annette Nuñez is the founder and director of Breakthrough Interventions, LLC, and Breaking Through Autism. She is a licensed psychotherapist and has worked with children with ASD and other related disorders for over 22 years. As part of her doctorate work at the University of Denver, Dr. Nuñez developed the Children's Social Competence Scale (CSCS). The CSCS is an early intervention evaluation tool that measures social competency in young children. She served as the Program Director for Connect Us, a non-profit organization that helps children cultivate positive relationships through facilitated play. Her research interests include the mainstreaming and socialization of children with High Functioning Autism. Dr. Nuñez co-wrote and self-published the Friendship Is ... book. She conducts many seminars both nationally and internationally and has consulted with many schools in China and South Africa. Dr. Nuñez also consults and supervises the therapists at the Breakthrough Interventions site in South Africa. She has been featured in the Huffington Post, NPR, The Jenny McCarthy Show, and FOX News. She currently hosts a podcast entitled Behind the Breakthroughs where she shares advice and the breakthroughs of her clients.

Websites: www.btinterventions.com, <https://www.breakingthroughautism.com>

Facebook: [facebook.com/profile.php?id=462556703926821&ref=content_filter](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=462556703926821&ref=content_filter)

Instagram: [breakthrough_autism](https://www.instagram.com/breakthrough_autism)



Practical and Effective Behavioural Support for Families & Professionals

Providing families and educational professionals with evidence-based behaviour strategies to promote social independence since 2011



Our Services

- ✓ PEERS® Telehealth Social Skills Groups
- ✓ Functional Behaviour Assessments
- ✓ Individualised Parent Training
- ✓ School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support
- ✓ 1:1 ABA Programmes via Telehealth
- ✓ Positive Behaviour Support Plans

Currently offering 20% discount on new consultations!

Supporting and empowering families and educational professionals across the UK and via telehealth across the world

www.allbehaviourconsultancy.com | info@allbehaviourconsultancy.com

Dad Shares the Incredible Journey of His Son with Autism in New Book

Cracking Autism: The Book I Wish I Had When We Started

By Peter GEORGE, parent

This book is ideal for parents who have already started therapy with their child for some time but feel stuck in critical places. *Cracking Autism* tells the story of Peter George's son, who recovered from autism symptoms almost completely. And while his story is simple and straightforward, his journey was anything but!

Parents and therapists reading this book can seek inspiration in order to find creative and down to earth solutions to overcome the obstacles in the path of their child's progress.

Out of the many challenges his family managed to overcome, Peter George chose to focus this book on the following themes:

- How love can change everything and how progress is connected to feeling and expressing unconditional love towards your child,
- Dealing with resilient anxiety,
- The importance of prioritizing communication and cognitive skills,
- The fine print on eye contact,
- How to approach feeding and toilet training when they're tough to crack,
- A few words on the causes of autism and the effects of smart devices,



- And why working with healthy limits is so important—something often overlooked in many programs.

Peter George is a simple parent of a wonderfully special child—a parent, like many others, with an unstoppable force to find solutions to his son's challenges and help him progress to the best of his abilities, in a way that feels natural and respectful. He always treats his son like he's capable of doing anything, and tries to help his son build a future where he will be happy to live in. Peter dedicates this book to all parents who go through a similar journey as he did, with the hope the fine print on his story will help them fill in the gaps in front of their child's progress.

For more information, visit
www.amazon.com/dp/B08713H5R6

Copyright: Peter George. Cover: unsplash.com

ADVERTISEMENT

follow us



Enlightening New Book Helps Families Successfully Navigate Autism

Autistically Awesome/Autisticamente Incredible

By Ericka WHARTON, MS; LBS

In this intriguing and educational book, caretakers and professionals will increase their understanding and awareness of autism spectrum disorder, also known as ASD. ASD has become very broad and familiar in today's society; 1 in 59 individuals are diagnosed. There are some unfamiliar to the diagnosis, which may require assistance with appropriate resources that are available.

The author makes a clear connection with distinguishing the different types and levels of ASD. While ASD is a complex disorder, the author explains in detail what one should expect from this diagnosis and what steps should be taken as the caregiver for an ASD individual. The author will help readers decrease their anxiety and frustrations by navigating their way towards becoming more familiar with ASD. This book will help the reader know what signs and symptoms to observe, strategies to utilize, efficient and appropriate services available, and proper treatment that can be implemented.

The author is very confident everyone will learn something new or expand his/her knowledge of ASD after reading this book.

Website: www.autisticallyawesome.net

This website has a lot of homemade workshops, downloadable visuals, videos on ASD behaviors, etc. that have been helpful to many. Please check it out! You can



also submit a contact form if you have any suggestions, recommendations, or topics you would like to know more about.

Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Autistically-Awesome-Understanding-ASD-Diagnosis/dp/1734650311/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Autistically+Awesome&qid=1589457139&sr=8-1

Español: AMAZON: https://www.amazon.com/Autisticamente-Incredible-Comprender-diagnosticos-Spanish/dp/173465032X/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3PEOB-5TN0LHUQ&dchild=1&keywords=autisticamente+incredible&qid=1589458842&srefix=Autisticamente+%2Caps%2C163&sr=8-1

Para obtener más información sobre el autismo y cómo prepararse y ofrecer ayuda, visite el sitio web y haga clic en ESPAÑOL.

Ericka Wharton, MS; LBS is a Licensed Behavioral Specialist who is licensed with the Pennsylvania State Board of Medicine. Ericka is from Norristown, Pennsylvania, and comes from a strong family unit that shows love and support. Ericka has five beautiful children, of which the youngest was diagnosed with ASD and ADHD. Ericka is his strongest advocate, with 11 years of experience as a Licensed Behavioral Specialist. Ericka is excited to assist and bridge the gaps between families and professionals for children who have been given an ASD diagnosis.

ADVERTISEMENT

Dealing with Police or Emergency Responders: How We Can Help Our Loved Ones on the Spectrum

By Kate FOLEY

One of the very real fears many parents of children on the spectrum face is: what can be done to help our children when we are not around? I run a local support group with two other wonderful women, and our meetings usually center around a specific autism-related topic. One month we opted to flesh out our concerns about safety.

We asked our local fire department to come and our local police. What we discovered was that although our first responders are trained in nearly everything, autism is an enormous subject where even those who are educated in it often do not fully understand it. There are more and more stories that flood the internet, both positive and negative, about police and people on the spectrum. What can we do to remain on the positive end? How do we help our first responders help our loved ones?

