5 SIMPLE WAYS TO PREVENT WANDERING

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AREVA MARTIN: THE RIGHT TO A FREE AND APPROPRIATE EDUCATION

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Editor’s Letter

Dear Readers,

I still remember the scene as if it was yesterday. Six years ago I received a call saying my daughter’s school friend was missing. I could feel my heart drop. One minute the fifth-grader was riding her bike around a cul-de-sac and the next minute she was gone — leaving only a parked bike and a helmet for clues. For five days police and volunteers searched the surrounding swamplands and alligator-infested lake using dive teams, sniper dogs, a helicopter and sonar to survey the dense woods. Distraught family and friends conducted vigils and prayer services — feeling helpless as national news services besieged the small Florida town with coverage on the “missing 11-year-old girl with Asperger’s syndrome.” Miraculously, close to 96 hours later the girl was found and despite dehydration and countless mosquito bites, she was healthy. The panic I felt for the entire family during those emotional days will always stay with me.

According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, nearly 50 percent of children on the spectrum will wander or elope from their safe environments. Sadly, more than a third are considered nonverbal, making it even more challenging to locate. We know this is a top concern among parents so we connected with Hallie Bulkin, MA CCC-SLP, who has provided excellent tips on how to help combat the risks. We encourage everyone to review 5 Simple Ways to Help Prevent Wandering in Children with Autism as there are numerous precautions parents and caregivers can take to help prevent children from wandering from a home or school setting.

There are so many ways people can work together to protect children with autism. Another challenge families face today is access to adequate education and services. Take a look at the piece called, Your Child with Special Needs Is Entitled to a Free and Appropriate Education - But Where Do You Start? as autism advocate and attorney Areva Martin explains the rights of children with special needs. Families, she explains, need to create strong parent/school district partnerships to ensure a child diagnosed on the spectrum receives appropriate placement and the best education to fit personal needs. Every child with autism deserves that chance.

We all know how much kids are drawn to video games. Finding safe, non-violent video game titles for young people on the spectrum can be a challenge, however, especially when kids want to play games in the multiplayer mode. Colin Rhodes, parent of an eight-year-old boy with autism, is excited to share with readers the positive aspects of Minecraft, an extremely popular video game. This creative game, supporters say, can be used to teach a wide range of concepts from science and reading to logic and problem solving. And for children on the spectrum, the game is praised for encouraging friendships and communication. Take a look at The Simple Game of Minecraft: Top Ways to Connect with Your ASD Child as Colin explains how you can better bond with your child by understanding how the game is played as well as ensure the game is multiplayer safe.

Providing guidance to our audience is a top priority. For example, we recently received a letter from a reader worried about her eight-year-old grandchild who is under the care of a Behavioral Therapist yet still continues to have regular meltdowns to include kicking, hitting and using bad words. The grandparent was concerned the boy would be kicked out of school and grow up to be violent. We turned to Sarah Kupferschmidt, MA, BCBA, and asked her to share her advice on how to better communicate with a behavioral therapist and ensure an adequate behavior plan has been developed. Be sure to take a look at Autism And Behavior Intervention Plans: What You Need to Know Now as she also includes a checklist to help you determine if a behavior plan includes critical elements.

This issue is filled with so much advice for our readers. From occupational therapist Bill Wong’s piece on how to guide your child with autism on finding the right kind of job to tips from Board Certified Behavior Analyst Angelina M. on how to select the right Applied Behavior Analysis provider, we have valuable information for so many people. In addition, we have an insightful article written by an adult with autism called 10 Simple Rules Parents of ASD Kids and Teens Need to Know. Take a look at Christina MacNeal’s piece as her guidance is helpful for all people.

Wishing our readers a happy Spring filled with acceptance and new beginnings.

Kind regards,

Amy KD Tobik
Editor-in-Chief

Disclaimer:
Autism Parenting Magazine tries its best to deliver honest, unbiased reviews, resources, and advice but please note that due to the variety of capabilities of people on the spectrum that these are recommendations and are not guaranteed by Autism Parenting Magazine or its writers. Medical information, including but not limited to, text, graphics, images and other material contained within Autism Parenting Magazine is for informational purposes only. Always seek the advice of your physician with any questions you may have regarding a treatment.
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Your Child with Special Needs Is Entitled to a **FREE AND APPROPRIATE EDUCATION**
But Where Do You Start?

By Areva D. MARTIN, Esq.

In the famous story, Rashoman, four blind men feel an elephant. “Why, an elephant is like a tree,” says the one man feeling the animal’s leg. “No, my friend, it’s like a snake,” claims the one feeling the beast’s trunk. “You are both wrong,” says the third who is holding its tail. “It is like a whip!” “How can you be so ignorant?” says the one feeling the animal’s side, “It is like a rough wall.”

Parents of children with autism and other special needs may feel much like the blind men in the story when confronted with the prospect of educating their child with special needs. In addition to coming to terms with the fact that their child is different, parents are faced with the prospect of learning a language that is completely foreign to them and the different theories of what is the best way to handle their child. There are so many terms to learn, that after while it looks like alphabet soup — LRE, OT, TSA, APE, IEP, IDEA, LAS and more. What does it all mean and where to start?

When parents meet with school district representatives for the first time to consider an individual education program (IEP) for their child, they are faced with many confusing choices. Do they choose the least restrictive environment (LRE) over a costly private therapeutic school? Do they want their child
fully included in regular classes, or enrolled in a special day class with only children with special needs? Or, should they go with the collaborative model? Classroom modifications or adaptations? Should he have a temporary support assistant (TSA) or not? Adaptive physical education (APE) and/or regular P.E. classes?

Even though the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) provides that children with disabilities are entitled to a “free appropriate public education,” deciding what is the best placement for a child with autism is almost impossible for parents to do – alone.

The choice of a child’s placement is a decision parents and school district specialists should arrive at together, in agreement, after a thorough series of evaluations performed by the school district, and if necessary, private consultants as well.

When a child is first diagnosed is key. There is fairly consistent agreement that intensive early intervention is the only proven method of increasing the chances that a child with autism will be mainstreamed in a general education class, which is currently the preferred model for most school districts. Many districts even provide special preschool classes for children diagnosed early.

However, the reality is that many children never receive early intervention services prior to entering school. Some do not receive a diagnosis until they are already school age and others – even if diagnosed as an infant or toddler – may not receive intensive therapies due to myriad reasons including lack of resources, lack of access or availability of services.

Whatever the case of when a child is diagnosed, once he is (and public schools have teams of experts who run batteries of assessments for the purpose of diagnosis), an IEP is held with the parents, school district representatives and others, such as teachers, speech therapists, etc., present to weigh in on where they believe a child would perform best in an academic setting. If the parents have hired private assessors, such as speech pathologists or therapists, these professionals are also welcome to present their findings at the IEP.

Parents who educate themselves prior to an IEP have the advantage. Those who come with some knowledge about the various educational options that are available and which best suits the needs of their child can address the choices with familiarity for their individual child’s needs.

No matter how much preparation is done, families can often feel frustrated with the IEP process and unsatisfied with the placements offered by their school districts. This sense of frustration can lead parents to challenge their school districts’ recommendations via a “due process” complaint. The filing of such a complaint post July 2005 requires school districts to conduct resolution sessions with the parents and a member of the IEP team. The purpose of this meeting is to attempt resolution of issues related to placement and or related services. If a mutually acceptable agreement cannot be reached at such a meeting, parents have the option of proceeding to mediation or a hearing where an administrative law judge will determine the outcome of their challenge.

The acrimonious relationship that often develops between school districts and parents over appropriate placement can be avoided in some cases if the approach to placement is revisited and a greater emphasis placed on full disclosure. First, school districts and parents need to partner in the educational placement process. By definition, a partnership requires each party to respect and honor the other and for there to be an open and honest exchange of information. School districts should openly discuss the various theories and concepts related to educating children with autism.

No matter if an IEP results in the ideal placement for a child, or if it’s a decision reached through mediation, placement is only the beginning of an even longer journey.

Ensuring that appropriate educational goals and teaching methods are utilized can be equally if not more challenging than securing the placement. Parents are often faced with decisions that seem inconsequential, but are actually of utmost importance. Should touch math or manipulatives be used to teach addition and subtraction to my child? Should the child be pulled out of the classroom for occupational therapy (OT) or should the OT services happen in the contest of small group work? Without a strong foundation and comprehensive information, parents cannot expect to reasonably have input in such critical decisions.

Districts can help demystify the entire placement process by openly discussing the various concepts
and the pros and cons of a restrictive environment such as a therapeutic school or special day class versus full inclusion in a general education population. It is up to the parents to know enough to keep asking the right questions and demand accountability when answers are “fuzzy.”

Likewise, parents should disclose as much information as they can about their child’s strengths and weaknesses so that an appropriate placement can be made.

The “hide the ball” approach to placement where neither the school district nor the parents openly and honestly disclose critical information is not only highly inefficient, but is extremely harmful to the child. When critical information is withheld by either parents or districts making the most appropriate placement is illusory at best. To the contrary, when districts and parents understand their respective roles and the tremendous opportunities created when they enter into a true partnership, phenomenal outcomes can be achieved for children — even those with the most severe disabilities — when there is a foundation of trust, respect and full disclosure.

Areva Martin is one of the nation's leading voices in the media. An attorney, legal and social issues commentator and talk show host, she is an audience favorite on a long list of shows from Dr. Phil to AC 360. A recurring guest host on The Doctors, Areva is a regular on Dr. Drew, Good Morning America, World News Tonight, Nancy Grace, The Michael Smerconish Show, CNN International, CNN Tonight. A Harvard Law School graduate, Areva is the founding partner of Martin & Martin, LLP. She represents clients in high-stakes civil and disability rights and employment litigation. She has been identified as a Southern California Super Lawyer for the last 3 years. Recognized as one of the nation's leading autism and children's rights advocates, she is the founder of Special Needs Network, Inc. and the author of an Amazon best-selling book, The Everyday Advocate: Standing Up for Your Child with Autism and Other Special Needs. (Penguin 2010).
It can be scary if you think you have 60 seconds to run to the bathroom and the next thing you know, the front door to your home is wide open and your child nowhere to be found. Or you believe your child is safe at school and then you get a phone call from the principal saying your child has wandered off school property.

These are scenarios that we hope never happen to you and your child. However, wandering is common in children with autism. It is not partial to a specific age-group and in many cases, it can be fatal. This is every parent’s worst nightmare. But you can prevent it from happening.

So the big question is, how do we protect your child and prevent them from eloping? And, if they do elope, what can we do to be sure they will be safe?

The following tips will help to ensure your child’s safety.

1. **Educate all team members.** If your child works with a team at school, private therapists in your home or a therapy office, or any other setting, it is important that you share with them that your child has a tendency to elope. This will help the team to keep an extra eye on your child when in their care.

2. **Get an ID tag/necklace/bracelet.** Regardless of whether you choose a tag tied to your child’s shoelace, a bracelet or a necklace, your child needs to wear some form of identification. If they do wander and they are nonverbal, this will be the most efficient way for first responders and/or others to know your child has autism, may be nonverbal and have your contact information to connect you back to your child as soon as possible.
Teach your child who is “safe.” It is important to teach your child that first responders (e.g., firefighters, cops, other medical responders) are safe and helpful people. You can do this by showing your child pictures of first responders and letting your child know, these people are your friends, they help us.

Enroll your child in swim classes. There are classes available for children with autism. Google around and see if you can find any in your area. It is not only important to teach your child to learn to swim (to prevent water deaths, which we hear about too often in the news) but it’s important to teach your child to swim with their clothes on. It will take a specialized swim teacher to successfully do this with your child so don’t just stick them in a swim class with anybody!

Invest in more locks! It is important to secure your home and add extra locks that your child cannot reach or does not have a key to unlock to the main doors in and out of your home. The only way you will be able to use the bathroom in peace, free of worry, is if you secure your home properly. Alarm systems are also another great way to do this, so you are alerted each time someone opens or closes the doors to your home.

Over time your child can be taught that it is not safe to leave the house without mom, dad or another caregiver present. But chances are this will be a challenge to teach your child and even when you are up for that challenge, it takes time. Take action now and put a plan in place to keep that child you love so much safe. Using the tips provided today will help put you on the right track to protecting your child from wandering.

Hallie Bulkin, MA, CCC-SLP, is a wife, mother, daughter, business owner, pediatric speech-language pathologist, blogger, foodie and advocate for children with special needs (with a passion for working with families living with autism). Hallie owns a speech language pathology, occupational and physical therapy practice, Little Sprout Speech, located in North Bethesda, Maryland. She also hosts her own blog, LittleSproutSpeech.com. You can find her hanging out on Facebook @ http://fb.com/halliebulkinbiz or on twitter @halliebulkin. She can also be reached at Clientcare@littlesproutspeech.com
As an overprotective mother, I created a safety net around my son, monitored his every move, his surroundings, and the people around him. I have made a point of knowing all the parents in his classroom, overlooking and monitoring his therapists, having daily contact with his teachers, and surrounding his weekends with family and friends who I felt confident, would accept him as he is, a person, a human being, a child with feelings and emotions. And so it happened one day, Niam was bullied. The date is January 15, 2016, a date I will never forget.

To those who know my son, it comes as no surprise, our Friday nights consist of going to the movies, regardless if we are on vacation. It was a routine night out. French fries with cheese curd, no gravy, a slice of cheese pizza and water. The movie: Alvin and the Chipmunks. It was a great night, the movie was funny, Niam was engaged, and I was enjoying my mother/son bonding time. The night is not over without Niam doing a dance to the credits, and asking if he can go to the washroom. He always asks, ABA therapy has engrained this into him, but for some reason, unknown to me, I had a nervous, hesitant feeling in my stomach, the kind of feeling a mother feels when she knows something is not right, something bad is about to happen. He emerged from the washroom traumatized and visibly upset holding his glasses in his hand clearly wet. Upon asking a few questions, I came to the realization a man, not a boy, put his eye glasses in the toilet, where he had to put his hands in to retrieve them. It took some time to calm him, to distract him, but eventually we washed them in the fountain without any satisfaction to Niam. He was repeating “New glasses, new glasses,” refusing to wear them.

What mother doesn’t hurt when her child is upset? What mother doesn’t feel the pain when someone else deliberately hurts your child? Why? That is the definition of bullying: there is never a real answer, and if there is, it never makes sense to the intelligent. To the man who bullied my son, what were you thinking? It is obvious with minimal interaction my son has special needs. You took advantage of his innocence and his soft nature to do the despicable, without any care to his feelings. I want you to know I forgive you, we forgive you, and I hope this letter reaches you, somehow, so that you may think twice, the next time you decide its “OK,” “fun” to let your worst side take over you.
Calmly, I approached the Manager of Fairview, a soft spoken pleasant gentleman, who looked as kind, as his actions. I explained what happened. Immediately he took us to sit down in the room where birthday parties are held, a special room, with posters and colored chairs, a room my son could have a space to himself, calm down, and be distracted by all the sensory stimuli the room had to offer. I welcomed the gesture. He patiently listened to the course of events, offered me some recourse, apologized for an incident that was not his fault except for the fact it happened at his place of work. After writing down the incident, I decided without adequate description from Niam not much could be done. It does not always take much to help someone, offering compassion, lending an ear and being thoughtful is many times more than enough.