In my quest to understand what we could do to help, I was pulled down a rabbit hole. There are many different types of law enforcement (police, sheriffs, state police), within which there are boroughs, cities, and municipalities that each have a different budget for training. On top of that there is a lot for first responders to learn on a basic level that is necessary to save lives. Luckily, my rabbit hole led me to one of the most informed persons on the topic, a man by the name of Dennis Debbaudt. He has a son on the spectrum and was one of the featured interviews in the HBO special *A Night of Too Many Stars* back in 2017. Dennis has been setting out to inform law enforcement about how best to keep everyone safe when responding to a situation where someone with autism might be involved. His line to me regarding his own son and an experience



that started him on this path was: “How can someone know what they don’t know? How can we help our own first responders to best help our children?” His advice to me was to start with my own local police department and go right to the top. Chances are they will have resources set aside for training their officers and some may even have training in place for situations concerning persons with autism. Mr. Debbaudt is a wealth of information, having trained police for decades on the topic of autism. There are many available resources on Mr. Debbaudt’s site (<https://www.autismriskmanagement.com/downloadable-resources/>), including information about training sessions for law enforcement.

One of the greatest resources out there to help you feel more at ease is [The National Autism Association](https://nationalautismassociation.org/resources/awaare-wandering/be-edy-booklets/). Their website is not only where you are able to find The Big Red Safety Box to help those of us with children who tend to wander (<https://nationalautismassociation.org/resources/awaare-wandering/be-edy-booklets/>), but they also have a wealth of information for first responders, teachers, and caregivers. Most of their booklets are free and downloadable, so you can print them and take the information right into your local police department.

All of these are great resources that can help us better inform our local law enforcement. However, what should our loved ones do if they find themselves face to face with a police officer, or any emergency responder? According to Autism Speaks, many first responders may have little experience with someone with autism. Here are some tips from Dennis Debbaudt on the Autism Speaks website about helping first responders and our loved ones should an emergency arise:

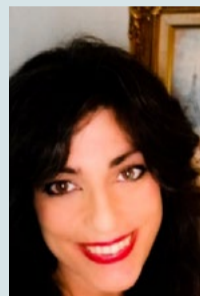
- Develop a handout card that can be easily copied and laminated.
- Avoid making sudden movements to reach for the handout card.
- Do not attempt to flee.
- Do not make sudden movements or reach for items.
- Try to remain calm.
- If you are a victim or are reporting a crime, you may want the police to contact a family member, advocate, or friend who can help you through the interview process.
- Carry the phone number of an advocacy organization or personal advocate, relative, or friend.

(Debbaudt, 2006 b).

Personally, I keep a sign in my car that lets an emergency responder know there is someone in the car with autism. If you feel it is necessary, you may wish to ask for someone with CIT training (Crisis Intervention Team). They will be more likely trained in dealing with people who have autism. Another important resource is [SMART 911](#) which is set up to inform

911 operators that someone attached to your home or phone number may have autism and what might be the best way to approach the situation.

These are all excellent resources and a great place to start. Although my own research often seemed overwhelming, considering all the different organizations, it's important to start at the beginning, make a plan for your loved one, and try to get to know your own police department or first responders, perhaps by downloading some of the other resources and sharing them with those in your community.



Kate Foley is an author/illustrator with a background in communication, education, and theater, whose personal experience in parenting a child with autism as well as one without has led her to create stories to help children navigate their complex emotions while teaching them to celebrate the uniqueness of themselves. Kate has a degree from Keystone College in communications as well as an elementary education certification for K-6. She studied theater at Mansfield University and for her professional development was grateful to have received training in effective leadership and communication skills from some of the best in their fields at Lehigh University's Iacocca Institute. In college, she and some friends ran a nonprofit theater group, the Footlights Players, which earned money for local charities. She also heads up a local group for parents with children on the spectrum, teaches a small, inclusive preschool class based in drama and play therapy for children both on and off the spectrum, and is a committee member of CHATID, a local advocacy group for all people with disabilities. Kate lives for both the quiet moments and those filled with wild, raucous laughter. She has been known to indulge in too much coffee and even more chocolate while living in Carbondale, Pennsylvania, with her husband, two beautiful children, and her cat, Mrs. Norris.

Website: www.katefoleyauthor.com

CHATID: chatidnepa.org

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER WITH AUTISM FIGHTS FOR MARGINALIZED KIDS

By Claire DELANO



Nicole Vander Meulen strives to be a catalyst for change. She is not just the managing partner at Vander Meulen Law Firm and a member of the Madison Metropolitan School Board—she is also open about her identity as a woman with autism. She resides in Madison, Wisconsin, with her cat, Tigger.

Accomplishments: Nicole considers her graduation from the University of Wisconsin Law School to be one of her most significant accomplishments. She is also deeply proud to be the first openly autistic individual to serve on a school

board in the nation. Elected in 2017, Nicole has fought to make the school system more inclusive for marginalized children and to increase funding for special education programs.

Inspiration: Nicole is most inspired by people who are change-makers—those who challenge the status quo to improve the lives of others. In particular, she admires Representative John Lewis, President Barack Obama, and innovative artists like Lin-Manuel Miranda. It is a dream of hers to meet Miranda one day!

Goals: Nicole hopes to be re-elected and continue her work on the Madison Metropolitan School Board. In the future, she plans to run for the Wisconsin State Legislature.

Advice for families affected by autism: Nicole encourages families to help their ASD children expand their horizons and learn new things: “Please challenge us to accept new ideas, new foods, and new people. Practice social etiquette at home by acting out what is going to happen at an event and how people may

AUTISM WARRIOR:

Nicole Vander Meulen, the first openly autistic individual to serve on a school board in the United States, shares her advice for families affected by autism.

respond.” She also says parents must always keep in mind that their child should be treated with empathy and compassion: “My advice is to treat your child the way you want to be treated. Just because we are autistic doesn’t mean we’re completely immune to the world around us...Most importantly, realize that we are capable of love, joy, and acceptance. We just show it differently than most people.”

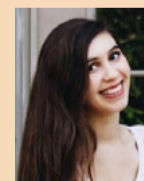
Website:

www.nickiforschools.com

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/nk-vander>

Twitter: www.twitter.com/Badgerlaw



Claire Delano is a student at the College of Charleston working towards a BA in English with a concentration in Writing, Rhetoric, and Publication. She is a freelance copyeditor and the Editor-in-Chief of Her Campus CofC.

A Look at the Connection Between Autism and Water

By Christopher BLOH, Ph.D., BCBA-D

It is a common belief in the ASD community that kids with ASD “love water.” While this could be an overgeneralized claim, caregivers frequently share, blog, and post web comments related to water. Anecdotes like “he repeatedly turns on the taps to watch water run but doesn’t bother with water in a bowl,” “pours water on himself and his sister,” “he can spend hours in the tub and is often found playing with the hose,” “loves making waterfalls and swimming pools,” and “anything near water he heads right for it,” are frequently published (asd-forum.org.uk, 2008). Interest in water may be common among people with ASD, but what kind of water? Is it still water, flowing, dripping, or swimming?

What about taking baths and showers? Surveying personal comments provided by caregivers (bbc.uk.org), baths can have appeal as the water can be engaged or manipulated. Not necessarily just for hygiene, a bath can be an opportunity to view water moving and catching the light. Showers, however, can be entirely different. Caregivers sometimes report opposition to showering as it may be too loud, and the beads of water can feel like “stingers” or “golf balls” on the skin (themighty.com, 2016). As far as addressing this opposition, there does not appear to be a plethora of empirical evidence specifically targeting shower/bathing. This adaptive behavior is commonly included for interventions with other hygiene-related activities, i.e., hand washing, tooth brushing, etc. (Veazey et al., 2016). This may not be surprising considering Pituch et al. (2011) surveyed parental treatment priorities, and hygiene was not listed in the top ten.

According to the DSM 5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), diagnostic criteria for ASD vary from deficits in social communication and interactions to restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior. Does the latter aforementioned description help explain possible predilections to water? Included within the

diagnosis under “restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior” are two qualifiers that are plausible: “highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in focus or intensity” and “hyper or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment.” Can the movement of water and/or light reflection of it reinforce the “visual fascination with lights or movement,” as identified as a behavioral characteristic in the diagnosis? Perhaps the need for sensory stimulation could lead people with ASD to engage in the fluidity (pun intended) of moving water.

Numerous studies have suggested the benefits of swimming for people with ASD, such as improved social skills (Mortimer et al., 2014; Pan, 2010), improved emotional responses (Caputo et al., 2018), physical fitness (Yilmaz et al., 2004), self-esteem (Napolitano, 2017), and motor abilities (Farnaz et al., 2015). While an inherent interest in water coupled with the potential benefits of water exercise has an appeal, it is not without a caveat. Guan and Li (2017) concluded children with ASD were 160 times more likely to die from drowning than their neurotypical peers. Couple a tendency to elope from supervised settings with an interest in water, an inability to safely navigate water could pose a significant threat. The last authors



One area leaves little room for debate: safety. If there is a remote interest in water, swimming lessons are recommended along with active supervision when in or near water.



(Guan and Li, 2017) recommend swimming lessons as soon as the ASD diagnosis is made. Other authors concur with the necessity of safety skills training regarding swimming (Alaniz et al, 2017; Lepore et al., 2007; Levy et al, 2017). Additional precautions are recommended for active supervision near bodies of water to prevent children with ASD from wandering.

While caregivers may freely share their children's water-play (not for hygiene) behaviors, not much is disseminated regarding sensory precautions, i.e., nose plugs, earplugs, sensory deprivation gear, etc. Additionally, caregivers have reported the texture of a bathing suit and bathing caps can be potential barriers to this activity (Duquette, 2016). Similar to any typically developing child, those with sensitivities to their eyes, ears, and nose could take similar precautions, though tolerance wearing these sensory modalities will vary across people.

What about people with ASD who are afraid of water? Is that common or as common as those with ASD having an interest with water? Phobias are not restricted to the typically developing population. Case in point, research suggests people with ASD exhibit more fears and phobias than people with other developmental disabilities or typically developing peers (Lydon et al., 2015). This may not be surprising considering people with ASD may be more sensitive to environmental stimuli. Additionally, there appears to be a greater variety of stimuli that could occasion fear, with water being identified as a source of fear in some with ASD (Davis et al., 2007; Love et al., 1990; Rapp et al., 2005; Volkmar & Cohen, 1985). Having an interest in water cannot be overgeneralized to the entire population of people with ASD.

Previously mentioned research is suggestive of the benefits of swimming for those with ASD. Considering the literature also suggests the possibility of water being aversive, what are the options to address this aversion? Davis et al. (2007) combined cognitive behavioral therapy and behavioral analytic meth-

ods to decrease anxiety to water. Love et al. (1990) involved the caregivers and had them model stepping towards the water source and vocalizing a lack of fear. Another intervention to address avoidance of water was reinforcing the person's entering various depths of water (Rapp et al., 2005). Currently, some research exists; unfortunately, there appears to be a paucity of empirically validated methods to address water phobia with people with ASD. Why? Is it because fear of water does not appear to be a priority in the treatment of ASD? Perhaps a fear of water is not something actively discouraged among caregivers. In view that wandering away from supervision is the most reported activity prior to drowning incidents for those with ASD (Guan & Li, 2017), caregiver discouragement is plausible.

So what is to be done with the potential for water activities? Encourage? Discourage? Indulge? Do we allow the child to play with water in ways different than his/her typically developing peers? How long should the caregiver allow the child with ASD to play in the tub? When do we consider the child just having fun as opposed to engaging in self-stimulatory behavior? If he/she is under stimulated, does the water help? What should be done?

One area leaves little room for debate: safety. If there is a remote interest in water, swimming lessons are recommended along with active supervision when in or near water. Leisure water activities could also be used to encourage water for hygiene. If the person with ASD has sensitivity issues related to showering, baths could be an option by allowing him/her to pour water over himself/herself for rinsing. If pouring the water is not an option, caregivers could allow him/her control over the pouring (how long to pour, when to start, the type of container holding the water, etc.). If pouring is too loud, earplugs are an option.

What if he/she engages in self-stimulatory behavior with water? An option could be to allow "free wa-

ter time" in his/her schedule, being notified ahead of time with vocal and visual prompts. Additionally, provide prompts of time (vocal reminders, count-down timer) remaining for this activity to notify its conclusion and transition to another.

So, regarding the common proclivity for people with ASD to be attracted to water, can it be considered a "given?" I must defer and suggest that nothing is a given. Regardless of abilities and disabilities, an individual is unique and should be engaged as such.