The gentleman watched as Niam tried to calm himself, distract himself, and offered words of comfort to us. He read my complaint and saw we attended the movies every week. Although I was satisfied with his actions up to now, he went above and beyond. He gave Niam a poster and movie tickets to attend next week’s show. Even without the movie tickets we would have returned to the movie theatre, it is our weekly routine, the gesture of kindness means more to the heart than one can explain in words.

We left the theatre happy. Niam holding his poster and glasses in his hands and me contemplating the events, grateful to the manager for his support, and thinking of all the good people in the world. The incident did leave me with one certainty, my son cannot be left unattended. I want him to be independent and be able to go to the men’s washroom himself — all those years of spending money and time teaching him independent skills, also leaves room to note, there can be people who are not so patient, understanding and can even be downright mean. When I reached the driveway to my house, I will not lie, I broke down in tears.

I have to remember for every person who is not so nice, there are more people who are nice, compassionate and loving. Thank you Manager of Fairview Cineplex for being the kind of person that makes me believe in this world.

Follow Niam on Facebook/niamjainautismartist

https://www.facebook.com/niamjainautismartist/?ref...
These are all essential parts of the story for every parent of an autistic child. The most difficult part of the autism parenting journey to tell is the emotional struggle: the hard conversations with family members that don’t understand the diagnosis; the stressful IEP meetings that feel like administrators are focused more on the struggles your child faces rather than their amazing strengths; watching your child struggle with social situations. The pain, the struggles, and fears of parenting a child with autism can break your heart at times, but it can also be amazingly rewarding.

Hang In There Autism Parents
TOMORROW IS A BRIGHT, NEW DAY

By Rachelle WADE

If someone asked me to tell about my journey as an autism parent, I could. I could tell about the steps we took; the doctors we visited; the therapies we tried; the diets and medicines that did or did not work.
The autism parenting journey is different for everyone. When Hunter was first diagnosed, I remember desperately wanting advice. I wanted someone to help me figure out the first steps to take, but no one seemed to have the answers. There did not seem to be any answers to the questions, so I decided to do the only thing left to do…write our own story.

I decided that Hunter’s story was not going to be about Asperger’s syndrome. Hunter is not Asperger’s. He is a boy who has Asperger’s and because of that, some things are a little more difficult for him. We all have things that challenge us. For him, Asperger’s just presented challenges that he would need to face and some he would need to overcome in order to function in life.

Through the years when Hunter would go through difficult situations, he would often say that he couldn’t do something because he had Asperger’s. My response was that everyone has challenges and this was his, so we needed figure out a way to deal with the situation. He hated these conversations. The obstacles were hard. He wanted to give in and give up so many times. He wanted me to hug him and agree that it was too hard and he shouldn’t have to deal with this. I didn’t. I felt this would be the wrong way to have a happy ending to his story.

Many times I have felt that I must be royally screwing it all up! I thought many times that God had severely overestimated my capabilities on this one. I wasn’t cut out for this. I didn’t have the answers for my son. I had not helped him write his story in a way to make him successful. The teenage years have been especially filled with doubt and met with the most resistance. Our relationship has been through the lowest of lows and lots and lots of tears. My little boy who once struggled with tying his shoes and sudden outbursts has now turned into a 15 year-old boy who is 6’5” with much different circumstances to tackle. Now we are trying to navigate social situations, like understanding friendships and girlfriends.

Then something remarkable happened the other day. He came home from school. He looked down at me and said, “Mom, thanks!”

I shockingly looked up at him and said, “For what sweetie?”

The next words out of his mouth are words I will never forget, “Thanks for not letting me use my Asperger’s as an excuse for not trying. Thanks for telling me that it was just an obstacle I had to overcome. I get it now.”

The truth is that every day he has new obstacles, but he is learning that he has the capabilities to overcome them. We work through each one as they come. He is now a freshman in high school and the concerns are much different. At that moment, I came to the realization, that though I have made many mistakes along this journey, I had gotten this one right.

For all of you out there who are struggling, let me give you some humble words of advice. Sometimes when you are in the middle of it all, it can be difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel. It can be so hard to believe that it will all work out, and that in the end, the story for your child will have a happy ending. It can seem like the struggles are too much and you will never see the fruits of your labors, but the truth is, you will. You just have to believe in your child and believe that, in the end, your story will be as beautiful and unique as they are.

Rachelle Wade is originally from Indiana. She attended Ball State University and University of Evansville where she studied Advertising in Journalism and Marketing. She has been married for 17 years to her husband Jeff. She has 2 sons. Her oldest son is 15 and was diagnosed with Asperger’s at the age of 5 1/2. Her youngest son is 10 and has been diagnosed with Dyslexia. Her family moved to Texas in 2012. In March of 2013, Rachelle began writing a blog called Sassy Aspie Mom. The blog focuses on her daily life, being a wife, Mom of 2 boys and raising a child on the Autism spectrum.
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The Simple Game of Minecraft: TOP WAYS TO CONNECT WITH YOUR ASD CHILD

by Colin RHODES

Video games were a sore point in my house for many years because my son and I could not agree on age appropriate titles. Sebastian’s choices revolved around what are often called “First Person Shooters,” war-themed adventures riddled with ferocious violence, whereas I was hoping for him to play Super Mario Brothers or some other “kiddy game.”

Here was significant conflict, bewailing, and gnashing of teeth before we finally found Minecraft; a simple game of virtual blocks that quickly became a way of life for on-the-spectrum Sebastian and his sister. Through Minecraft we all came to peace and learned an important truth: playing video games with your friends and family can be more fun than playing alone.

About Minecraft

The first video games were conceived in the early 40s by researchers who were studying the nascent field...
of computer programming. In the beginning these games were very simple, consisting of a minimal text based user interface that was printed to paper as the game was played. Over the last 30 years game development has moved into a new phase of theatrical productions comprised of symphonic music, textured photorealistic graphics, and three dimensional maps of breathtaking complexity. The resulting production costs have come to rival Hollywood movies, with the most expensive game of all time costing one quarter of a billion dollars to develop and produce.

Over the past 15 years the games industry has undergone massive change forced by the introduction of small powerful mobile devices such as iPhones and iPads. Not only has making a game become easier, it is also now possible for small games studios, also known as “Indie Developers,” to market their products in online “App” stores from which consumers can easily download them. Unlike their mainstream counterparts, these teams are comprised of a few people who work on skeleton budgets. Their games are usually simpler than mainstream titles, but what they lack in multi-media effects they often make up for in playability, and a well developed game can easily garner a cult following.

Minecraft started life as an Indy game set in an essentially infinite world populated with animals, monsters, and other players, that have access to a variety of multi-colored building blocks that can be combined into complex structures. The game has been described as a virtual Lego world, and the concept has proved so popular that Minecraft has sold 72 million copies. It is now the number three selling game of all time, following closely behind Wii Sports, but still only having sold only one third of the copies of the obscenely popular “Tetris.”

Minecraft provides a new modality of communication for children who have less developed social skills. Players can interact in the world and send each other in-game messages. My son’s Xbox friends can be found exploring the world together or co-creating their latest invention or piece of art. They like to bop, and jump, and run around in circles just for the sheer joy of seeing each other’s virtual persona — something I find heartwarming. They also learned to communicate by typing short, often misspelled words, sometimes before they knew how to write.

There are many educational benefits to the game, and it has been successfully incorporated into classroom curriculum as well as after school clubs that are popular with both teachers and students. Creative educators have found a myriad of interesting ways to engage students, including virtual science experiments, planning the plot for stories, and helping visualize arithmetic and geometry in mathematics. Researchers are working to quantify the value of this new modality of education and while it’s still early days, there are many promising papers reporting a measurable improvement in learning, particularly in the special needs community.

Minecraft can also be viewed as having an anti-anxiety effect. Psychologists have used it as part of vi-
visualization exercises and mindfulness training with some measure of success, largely because the child has the opportunity to write their own stories in the game, something which author and researcher Brené Brown views as key to building resilience and recovering from negative experiences.

Getting Started

Minecraft can be found on every computing device that is popular with your kids today. The Xbox and PlayStation platforms are particularly easy to use because you can install the game directly from the App Store without worrying about how your computer is configured. Your child will also be familiar with the controllers used in these games and won’t even have to learn the simple sequence of keys needed to play the game.

Both the PC and Mac platforms have versions of Minecraft that can be bought and downloaded from https://minecraft.net/download for around $27 US dollars. They are easy to install, either by reading the supplied instructions, or by watching a YouTube tutorial video. You don’t need to be a computer whiz to install Minecraft.

If your child is particularly advanced, or they want to use features such as mods (plugins that can extend the game), then consider downloading the Technic launcher (http://www.technicpack.net/download), which makes installing these additional components a snap.

Understanding the Game

The game is simple and has few rules. The player is placed into a three dimensional world made of blocks than can be placed next to, or on top of each other, to build structures. Blocks can also be destroyed allowing players to dig dungeons or carve out sections of an object to create features such as windows and doors. There are many different types of blocks representing building materials such as dirt, stone, ore, water, lava, and the player can combine these to create new blocks with other special properties.

When the game is started, the first step is to chose between four modes of play:

- Creative mode allows the player to have an unlimited number of blocks as well as the ability to fly around the world as they see fit.
- In survival mode the player has to gather blocks and take care of their health/food supply in order to stay alive. There are monsters such as skeletons, zombies and creepers who come out at night and attack you, but this isn’t nearly as scary as it sounds, and even younger children are usually not too perturbed.
- Adventure mode is a variant of survival mode that allows players to use other player’s maps instead of just the standard ones supplied with the game.
- Spectator mode requires the least effort because it is not possible to place blocks, and the player simply flies around watching others with no interaction. This can be a great way for a parent to get a sense of the game without accidently destroying their child’s latest master work.

Learning Minecraft is simple because the gaming community has contributed thousands upon thousands of player tutorials on YouTube. Some of the best of these come from Joseph Garrett, aka
“Stampy;” an English YouTube content creator whose videos are among the number 10 most watched YouTube channels in the world, and whose ratings often exceed those of television stations. If you do a YouTube search for Minecraft tutorial and follow along, you’ll be on top of the game in no time.

Making Multiplayer Safe

One truly amazing feature of Minecraft is its multiplayer mode that can be used by people all over the world to play the game together by connecting to one of many “Servers” that are available on the public internet. Players can pop in and out of the game, meet with their friends, and work on their latest construction together. While this adds a lot of fun to the game, care is required and this is especially true when dealing with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) kids. Predators, bad language, and cyber bullying are real factors to take into consideration and choosing appropriate servers is paramount.

If your child is not ready for open multiplayer, then perhaps you could consider a group called “AutCraft;” a dedicated server created by Stuart Duncan for people with ASD (http://www.autcraft.com/). The server is run by adults with an interest in ASD kids and contributed to by “Helpers;” children and adults who have demonstrate that they are “responsible, positive, and helpful with people.” It’s a positive, inclusive, environment with zero tolerance for bullying, killing, stealing or griefing, as well as being a great place to make friends in the ASD community. AutCraft maintains an active Facebook fan page.

Ways to Make Minecraft More Fun

There are many ways to enjoy Minecraft and some of the best of these involve interaction with your child as they play, or talk to you about the game. This can be as simple as picking up the other controller and “jumping into the game;” although this may not always be welcomed if you are too “embarrassing.” Another strategy is to sit with them and watch as they play and explain the game in their own words. Patience is required with ASD kids as this conversation may go on for hours while they explain every intricate detail of their latest creation.

In my household TV takes a back seat to YouTube Minecraft videos, some of which have a quirky sense of humor that can be fun for adults. Watching the videos, asking questions and actively listening can be a great way to engage your child as you wile away a rainy Saturday afternoon. When you’ve had enough of this pursuit, take a trip to the local bookstore where you can find a wide range of Minecraft books that make excellent homework reading your child will really enjoy.

Many autism societies understand how much our children really love this game, and have activities where like-minded kids can play in a safe environment. My son attends a Tuesday night group with AutismUp that he absolutely adores, and even though getting him out of the house can be a real challenge at times, this never seems to happen on Minecraft Tuesday!

Final Thoughts

If you haven’t discovered Minecraft yet, now might be the time. It’s an easy to learn, non-violent game that ASD kids seem to be naturally attracted to, as well as a tool parents can use to have fun with their children through joint play. There are educational and psychological benefits to the game as well as safe environments targeted to meet our children’s needs. If you are patient and listen to what your child has to say about Minecraft, you may learn a great deal about their inner lives and find a way to engage them in valuable constructive play.

Colin Rhodes is an experienced healthcare IT executive with sixteen years’ experience working in medical imaging and clinical trials. Colin holds a bachelor’s degree in Pure Mathematics and Computer Science as well as a Master’s degree in Computer Science from the University of Queensland. He has an eight-year-old son with ASD.
Families of individuals dealing with Autism, Asperger’s, SPD, and similar issues often suffer from sleepless nights. Some families have experienced months and years of sleepless nights. Overstimulation, anxiety, and sensory issues are among the causes of sleeplessness in individuals. What can be done? Medication alone only addresses part of the problem. Sensory Goods Weighted Blankets are designed to work with the sensory system, allowing the individual to rest their body and mind. They work by calming overstimulation, anxiety and providing sensory input for sensory seekers. Individuals dealing with Down Syndrome, night terrors, Restless Leg Syndrome and other special needs have also benefited from using these products.

Testimonials:

“The blanket is truly amazing!!! My son loves it , the fabric I picked is even better in person ...it is so well made looks like I should have paid twice as much as I did... Seriously exceeded my expectations... I have already recommended them to several other mommies I know who have children with Autism.” –Sherrie

“… We love the quality and delivery. Price was even great too after shopping around, this was the cheapest, but yet amazing delivery! I got it within a week, 3-4 days of ordering and did not pay more to receive it faster. Totally & Completely Satisfied! Thank you!” -Olivia

“Sensory Goods is a very caring company. They took care of our families need and we are forever grateful. Excellent customer service and they respond to every question that you may have...” –Michelle

OT Testimonials:

“I am an OT and Sensory Goods was such a wonderful company to order from. This company actually understands the difficulty of having a child with special needs and will do everything they can to help out. I love this company and will definitely refer them and order from them again! Thanks so much!!!”  -OT Jodi

“I am both a mom and an Educational Therapist. I bought this blanket for my son who has ADHD and a sensory disorder... None offered the selection and quality that Sensory Goods does. This blanket...is the perfect size and weight for my 11 year old. He likes to put the whole thing right on his chest and he says it feels like a hug. It helps him to calm down when he's had a rough day and...sleep better. Sensory Goods has excellent client service as well, answering all my questions promptly to ensure I got the appropriate product. I'll be recommending you to my clients.”  -ET Amelie

Our blankets are customizable with 4 layers of fabric, allowing you to choose the weight, size, filling and fabric. Sensory Goods offers a wide variety of other products suitable for any therapeutic program including: weighted products, swings, floor products, oral motors, exercise, and much more!