References:

- Alaniz M.L., Rosenberg, S.S., Beard, N.R., & Rosario E.R. (2017). The effectiveness of aquatic group therapy for improving water safety and social interactions in children with autism spectrum disorder: A pilot program. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 47, 12, 4006-4017.
- American Psychiatric Association (2013). *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th ed.* Arlington VA: American Psychiatric Association.asd-forum.org.uk. (2008, August 26). Water obsession [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.asd-forum.org.uk/forum/index.php?topic/18764-water-obsession/>
- bbc.uk.org. (2012, July 18). Are people with autism drawn to water? Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ouch/2012/07/are_people_with_autism_drawn_t.html Caputo, G., Ippolito, G., Mazzotta, M., Sentenza, L., Muzio, M.R., Salzano, S., & Conson, M. (2018).
- Effectiveness of a Multisystem Aquatic Therapy for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 48, 6, 1945-1956. Davis, T. E., Kurtz, P. F., Gardner, A. W. & Carman, N. B. (2007). Cognitive-behavioral treatment for specific phobias with a child demonstrating severe problem behavior and developmental delays. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 28, 546 – 558.
- Duquette, M.M., Carbonneau, H., Roul, R., & Crevier, L. (2016). Sport and physical activity: Facilitating interventions with young people living with autism spectrum disorder. *Physical Activity Review*, 4, 40-49.
- Farnaz, T., Azar, A., & Sohayl, D. (2015). The effect of basic swimming skills training on gross motor skills in autistic children (7-11 years old). *Development and Motor Learning (Harakat)*, 7, 2, 171-185.
- Guan, J. & Li, G. (2017). Injury mortality in individuals with autism. *American Journal of Public Health*, 107, 5, 791-793.
- Lepore, M., Gayle, G.W., & Stevens, S. (2007). *Adapted Aquatics Programming, 2nd ed.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Levy, K.M., Ainsleigh, S.A., & Hunsinger-Harris, M.L. (2017). Let's go under! Teaching water safety skills using a behavioral treatment package. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 52, 2, 186-193.
- Love, S. R., Matson, J. L., & West, D. (1990). Mothers as effective therapists for autistic children's phobias. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 23, 379-385.
- Lydon, S., Healt, O., O'Callaghan, O., Mulhern, T., Holloway, J. (2015). A systematic review of the treatment of fears and phobias among children with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 2, 141-154.
- Mortimer, R., Privopoulos, M., & Kumar, S. (2014). The effectiveness of hydrotherapy in the treatment of social and behavioral aspects of children with autism spectrum disorders: a systematic review. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, 7, 93-104.
- Napolitano, S. (2017). Swimming as an inclusion tool for autistic subjects. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport*, 5, 2339-2343.
- Pan, C.Y. (2010). Effects of water exercise swimming program on aquatic skills and social behaviors in children with autism spectrum disorders. *Autism*, 14, 1, 9-28.
- Pituch, K.A., Green, V.A., Didden, R., Lang, R., O'Reilly, M.F., Lancioni, G.E., & Sigafoos, J. (2011). Parent reported treatment priorities for children with autism spectrum disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 5, 135-143.
- Rapp, J.T., Vollmer, T.R., Hovanetz, A.N. (2005). Evaluation and treatment of a swimming pool avoidance exhibited by an adolescent girl with autism. *Behavior Therapy*, 36, 101-105.
- themighty.com. (2016, March 17). Why a shower is a big deal for my son with autism and sensory processing disorder. Retrieved from <https://themighty.com/2016/03/why-a-shower-is-a-big-deal-for-my-son-with-autism-and-sensory-processing-disorder/>
- Veazey, S.E., Valentino, A.L., Low, A.I., McElroy, A.R., & LeBlanc, L.A. (2016). Teaching feminine hygiene skills to young females with autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 9, 2, 184-189.
- Volkmar, F.R. & Cohen, D.J. (1985). The experience of infantile autism: A first-person account by Tony W. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 15, 1, 47-54.
- Yilmaz, I., Yanardag, B., Birkan, B., & Bumin, G. (2004). Effects of swimming training on physical fitness and water orientation in autism. *Pediatrics International*, 46, 5, 624-626, 2004.

Christopher Bloh, Ph.D., BCBA-D holds a B.A. in Anthropology, an Ed.M. in Special Education, an Ed.M. in Educational Psychology, and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from Temple University. He is also a Board Certified Behavior Analyst, Doctoral Level who provides classroom consultation in behavior management and differentiating instruction. Before arriving at Kutztown University, Dr. Bloh taught students with autism and those with physical and cognitive disabilities in Philadelphia, PA. His areas of research interest include classroom and behavior management through Applied Behavior Analysis and the increase in communication for people with autism using verbal behavior. He has presented at the state and national levels while publishing in his field.

Helping Your Child with A.U.T.I.S.M. Succeed in School

By Dr. Ron MALCOLM

Many parents initially struggle when given the news their child has autism. Other parents are relieved there is an actual name for the situation they face every day with their child.



Parents with autistic children have the same hopes and dreams for their children as other parents have. However, many parents struggle to know whether the school program their child attends is a “quality” program. Here is a simple acronym (A.U.T.I.S.M.) to remember when determining how to help your child succeed during his/her school day.

Authentic assessments

Parents want a legitimate diagnosis for their child that outlines his/her strengths and weaknesses. Such a diagnosis is centered around professionals using

valid, authentic, evidence-based assessments with the child. Parents often become overwhelmed with the variety of authentic assessments available for children with autism. These assessments may need to take into consideration the age of the student and the severity of the autism, as well as cultural and linguistic considerations. There is a vast array of assessments available for children with autism. Parents should look for schools that utilize assessments that could include:

- Competency-based tools such as interviews with the parent, teacher, and child

- Observations conducted in the classroom
- A review of medical evaluations such as a full audiological exam to rule out a hearing loss that could contribute to a communication disorder or behavioral concerns
- A full speech and language evaluation by a certified speech-language therapist using such instruments as: Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOWPVT), etc.

Other competency-based testing could include the following instruments: Vineland Adaptive Behavioral Scale – Second Edition; Assessment, Evaluation and Programming System (AEPS); Verbal Behavioral Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP); Sensory Profiles; Autism Diagnostic Observation Scale (ADOS); Asperger Syndrome Diagnostic Scale (ASDS); Child Autism Rating Scale (CARS); Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transitional Support Model (SCERTS); Parental Rating Scales; Social Skills Checklists; etc.