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I wanted to share a father’s view — how I felt when I realized my only child, a son, was diagnosed with autism along with the unending love I have for him.

Jenna and I were older in life when she got pregnant so we were very careful. We saw the doctor regularly and she did everything a pregnant mother should do. I couldn’t have been happier as we had a healthy baby boy that was such a joy to us that we enjoyed being parents. I envisioned myself playing catch with our son, Cory, and doing all the things a father and...
son do when he gets older. It was a wonderful time in our lives and we felt very blessed.

We were very in tune with Cory as we read a lot about parenting and what a child should be doing at a certain age and noticed Cory wasn’t doing some of those things. He was not talking nor attempting to, was not responding to his name, and he had little eye contact, if any. At first we thought that he was just delayed so we did everything we could to help him catch up. I started reading about autism and the red flags that are associated with it. Jenna and I both agreed we needed to take him to a therapist to discuss Cory’s delays. She recommended we get in touch with Baby Net which is a company of therapists that work with children who have delays. We were qualified to have a speech therapist and an early interventionist come to our house two times a week for an hour each session. The therapists were excited to see Cory’s improvements each week and I praised Jenna on working with him on his alphabet and numbers. It was hard on Jenna as I would hear her cry at night and the only thing I could say was “Focus on what he can do instead of what he can’t.”

One time when I came home from work I found Jenna and Cory sitting on the floor in the kitchen pushing a ball back and forth to each other. Jenna was saying “On your mark, get set, go” and then roll the ball to Cory. I was watching and cheering and one instance Jenna said “On your mark, get set,” and Cory said “go” and rolled the ball to Jenna. We were so excited that he said something that we hugged and kissed Cory. Jenna was crying as she was so happy and went to the bathroom so Cory wouldn’t see her since she didn’t want him getting mixed signals. At that moment we got renewed hope that Cory just had a speech delay rather than autism and we relished in that fact as we were newly optimistic that boys just develop later than girls. Every child is different....

Baby Net did tell us about an autism screening session that could be done. So, we took Cory to the facility and he engaged in a three-hour screening with a couple of therapists performing different programs and tasks. I watched and was actually very pleased with how Cory performed that I was confident I would hear that he was not autistic. The therapists came to us after discussing the session and told us that Cory is on the autism spectrum and explained why. The tasks that Cory did were performed but his eye contact and how he performed the tasks were the problem even though the end results were correct. This was a shock to us as all our thoughts and fears were finally confirmed that Cory didn’t just have a delay he had a diagnosis. The therapists were very nice as they were very patient with all our questions and they gave us lots of reading material to help us understand this diagnosis.

So now we know... Immediately after we left the facility Jenna and I started crying and we gave each other a big hug as it was now confirmed. What were our options? We knew that Baby Net would end their services when Cory turned three and he would then go to a special needs class where he may not get the good help he needs. I knew that Cory needed better help than what the state of South Carolina could provide.

No doubt that all parents want nothing more than to raise children that are “perfect” in every way. They want them to be popular, smart, kind, and loving. After the diagnosis I felt a sense of mild depression because I worried about both my son with his diagnosis and Jenna’s state of mind. As the father, I felt that I had to be strong for my family and try to keep my mind clear so we could make smart decisions. I tried
We want to give Cory the best chance to be happy in life. He has been such a precious part of ours that we would do anything for him.

to be like a “rock” so Jenna wouldn’t worry about me and instead put all her attention on Cory. It was hard to concentrate at work sometimes as my mind would constantly wander to my family and what they were doing. Jenna didn’t have an outlet like I did with work, she was home with Cory all day which made her dwell on the situation. With each day I saw Jenna more and more accepting the diagnosis and working with him as a child with autism. When I got home from work I would just watch how Jenna interacted with Cory. She would talk to him, sing the alphabet, point to objects and say what they are. But I would constantly ask “Why us?”... we were devout Christians and good, kind people who would be great parents, so why did this happen to us? As much as I tried to accept it, something had to change....

We then agreed that for the sake of Cory we would need to move to a state where there were good schools that specialize in autism. We asked around and everybody said that the northeast had great benefits for special needs children especially ones with autism. We also decided that, in light of our situation, we would need help and support from our family that’s living in the northeast so we moved to Carbondale, PA to be closer to Jenna’s family.

When we moved to Carbondale we contacted a company that offers services for children with autism called the Friendship House. This is a place where children with autism go Monday through Fri-
day from 8:30am to 3:00pm. Located in Scranton, PA, it’s a fairly large school where there is a one-to-one teacher to child interaction for the whole day. They have different sessions and programs that help with speech, the alphabet, numbers, social interaction, and stimulation. I couldn't believe how great this school was and how devoted the therapists were to ensuring students receive the best care and personalized programs. I couldn't have been happier with how great Cory took to the school and how well he was doing, it just confirmed that moving to Pennsylvania was the best decision for all of us.

Cory is almost four years old now and making great progress. He still mostly babbles but is starting to say some words and is doing great with the alphabet and numbers. He really enjoys the iPad where he has his games that I believe are helping with his learning. But I can’t help to wonder what his life will be like; will he go to college, get married, have children? We want to give Cory the best chance to be happy in life. He has been such a precious part of ours that we would do anything for him.

This was and still is a tough journey for us but one that we had to do for our son. Now that we’re settled we wouldn’t change anything as we’re getting great services for Cory and wonderful support from Jenna’s family. We knew things would work out for the best as we were doing it for the right reasons. We will always be optimistic and dwell on what he can do instead of what he can’t. We will praise his accomplishments and help him when he needs it. Our son is a beautiful child with a beautiful mind and we love him very much.

Mark Peterson is an Engineer for a local cable company and resides in Carbondale, Pennsylvania with his wife, Jenna, and their son, Cory. Cory will turn four years old in March, and was diagnosed prior to his second birthday. The Peterners relocated to Northeast Pennsylvania from Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, so that Cory could attend an autism specific program in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Cory is thriving in the Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention program, and his parents are thrilled with his progress.
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Those were the early days following my son’s diagnosis with autism. I waded through it all, found what I thought were the best available therapy options for us and recruited the dream team of therapists that would accompany us on our journey. Over the years I made sure to keep up with all the relevant information about autism. I was pretty confident there wasn’t an excellent therapy option I had not heard of.

So when my son’s occupational therapist called to talk about a kind of massage with an unusual name that had something to do with Chinese medicine, I was less than enthusiastic. She thought my son would be a good candidate and needed my consent and to train me in this vague massage. I was skeptical but agreed to talk more about this therapy in person.

A week later I arrived for our appointment with my well-thumbed copy of Qigong massage for your child with autism by Dr. Louisa Silva. Having also read all the original published research studies, I no longer wanted to hear more about the therapy and couldn’t wait to start the training. I was now convinced that Qigong (pronounced chee-gong) Sensory Treatment (QST), or qigong massage, was a great therapy for my son. After completing a few questionnaires about my son’s development, his sensory profile, my stress level and my priorities for the therapy, we were ready to begin.

The massage was surprisingly easy to learn. It consists of patting and pressing movements with a cupped hand over the child’s clothing and takes about 15 minutes to complete. Initially, my son was not always an eager participant. I persisted with it because I knew that the massage works. I had seen the results of the well-controlled research studies.