Understanding from the school community

Parents should communicate regularly with principals, teachers, therapists, and special education personnel to see if they have experience working with autistic children. Parents need to ensure services are available from a qualified special education teacher with background training in autism, as well as physical therapists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and adaptive physical education therapists to meet the educational needs of their child.

Teamwork with parents

Parents need to be active members of their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team. Working collaboratively with both their child's special education teacher and regular education teacher is critical to his/her daily success at school. Keeping these professionals informed about any involvement your child has with outside agencies and therapies will assist with generalizing his/her skillset from school to home and vice versa. Displaying a positive and engaging attitude with the educators involved in your

child's education will also help develop open and honest communication.

Inclusion

Research indicates students with disabilities have a better chance of being actively employed as adults if they have been integrated with students who are non-disabled. Parents need to look within their school and help find ways for their child with autism to be included in the school community. Some students with autism may spend all day in the regular classroom with neurotypical peers. Some may only be present on a part-time basis. Regardless of the time students are integrated into a regular classroom, many students with autism can benefit by being included in elective classes such as art, computers, physical education, and music classes. Parents will also want to ensure inclusion occurs during lunch and recess. This allows individuals with autism unique opportunities to practice their social skills daily. It will reveal to neurotypical students that the child with autism is not a "visitor" to their classroom, but a fully functioning member of the student body.



Self-advocacy respected

Self-advocacy is an important skill for any student on the spectrum. It is essential your child understands he/she has autism and the accommodations he/she requires to be successful. A student can't self-advocate for something he/she doesn't know about.

Yet, self-advocacy can be tricky for a student with autism to understand. If he/she doesn't advocate for

himself/herself, educators may feel he/she doesn't have the skill set or competency to do so. But many students with autism also report receiving negative results when attempting to self-advocate. Teachers may claim they are "complaining or whining" or are "using their disability" to get out of doing something. Your child with autism may view self-advocating as a "lose-lose" situation.

Parents can assist with this situation by practicing self-advocacy skills at home. Having a classroom teacher or school counselor practice these skills at school or in a social skills class will help with generalizing these skills across both the home and school environments. Parents can also ask their child's teachers how self-advocacy is taught, encouraged, and practiced at school. When self-advocacy is encouraged and received positively at your child's school, he/she will be encouraged to self-advocate more.

Memories from a childhood celebrated


Students with autism need to be celebrated in their school environment. Parents can ensure a classroom environment is positive by volunteering at the school and having a physically positive presence. Parents should look for school programs that celebrate all students (including those with autism) academically, socially, and through involvement in extra-curricular activities. Parents who are actively involved in the

classroom can meet other parents as well as the students from the classroom. Developing positive relationships with these individuals can open up doors to social opportunities for their child with autism. Parents need to ensure the educational programs they place their children in have a good track record of allowing parents to be actively involved in their child's classroom and in programs throughout the school. Schools that celebrate the achievements of all students, including those with autism, show the value and importance of these students to the entire school community.



Dr. Ronald I. Malcolm is an Assistant Director of Special Education for a public school district, an Associate Faculty Member with the University of Phoenix, and a Special Graduate Faculty Member at the University of Kansas. He has bachelor degrees in English and Special Education. He holds master-level degrees in Counseling, Special Education, and School Administration. His doctorate degree is from Northern Arizona University in Educational Leadership. His post-graduate degrees are in Positive Behavior Supports and Autism Spectrum Disorders. He has worked for the past 35 years with students between the ages of three to 21 with autism in various school and community-based settings.





Creating Special Memories on the Fourth of July with My Noise Sensitive Child

By Laura YEAGER

The Fourth of July must be the loudest holiday in our country. There are parades with firetrucks and whiny sirens, and out-of-tune marching bands, blaring patriotic songs. Then, there are fireworks—hissing, exploding, and booming in the night. All of this is fine and good if you're a typical kid and enjoy celebrating the nation's birthday, listening to hyper sounds of partying and mayhem. But if you're on the autism spectrum, all of this so-called joyful noise may infuriate and literally unravel you.

My son is one of those on the spectrum who is very sensitive to noise. For this reason, he hates parades, especially on the Fourth of July. He can tolerate the Thanksgiving Day Parade on the television, but standing out in the hot July sun, enduring *America the Beautiful* played by flutes, trombones, and drums is impossible for him.

What should we do on this celebratory day? I asked myself. We had to do something. We couldn't simply

sit in the house and ignore the fact it was an important day for us and our country.

After a few minutes of thought, the first thing I did was dress for the occasion. About a week ago, I purchased a red tank top that said, "Keep calm and sparkle on." I donned this bright shirt. To finish the look, I added some dangly earrings shaped like tiny American flags.

Okay. I looked the Fourth of July part. Now, I had to get my son into the act. I suggested he dress in a red,

white, and blue golf shirt. He did, and then he placed an Uncle Sam hat that was also red, white, and blue on top of his head.

Now we were really ready to celebrate the Fourth in style.

Okay, on to part two of the holiday plan. My son was born in Guatemala. We adopted him in 2005. I decided if he didn't want to honor our loud, American culture, we'd honor his (quiet) Central American one. I decided we would go to the Guatemalan restaurant in Cleveland for lunch.

But were they open? I Googled the restaurant, got the phone number, and called them. Alas, no one was answering the phone. The Guatemalans weren't there cooking their native foods. They were probably out celebrating the Fourth of July, at a parade dressed in red, white, and blue, enjoying the band music and preparing to see fireworks that night.

Okay, so we couldn't eat traditional food from Guatemala. The next best thing was Mexican. There were plenty of Mexican restaurants in town. I suggested one in Stow, the one we usually ate at when we ate Mexican food. But my husband had something else in mind.

"Why don't we go down to Barberton and eat at the Mexican restaurant down there?"

"Great," I said. By going to this restaurant, we would get a little drive in the beautiful sunshine.

My husband Googled the place. Their ad said they were open on the Fourth and that they were "popular with the locals."

"Popular with the locals," I said. "That's good enough for me."

Away we went. The drive was pleasant. We passed lakes, grassy hills, and nice neighborhoods of little white houses. Finally, we got to the restaurant in Barberton. The parking lot was completely deserted.

"Oh, no," said my husband. "They're closed."

"What do we do now?" I asked.

"Well, there's that new Mexican place in Fairlawn."