Parents often struggle with choosing from the myriad of therapies available. I remember the intense feeling of being crushed by too much information coming at me all at once.
After five months, the changes in my son were incredible. They transformed our family’s life. He started sleeping through the night which meant that I was getting enough sleep for the first time in more than six years. His total autism score improved by 43%, his sense and self-regulation score improved by 55%, both greater than the average improvements observed in the research studies. Moreover, not only did his auditory sensitivity decrease, his verbal language increased and his sensitivity to touch improved so much that he started wearing socks for the first time. He still does, more than three years later. My stress level dropped. The biggest impact on my stress was that my son almost completely stopped hitting his teacher. He went from hitting several times a day to weeks then months of no hitting at all. I stopped worrying about him being kicked out of the best school available for him in our city. My house became a lot messier since I was no longer up most nights cleaning because the worrying made sleep impossible.

I was so overjoyed with QST that I couldn’t keep this knowledge to myself. I wanted the people on waiting lists for government services to know that they could start doing something relatively inexpensive and easy for their child. QST was a breakthrough therapy for autism that empowered parents to transform their families and yet I had never heard of it. Since there was only one trained therapist in Canada at the time, I felt compelled to learn as much as I could and trained as a therapist. There were several reasons why I was so impressed with QST:

1. **QST is evidence-based**

   This means that well-designed research studies published in scholarly journals have shown that QST is effective in improving key areas of autism:

   - Improves all aspects of autism, language, behavior and sensory difficulties
   - Reduces parental stress by 44%
   - Decreases autism severity by 32%
   - Children are more affectionate with their families, more sociable and more open to new experiences

   Like many parents, when my son was diagnosed, I struggled with choosing from the myriad of available autism therapies. Which ones would actually help him? Often, the only “proof” I had was the changes the therapists told me they had seen in their clients. Later when I met more families affected by autism, what other parents told me. As a scientist, anecdotal evidence of a therapy’s usefulness was not enough for me to invest money and time on it. I needed unbiased assessments of a therapy’s effectiveness. The only available true test is a well-designed research study that is published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals.

   While I am happy to share with other parents the changes I observed in my own sons following QST, I always point to the research studies as being more reliable evidence of its effectiveness.

2. **QST is a family-based therapy**

   Following a child’s autism diagnosis, many parents (myself included) often feel unknowledgeable, disempowered and helpless. QST gives parents their power to parent back. With a little help, parents do the massage and see the positive changes it makes to their child and their family. At the beginning, some children may not like the massage and parents are trained how to respond appropriately. The massage gradually becomes enjoyable for both the parent and child. Often, children start asking for it.

   Not only does QST improve the core challenges of autism but it also decreases parental stress, improves parental mental health and improves the parent-child relationship. QST empowers parents by placing them at the centre of their child’s therapy.
3. **QST is a breakthrough therapy for autism**

QST is an important new advance in autism therapies for several reasons:

- It is the first treatment that improves all aspects of autism; sensory, behavioral, language and also reduces parental stress
- It is consistently effective for all children affected by autism whether moderately or severely
- It is the first treatment that effectively decreases the sensory challenges in autism

4. **QST is relatively inexpensive**

Qigong massage is relatively inexpensive. Parents often have to pay privately for therapy and insurance coverage is insufficient. With QST, parents can choose how they work with the therapist. This is because there are two intensities of QST that are available:

Firstly, the QST dual parent and therapist intervention in which that parent’s daily massage is augmented by the therapist’s more intensive therapy. The therapist’s intervention however, is only for a limited time, thus reducing the financial burden associated with private therapies.

Secondly, the QST parent intervention in which parents are trained to give the massage daily, and the therapist never works directly with their child.

Visit the Qiqong Sensory Treatment Institute’s website to find a certified QST therapist in your area: [http://qsti.org](http://qsti.org)

Where no therapists are available, parents have bought the QST book which has a training DVD included, formed small training and support groups and successfully used QST. Thus in some instances, the cost of QST can be minimal.

5. **QST relieves the stress of waiting for government services**

In Montreal where I live, families routinely wait for up to 24 months for government-provided autism therapy. This is despite the fact that the benefits of early intervention are well-known. It is agonizing time for families who can’t afford the prohibitive costs of private therapy. QST, an effective, low-cost, parent-delivered therapy can be a godsend for these families.

QST is a breakthrough autism therapy and yet many people have never heard of it, I certainly hadn’t. I was impressed by not only it’s effectiveness for individuals with autism but also by the fact that it puts parents at the centre of their children’s therapy. Parents feel empowered when they can take direct credit for their child’s progress. Through QST, they learn how to harness the power of touch to help their children. I never imagined that I would straddle the fence one day: a parent and therapist of children with autism. It took a unique therapy that is accessible to most parents but only if they know about it.

**References:**


**Sazini Nzula is a mother of two boys with autism, a scientist, advocate, happy gardener and global citizen. She is a certified Qigong Sensory Treatment (QST) therapist and founder of Eden Qigong Massage. She delights in promoting evidence-based approaches in autism therapy that also empower parents. She loves curling up with a good book.**
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Autism Village is a free app where the entire autism community can share ratings and reviews for all kinds of places.

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I’m worthy of the family’s coat-of-arms when I’m scrubbing poop out of the rug and reassuring my autistic daughter—who’s having an uh-oh moment, chanting mournfully “dirty and yucky”—that it’s okay, poop happens. Now, let’s hose you off in the tub, dear. That’s it, let me get between your toes.

I’m sure I was born for upstairs, but we’re terribly shorthanded downstairs. So I do both.

Still, I’m of a special class. I don’t see why folks don’t curtsy when I waltz into the coffee shop with my fair charge—they don’t know any better, I suppose. I order m’lady a lemonade, but she finds it not quite to her taste, thank you, and spits a mouthful onto the floor. Sorry, sorry, sorry! she cries, and I see the tears welling up. Too sour, Miss? I smile as I fashion a mop from a wad of brown, industrial-thin napkins. And then we’re giggling.

Those of with us with extraordinary kids, you know the ones—they rock back and forth and jump up and down and flap their hands—we are parents who do noble deeds, scouring and wiping, coaxing and cajoling. Armed with affection, we call on out-of-this world courage and trudge into battle. Some of us wear war wounds, bite marks on our arms or scratches on our face. Take heart! We are knighted for our deeds, given a title and a vast piece of land, lush and green: compassion we will pass down through generations.

We’re not preoccupied with forging perfection. We don’t view our offspring as our second chance, an opportunity for more feathers in our caps—I didn’t but you should. You WILL. We’re glad for a modicum of peace. And the times when our child makes us laugh, those are our crowned jewels.

The peasants, they have the typical kids, the ones they feel compelled to chauffeur all over creation to Suzuki lessons and softball leagues. Poor knaves! C’mon Mom, can’t I play lacrosse instead? Driver, back to Dick’s! Someday those budding professional athletes and virtuosos, they’ll lie, perhaps sneak out after curfew, ditch school, even after all that parental plowing and sewing. Ah, but cheers to these mums and dads, a cup of the best mead!

The claret, rather, that’s all ours.
The blue-blooded crowd, we are crowned with a calling, though we curse it some days. Maybe we curse it, just a little, every twenty minutes. Sometimes we catch ourselves crying in the shower, or when we're running the vacuum, so no one will hear. But we mostly keep calm and carry on, acting as if—as if we aren't angry or disappointed or grief-stricken or bitter. As if it works for us from the outside in, and our minds are changed, at least in the moment.