"Deal," I said.



Away we went to Fairlawn, which was about 15 miles away.

The Fairlawn restaurant was open. Success! We went in and ate tacos and quesadillas and drank mango iced tea. It wasn't your typical Fourth of July cuisine (hotdogs, potato salad, and lemonade), but it was perfect for us. Our son loved that instead of honoring his American culture that day, we honored his Hispanic one.

In conclusion, participating in holidays often takes work if you've got a child with autism. Autistic individuals usually like routine, and holidays are usually anything but. You've got to get creative to find something pleasing to the person on the spectrum and to the whole family.

So here is my advice for you with autistic kids during holiday time: don't get discouraged that you might not be able to do typical activities. Seek out new and interesting ones. At the end of the day, you'll save yourself a great deal of unpleasantness and aggravation. And one thing is for sure: you will not be bored by the same old customs that usually come with the holidays.

But most importantly, dear readers, keep calm and sparkle on...

Laura Yeager blogs for [psychcentral.com](https://www.psychcentral.com) and [cure-today.com](https://www.cure-today.com). A graduate of The Writers' Workshop at The University of Iowa, she teaches writing at Kent State University at Stark and online creative writing at Gotham Writers' Workshop in New York.

An Exclusive Look at AUTISM

with *Lola Dada-Olley*

By Derrick HAYES

Encouragement Speaker Derrick Hayes gives an AUTISM Interview by asking six questions through each letter in the word AUTISM to give readers an insightful perspective from parents, experts, entrepreneurs, and other leaders in the field.

Today's AUTISM Interview is with Lola Dada-Olley, who is a mother of two children on the autism spectrum and also the big sister of a non-verbal man living with autism and an intellectual disability. He is her greatest teacher and aided her in detecting autism in her children decades after his diagnosis.

Along with being an advocate for autism, Lola Dada-Olley is an attorney and journalist.

A **is for Awareness**—**When and how did you first become aware that something was different?**

Having a brother on the spectrum allowed me to have a front-row seat to autism-related behaviors in an intimate way growing up. It was those same types of behaviors, such as the lack of eye contact and stimming, that allowed me to detect and receive a medical diagnosis of autism in my son and daughter at two and a half years and at 18 months old, respectively.

U **is for Unique**—**How has this experience been unique for you and your child?**

It's unique to me because I have more than one child on the spectrum, and they are on varying ends of that continuum. Plus, one is a boy and one is a girl. I grew up with my brother living with severe autism; he is also non-verbal, so that was really the only form of



autism I was accustomed to. But as the saying goes, "When you meet one person with autism, you've met one person with autism." Although some of the behaviors I've witnessed firsthand in my children I've also seen in my little bro, it is still its own distinct and unique experience. My older child can speak quite eloquently, and people often ask me if he really is on the spectrum, as though it is something the doctors and I have made up. But, if you observe him long enough, you can see where his challenges lie. His sister's challenges are far more apparent; she is still mostly non-verbal and is learning to use her iPad to communicate better.

Raising a girl living with autism is not as common as a boy. They are not diagnosed as often. Many times, when I attend autism-related events, my daughter may be the only or one of very few girls in the room.

“ The road at times may feel long and winding, but I truly thank God that He trusted me enough to make me the mother of these two children. They are my assignments from God and I will do my best, within my own human limitations, to do right by them as much I am humanly able to. One day at a time. ”

So, those are just some of the ways in which this journey feels unique to my family and me.

T is for Tools—What tools are there now that were not there in the beginning that could help other parents?

My children are relatively young, so they have been beneficiaries of years' worth of awareness campaigns. My son would be considered a modern-day early intervention story. He is in the gifted and talented program at his school; there was once a time when I dreamed of him being able to utter a full sentence spontaneously. He underwent 50 plus hours of ABA, speech, OT, and PT for nearly two years. In addition to that team, he had a developmental pediatrician and child psychologist. We have hope he will be self-sufficient as an adult and attend college. I am very fortunate to be raising children at a time when autism was not something to be hidden. My brother, on the other hand, is in his thirties; he was raised at a time when ABA was first being talked about. He didn't have one-quarter of the resources my children enjoy. My son and daughter are the direct beneficiaries of their uncle's struggles and the advocacy efforts that came about as a result of parents and medical professionals making positive strides in areas like social acceptance and treatment.

I is for Inspire—As a parent, when you look at your child or children, what inspires you?

For my son, it's his understanding of his diagnosis. He understands it is a part of him. In second grade, he explained to a classmate that all disabilities are not always visible and why. He was in second grade when he said that! I was in awe. He inspires me every day; he is showing incremental progress in recognizing and working through his autism related challenges with a mix of grace and innocence.

My daughter inspires me every time she makes incremental progress also. It is not always as bold and pronounced as her brother's. She not only has autism, but an intellectual disability, apraxia, and allergies that can sometimes all work together in a way that can make some days tough. For years, she didn't smile. Then one day she did, and it felt like the heavens opened up. She shows love in all the ways it counts. One day, I was crying and she simply walked over and put her hand on my shoulder. She, too, is an old soul in her own way.

The road at times may feel long and winding, but I truly thank God that He trusted me enough to make me the mother of these two children. They are my assignments from God and I will do my best, within my own human limitations, to do right by them as much I am humanly able to. One day at a time.

S is for Support—Are there things you struggle with or have struggled with and what types of support do you still need?

Of course! I am definitely human (as cited above)! I sometimes struggle with my inability to fully communicate with my daughter at times. Her recent improvement in receptive communication has helped to mitigate that a bit, but it is an area I do struggle in. Sometimes, given her other challenges, like her allergies, she is unable to tell me where and how she is hurting, which, in turn, of course breaks my heart. My challenges with my son lie in the social skills category. He can be a highly logical and linear thinker, so sometimes, things like nuance or even just asking him to do non-favorable tasks can lead to parental frustration for sure.

But, in both cases, we have a community of medical professionals we regularly consult with and seek guidance from in order to help our kids be the best version of themselves they can. For my daughter,

that has been ABA and OT this season. For my son, it has been mostly OT. We are starting to look at cognitive behavioral therapy options on the horizon as well to aid him in regulating emotions and situations that may frustrate him. Again, one day at a time.

M is for **Manage**—What keys to success can you leave with parents so they can better manage their day to day efforts?

It is a mix of mindfulness in the moment while remembering what you are putting into practice in that moment is a step closer to creating a more improved version of your child's older self. Our kiddos need more repetition/practice than other children in certain areas of life, so the more you expose them to, the better they can cope later on. Did I mention one day at a time?

Also, the village is important. Getting a group of medical professionals and community partners/friends that can share in your vision for your children is huge. Whether it be the neighborhood barber to the special education teacher to the development pediatrician, put together a team who all have the same goal of working on making your children the best versions of themselves.

Derrick Hayes is an author, motivational speaker, and paraprofessional in the Muscogee County School District in Columbus, Georgia. Book or interview Derrick Hayes the "enTIETainer" now by visiting derrickhayes.com/entietainer/.

Website: www.derrickhayes.com
 Email: info@derrickhayes.com
 Phone: 706-615-1662

Autism Parenting Magazine



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW



READ IT NOW

Ways to Help Your Picky Eater Explore More Foods

With five amazing tips from Jenny Friedman, Autism Nutritionist

By JC ELLINGER

It's that dreaded time again. You open the refrigerator door and scan the wholesome ingredients that seem to mock you with their bright, healthy colors in illuminating shades of greens and yellows. "Easy meals" on Pinterest and books on "picky eaters" clearly do not know the true definition of your child's eating habits. Another monochromatic meal sectioned off in its three-part divided dullness.

get it. I've been there. Chicken nuggets and French fries (I mean, I would at least applaud myself for feeding him the most natural of frozen foods, though I've never categorized chicken nuggets as a protein) would grace my son's plate more times than I would like to admit. In my son's case, his kryptonite was meat.

Food sensitivities are a common challenge with kids on the spectrum. Research conducted by Sharon A Cermak, a Science and Occupational Therapist Professor at the University of Southern California, found that "management of food selectivity and concerns about dietary adequacy have been found to be major reason for referral of children for nutritional services."

As parents, the daily challenge to put together a meal for our selective eaters yields realistic worries.



“Essentially, the child is the driving force of his/her nutritional plan. Since every child has varying health needs and food sensitivities, not every nutritional blueprint will look the same.”

Additionally, in the same study, selective eaters are also “associated with inadequate nutrition as a result of their restricted diet.” Aiming for the idyllic five food groups collage—grains, vegetables, fruits, protein (meat, fish, and beans), and milk (which includes yogurt and cheese) seems anything but realistic.

1. Patience

“The whole progression is baby steps—it doesn’t happen overnight. It can take years. Just having patience and persistence is important,” says Jenny Friedman, a nutritionist who specializes in working with children on the autism spectrum.

As I continued to speak with Ms. Friedman via Skype, she shared additional insight into her dietician’s brain, providing useful and informative advice from her experience of having worked with numerous children to overcome various challenges with their diet.

For me, I have been working slowly with my son for years until last year when we overcame some significant hurdles in his diet. When your child makes any type of forward growth, don’t be afraid to relish in your child’s accomplishment as well as yours. It will be those small steppingstones that will one day reveal a larger victory.

2. Comfortability

“I’ve always felt the hands-on approach to food and engagement is the way for kids to get more comfortable with food. It [SOS Approach] moves along our natural inclination on how to eat when we are little.” Her approach is dictated by the client, mixed with a methodology called the SOS Approach to Feeding that supports the child leading the rate of progress and engagement.

So what exactly does that mean? Essentially, the child is the driving force of his/her nutritional plan. Since every child has varying health needs and food

sensitivities, not every nutritional blueprint will look the same.

For example, let’s say one of the goals is to ease the discomfort of eating out at a restaurant.

“In therapy, we can work on introducing and getting them comfortable with food that is commonly found on restaurant menus. Introduce more [food] variability and again using the same desensitization method—getting the child used to the food in a safe environment so it can be easier to translate outside of the home. Preparation is helpful too.”

So how does one find his/her footing in this specific field?

Ms. Friedman’s response comes off with a casual, heartfelt genuineness—“I was working in schools and would see that eating was a real struggle...I saw that kids were struggling to eat and was simultaneously interested in the medicinal, therapeutic side, so I married the two.”

Having grown up in and exposed to the field with her mother as an occupational therapist, she had no doubt her career would eventually land her working with children.

Common questions like:

“How do I get my child to eat vegetables if he or she can’t even handle them on their plate?”, “We like to eat at restaurants; how can I make eating at a restaurant an enjoyable experience both for my child and the family without the stress?” and “My child refuses to eat anything other than chicken nuggets and French fries. How can I get him to try different foods?”

Sometimes the thought of overcoming these food hurdles can seem daunting, but Ms. Friedman calmly answers these frequently asked questions with these thought-provoking tips:



Seventy percent of children with autism compared to only 11 percent of neurotypical children choose their food solely based on the texture.



“How can we change it so they may like it a little bit better?”, “Is it pairing the food item with something else?”, and “Or can we substitute it with something they do like that provides similar nutrition?”

3. Adaptability

This segues into point number three—with the above questions in mind, think about how you can minimize the adaptation by using a menu item or food characteristic your child is already accustomed to eating.

If chicken nuggets are his/her only source of protein, try wrapping the chicken nugget in a whole wheat tortilla. Although the same color adds a source of whole wheat into his/her diet that can then be paired with other food.

My son was (and still is) sensitive to textures, but he mostly gravitated toward crunchy foods. So I would test out different foods with texture similarities by cooking them in different ways, especially foods that provided a source of protein. One day, I tried roasting garbanzo beans. I added a drizzle of olive oil, salt, and pepper until they were somewhat crunchy on the outside. It worked. He loved them. We celebrated.

As we know though, reaching a celebration point also means working diligently with patience to expand the palate while using parameters a child is still comfortable with.

In working within these parameters to help them adapt, Ms. Friedman illustrates how she incorporates this when working with one of her kiddos on the spectrum, “I try to think most about the texture which is often the primary [issue], within that same food group how can we find something a little bit more comfortable [for them to eat].”

“I try to think most about the texture which is often the primary [issue] within that same food group, how can we find something a little bit more comfortable [for them to eat].”

Seventy percent of children with autism compared to only 11 percent of neurotypical children choose their food solely based on the texture. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, texture is defined as the tactile quality of a surface—in this case, texture is the way the food feels in their mouth.

What type of food is your child routinely attracted to? Sticky? Crunchy? Smooth? Lumpy? Hard? Chewy? The types of textures are endless. It is okay to stick with his/her comfort zone, but explore the area he/she is comfortable with to discover new foods that give him/her the nutrients he/she needs.