In the moment is what counts—we know this deeply, in our very bones. We learned it the hard way, regardless of personality type. Our plans, though splendid, have been laughed at often enough. They've split the good Lord's sides.

So we stop scheming. What are you going to do when she graduates high school, when she turns 21? I. Don't. Have. An Inkling. Now, off with your head!

We live for today, the space between dawn and bedtime. And so our hearts soar at the way a child's hair forms ringlets around her face, or that offbeat sense of humor, or, praise be, when we're hugged for the first time, or kissed, or looked at eye to eye. Oh, for a season we'll huff about like commoners, with blinders on, but then, come spring, those white dots on the hill that were merely part of the scenery bring us lambs, dozens of them. Lambs everywhere, even sets of twins! We can't remember when we've seen such frolicking, such freshness from God.

We'd be an insufferably arrogant lot, but the poop and the spilled drinks keep us humble. We are wartime royalty, of the people but not quite with them. (The people are busy queuing up at the sporting goods store.) At the end of the day, if we're clever, we pat ourselves on the back, knowing we've hung in there for 24 more hours, stayed subdued one second and ridiculously upbeat the next, all in the right and honorable name of love.

Laura Boggs writes about life's little paradoxes in Milton, Georgia, where she keeps three kids, one of them whimsical (scientifically referred to as autistic); a hound; and a husband. Laura rides a bicycle and a horse named Fred, though neither especially well, and works as a freelance writer and an un-famous novelist.
Hopefully you will find, as Oprah says, an ‘aha moment’ here that you can use to further connect and bond with your child. Or, it may enable you to see something you are doing in a different light that you can cut out of you and your child’s life. The purpose of this article is to share some insight from someone who has lived to tell the tale about what made my autistic childhood amazing and things that I could have lived without.

1. Never lose your sense of humor about being an autism parent!

This is something your child understands and can also see the humor in. Laughter, after all, is the best medi-
Always trying to live up to unrealistic expectations and not getting the much needed support he or she needs also contributes to that negative feeling.

2. Always prompt, never push!

I get it you want your child to reach his or her full potential but pushing instead of prompting leads to poor self-esteem. Always trying to live up to unrealistic expectations and not getting the much needed support he or she needs also contributes to that negative feeling. We on the spectrum need to be shown how to do things over and over with support and compassion. What we don’t need is to be pushed past what we are capable of and all the while we are unable to tell you verbally or otherwise that enough is enough! I am not saying to not help your child achieve all that they can, I am just saying there are much better ways to go about it and empower them to reach their full potential. Remember, prompt but don’t push!

3. Enter their world whenever possible

Doesn’t sound so simple, right? Well actually it is. To some degree or another, parents fear the unknown to the point of not approaching or knowing how to approach their ASD kid(s). The best way to do this is spend time with them doing one of their special interests for a few hours. Or make a whole Sunday Funday of nothing but what they love to do and do it with them and ask questions. You can also take, for instance, art and or a hobby they might enjoy and make that hobby your guy’s special time spent in their world painting along with them. By entering their world it shows them you care and the difference divide goes away for a while. This one is a ‘do’ and do it often!

4. We aren’t coffee tables

Kids and adults on the autism spectrum are aware when they are being talked about as though they are a coffee table and I assure you it isn’t fun for the person on the spectrum. I have even heard parents say, “Oh, they are used to it.” The truth is being talked about like you are not even there feels like you don’t matter; internally, it feels like you want to scream, “Why don’t you ask me what I think!” The frustration it causes builds up inside you. This is a big one you as a parent should not do or allow others to do this to your kid. This one is a big ‘don’t!’

5. Stim the way

There is much debate over allowing your kid(s) to stim and if it should be allowed at all. The only real reason this is even an issue is because of the desire to make ASD kids “normal” like their peers, but this attitude needs to stop as we are different, not less. Just because we do things differently and act differently does not mean we are somehow broken and in need of being fixed. Stimming is something we do to feel safe and to calm down; it is our way to self-regulate and soothe. So long as it is not consuming the whole day, every day it should not only be allowed but it should be embraced. If your kids do not have stims they take out of the house I suggest that they do – and this is at any age. It’s a great way to have fewer times with kids running off and it helps with feeling safer and calmer in new places and with new people. I still have stims that I use and carry everywhere I go. It is healthy and promotes self-regulation. Who cares what people passing by think about it? This is a simple do. Let your kids stim!

6. You’re too old for that

In one word, no. No, we are not and, guess what; even as adults we are not too old. Our minds work very differently than those of neurotypicals (NTs) and as we grow our desire for stim toys, movies geared for a very young audience and other toys doesn’t stop like an NT’s as they reach different marks in growth. In fact, NT’s are not meant to have the same interest in these things from one year to the next. For us on the spectrum it is comfort, entertainment and it gives us a chance to shut out the world around us for a little while and we treat these things more like friends or family instead of some old toy, movie or stim toy. For us these objects have a life and feelings and have been there for us no matter what. So the answer is we are never too old nor should we be told that. This one is a don’t!
7. If I do say so myself

All of us on the spectrum understand and even appreciate when those who love us speak up when we are unable to for ourselves. It means a lot to us and we think silently to ourselves, “Yay mom!” It is needed in a lot of circumstances and again we do appreciate it when it is needed. There are other times when caregivers, family members, or total strangers speak up before we have answered the question ourselves. While we are trying hard to process what is really being asked and how to word an answer to the question in whatever form of communication we decide to do so, someone has already answered for us. Give us time to try to answer the question on our own in order to get our true answer before jumping in to answer for us.

This becomes very important for a few reasons. It builds our self-esteem, it keeps us from getting in the pattern of not participating in two-way communication, and it shows that you are interested in and respect us enough to wait for our answer. Most of us are not very effective at communicating, so when the real world and strangers do this to us we shut down and it looks like we are regressing. Really, we’re doing what anyone would do if day in and day out we spent hours trying to learn this skill and still are not heard by those we love. This one is a don’t for many different reasons.

8. It’s all part of the routine

Our routines are everything for us and without them we are lost and do not know what process needs to happen in order to get a task completed or in what order to complete it. It also gives us a control of what will happen to us in a world that offers us very little security and it reduces meltdowns and outbursts. It is important that routines don’t change too quickly and any new things need to be slowly integrated into the routine one at a time to make it effective not just for the person with ASD but for the whole family.

There are different ways to make a routine chart. My suggestion is to find a large Monday through Sunday daily chart and laminate it. Then find picture cards that also have the word at the bottom and print and laminate those. Then take strips of Velcro and run them down each day of the week in a large continuous strip. Cut out squares of Velcro and use the soft side (loops) to adhere to the back of the picture card while the scratchy Velcro (hooks) are on the...
actual chart. Do the same thing with the Velcro strips on the back of the weekly chart and adhere it to the wall level for your kid or adult on the spectrum. Your chart is complete. I suggest doing the same exact model with an emotional check-in chart on the wall along with a backpack sized one that can be filled in with a dry marker and can go everywhere. It works and it is a must for every autism household. This one is a do for anybody of any age on the spectrum.

9. Too much at once

Have you ever noticed your ASD child seems to be just not getting it and for every time they are not getting it you try harder to make them understand. Yeah, well you’re wasting your time as our brains don’t work that way. In fact our brains work in a way that word by word and sentence by sentence we are drifting closer to shutting down and we can’t help it; we are just wired that way. Instead, understand we can only take on one thing at a time or less than five minutes before you have lost us entirely. Also keep in mind, with the added information that we cannot process as we are still trying to process the initial information we are inching toward the dreaded meltdown. Instead keep it to one and only one topic at a time without referencing the past or future and keep it under five minutes. Use the clock timer and explain that we have five minutes and when the timer goes off we can go back to what we want to do. This will produce a much better outcome. Don’t overload us!