4. Toleration

Toleration of a particular food is part of the beginning process. This initial step alone, depending on the child, can take some time before forward progression takes place. First, have the child allow the food to be on the same table, then to touch the food, then later to allow the food to stay on his/her plate.

What is also important to keep in mind is that each child is different. Although Ms. Friedman uses the same methodology in her practice, it is the client that steers the direction and pace of his/her therapy.



Ms. Friedman will frequently incorporate a dietician technique she calls “play scenario.”

“It’s not a matter of you forcing them to eat—let’s focus on the desensitization and familiarization process.”

In a “play scenario,” a food situation is created for the child, but it can be guided and prompted appropriately as needed because it is being played out in a safe environment compared to experimenting in an uncontrolled atmosphere such as a restaurant. Increasing his/her familiarity with a particular food over time will naturally evolve to his/her nutritional growth.

5. Supplements

Ms. Friedman emphasizes that whole foods are always better. We can already agree with that advice, but it is also easy to get in the habit of giving a child supplements thinking they are a permanent nutritional replacement.



“Now if a child is not eating any fruits or vegetables, I support having a multi-vitamin just in case. Fiber supplements can also be important. I think there is a time and place for incorporating them [supplements] but they are not a long-term solution.”

While you are working with your child to diversify his/her diet, it is okay to use supplements. In the interim, continue working on the permanent goal of eventually replacing the supplement with real food.

If you need additional one-on-one guidance, reach out to your medical provider to schedule a consul-

tation with a nutritionist. Even a certified nutritionist who may not work directly with children with ASD can still provide valuable support and dietician advice.

Last year, we had back-to-back food celebrations. One month my son went from eating one bite of a pork chop to eating up to two pork chops in one meal. His diet presently includes tri-tip and steak (of course, not in the same meal). I can now happily serve a three-part divided plate tastefully adorned with a brown protein, shades of green lettuce, and red-sliced apples that sweetly remind me that after years of patience, my son’s diet has made healthy strides.

Cermak, Sharon A. (2010, Feb). “Food Selectivity and sensory sensitivity in children with autism spectrum disorders.” US National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3601920/>. Accessed 31 March 2020.

(2015, May) “Should you get your nutrients from food or supplements?” Harvard Health Publishing, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/should-you-get-your-nutrients-from-food-or-from-supplements>. Accessed 6 April 2020.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/texture>. Accessed 6 April 2020.



JC Ellinger continues as a contributing writer for Autism Parenting Magazine by sharing and learning as an autism mom herself. She is currently working on her first children’s book geared at bringing relatability and support to other ASD

children just like her amazing son. She carries an MBA from Regis University and a BA in Communications from CSU Long Beach.

Facebook: www.facebook.com/jc.ellinger.writer
 Instagram: www.instagram.com/jc.ellinger
 Email: Juliet.ellinger01@gmail.com

Keeping Your Special Needs Family Safe Financially

By Ryan F. PLATT, MBA, ChFC, ChSNC

The COVID-19 global pandemic seems to have caught our world by surprise. Our world leaders, businesses, financial markets, local communities, schools, and hospitals were all caught off guard by the swiftness of the spread of this virus. It is clear that, as a society, we're not prepared to handle such a pandemic.

Our hospitals did not have the proper level of supplies and equipment, our education system had to learn how to teach students from a distance, our world leaders appear to create protocols on a day by day basis, businesses had to lay off workers due to not having enough "emergency" reserves to keep their employees employed with little to no current revenue, and our financial markets tumbled because of all this uncertainty.

What would have happened if this type of event had been thought about before it occurred, and then planned for? What could have been different? Is it possible teachers would have been trained on distance learning? Is it possible our leaders would have had a game plan they could have followed? Is it possible business owners would have kept money in reserve during good times so that in these short-term emergencies, they would not have had to panic and their employees would have still been employed? *Is it possible?*

The same level of uncertainty, fear, and subsequent panic can happen in our own families outside of a



pandemic. I have seen it in my office. Imagine the following—I walk into the conference room to meet with a sibling of an adult with autism whose parents have just passed away. Her hands are shaking, palms sweaty, legs frantically bouncing up and down, tears in her eyes—she is in a palpable panic, all because of uncertainty. She is making decisions on a day by day basis without any game plan. Questions flow from her mouth like a raging river:

- Where will my brother live?
- How will he get around? He has a part-time job, but I have a full-time job. How will he get to work?
- How can I help him with his government benefits? Do I need to go to the Social Security office in order to be authorized to make decisions?
- My parents left some money for both my brother and I, but I don't know how much he will need. Does he need all of it for his care and support?
- I have heard that if my brother has \$2,000 in his name, he will lose his government benefits, which provides his monthly income, his health care, and services that help him live in the community. The money my parents left is certainly more than \$2,000. What do we do with this money?
- Now that my parents are gone, if something happens to me, who will help my brother?

Concern and fear come fast and furious. She has great questions, and she has true reasons for concern. Due to the fact her parents did not provide her with a framework that would have answered all these questions (and more), she is left in an emergent situation with no support and no guidance. She needs to find the experts, she needs to find the answers,

and she will have to create, implement, and manage the plan, all while putting her life and family on hold. *It does not have to come to this.*

It is easy to dismiss the concern, to squelch the fear, and to eliminate the panic. By thinking ahead, by discussing the situation we all know will occur (we will die), and by creating a solid plan, we provide a gift to our child with a disability, we empower the next caregiver, and we are left with a sense of relief and peace because the question “What happens next?” no longer hangs over our head!



For more information on how to prepare for the future, be sure to contact a financial advisor who specializes in serving families with special needs. A Special Needs Plan is driven by their purpose of leading families to independence through an ongoing multi-generational plan. A Special Needs Plan is passionate about families confidently moving forward.

101 N. McDowell Street, Suite 120

Charlotte, NC 28204

704-326-7910

Website: www.aspecialneedsplan.com

Ryan F. Platt, MBA, ChFC, ChSNC, is a registered representative who offers securities, investment advisory, and financial planning through MML Investors Services, LLC, member of SIPC. A Special Needs Plan is not a subsidiary or affiliate of MML Investors Services, LLC, or its affiliated companies. This article is not a recommendation or an endorsement of any products.



Autism Parenting Magazine

BACK ISSUES



PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY



PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY



PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY



PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY

PRESS TO BUY