10. How many times do I have to say it?

It is important in any situation to explain in detail why you are talking about what you are talking about or why this is happening. Be reassuring that everything will be OK; be clear about what will be talked about and why; what the outcome will be; if there are any consequences and what they are and what and can be the expected overall outcome. This should be done before serious talks, punishment, a change from what is going to happen, family or friends coming to stay, holidays and anytime a bump in the road or a major change, even for the day, is going to take place. Do take the time to explain!

I hope that you are able to take away things that you can use in your daily life from this post. Never forget that to your kids you are the world and they would do anything that they could to take the stress caused by autism away for you. On the other hand minimize them feeling like they need to as it leads to a lot of self-doubt, hang ups and poor self-esteem. The bond between kids on the spectrum and their parents is a testament to true love.

Keep up all the great work, remember to take time for yourselves and appreciate every day you are able to be together as our largest and most valuable commodity is time, so make it well spent! There is not a puzzle piece missing, we are instead unique puzzles all of our own creation and should be treated as such. We are whole people who deserve the kindness and respect that we show to others. The cure to the autism spectrum lies within visibility, open hearts and education, it is not something we will or can find in a lab.

Christina MacNeal is a writer, journalist, autism activist and public speaker who has autism. She currently is the Development Director at a nonprofit dedicated to getting technology to those who need it most. Prior to that she has been a two time Editor-in-Chief and a Communications Director to name a few. For more information about Christina she can be contacted at christinamacneal@gmail.com.

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What inspired you to develop the concept for Track-N-Find GPS Undergarments 4 Kids?

I came up with the concept after my identical twin brother told me about the time his kids wandered off and were temporarily missing. He explained how powerless he and his wife felt not knowing where they were — knowing they had exhausted all leads and time was passing. Fortunately, my niece and nephew returned home safely but that experience motivated me to develop an easy way for families to track their children.

What was your connection to the autism community?

Before I completed development of Track-N-Find, I talked to an old friend whose son with autism had recently passed away. She shared her emotional story and explained how children with autism tend to wander off which is how I became a strong advocate for autism awareness. I promised to dedicate my invention to the autism community, elderly, as well as aiding in the prevention of kidnappings or any child taken by force.

How does it work, can you describe the product?

My prototype has one of the smallest GPS devices you will find and it is extremely accurate. The application to track your child’s movements is easy-to-use. I do plan to continue to adjust the product until everything operates at a high level and meets with my patent specifications. There are several GPS products on the market but they don’t offer the discreteness that Track-N-Find GPS Undergarments 4 Kids placement does. Once my product reaches the market it will undergo changes in an effort to provide the best possible product for customers.
Why does the development of Track-N-Find mean so much to you?

I spent some time in prison and during that time I vowed to change my life and make a difference in the world. Being locked up you have nothing but time on your hands which I used wisely to outline my life upon release right down to the smallest detail. As a black man re-entering society with one strike against me, the odds were definitely stacked but failure was not an option. I definitely had something to prove to myself and to my family and friends. I made it a priority to earn my GED and started my college education. I’m currently working on a BA in business. I’m also co-owner of Bella Fashion Boutique LLC., an online and delivery boutique. The boutique was always been my wife’s dream and I’m glad I could be a part of helping to make that happen.

When do you expect the product will be available to the public and how much do you think it will cost?

Track-N-Find GPS Undergarments 4 Kids has a patent pending status and is prototype ready. I’ve taken this as far as I can at the moment so I’m reaching out to the public as a call to action to help spread the word to their community. Investor support will be crucial to the completion of our final product. We’re also looking for people to help join our team financially and in promotion and marketing, etc.

What does your family, especially your twin brother, think about your goal to help keep children and the elderly safe?

Family is everything to me — they’re the reason Track-N-Find GPS Undergarments 4 Kids has even made it this far. The support from my family, friends, and community has been overwhelming. The autism community has really rallied around the Track-N-Find movement to spread autism wandering prevention. I vow to make my product affordable for all customers as well as being a part of funded programs that offer our product at reduced prices.

What does the success of this product mean to you?

I remember vividly the story my brother told of his experience when his kids wandered off. To hear and see the hurt in him affected me deeply. This product means a great deal to me, I’ve always been kind of an humanitarian at heart and if I could save every missing person I would and that’s my sole mission with project. My invention has been dedicated to a wonderful friend of mine named Tama Wilcox-Curtis who I happened to reconnect with shortly before the completion of Track-N-Find GPS Undergarments 4 Kids. It was a very sad reconnection because her son with autism had recently passed, needless to say I felt her pain for her loss. We had a long conversation about autism and the problems many children face particularly with wandering. From that very moment I dedicated my invention in the name of her son Fuzani Zuberi Curtis.

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I wanted him to be well rounded, athletic, scholarly, and independent. Essentially, I had unrealistic expectations for him, but they were the same goals that every parent has. I wanted more for him than what I had. I wanted him to have financial security, but not so much that he wouldn’t know the value of hard work. I wanted him to know the importance of an education. I wanted him to be a leader, who would gladly defend the underdog. I pictured family holidays, school dances, and sleepovers. I would fulfill my role as his mother until he was old enough to venture out on his own, and I knew I was born for this. I was here to be Jackson’s mother.

Regardless of my “predetermined” role, motherhood was not easy. Jackson struggled to take to breastfeeding. His bowel movements were irregular, and his sleeping was pure chaos (it would take me until he was four to solve his sleep issues). When returning to work at six months, he was waking every hour. I tried numerous calming strategies from the Pick Up Put Down Method from The Baby Whisperer to the Five S’s from the Happiest Baby on the Block. I gave up dairy and soy in order to help his digestive issues, and this brought some relief. I slowly moved into a life of seclusion without even realizing it. I couldn’t admit to my friends, or maybe myself, that I didn’t have a grip on motherhood. I was failing at it. While friends were venturing out with their kids, I stayed at home. Jackson would become overwhelmed in certain situations, and there were many times I had no clue how to fix it. These months were just about survival, and looking back, they were kind of a blur.

When Jackson was 13 months, we were over at a relative’s house for a family function of some kind. He was finally meeting his cousin. They were both only two weeks apart, so we were excited for the “playdate.” This small moment had lasting ripples, and it would take my husband and me two days to fully talk about the experience. We realized, when watching our son not interact with his cousin, how developmentally behind he was in speech. He had maybe three words, and his cousin was identifying characters in books, expressing his needs, and offering verbal affection to everyone in the room. This short visit...
prompted a speech evaluation not soon thereafter and entrance into the Early Intervention Program.

From the beginning, and maybe through divine guidance, my son’s had amazing therapists. We started in speech therapy, but we soon realized that he needed special instruction and occupational therapy. I still had high hopes that he could be fully mainstreamed. I signed him up for a local preschool with a distinguished reputation. He lasted two weeks before I was called in for a meeting. His teachers were caring and experienced. They were coming from a place of compassion, but it did little to soften the blow. When I was told that they were noticing many “red flags” and that he could return only with a fulltime TSS, I used the last of my strength to hold back my tears. I didn’t want to cry there. I needed to be strong. I made it to my car, and I cried. I shed tears for the boy I knew I lost. The boy that may never have friends or tell me he loves me. It was a lonely place to be in that moment, and thinking about it now even brings back the isolation I felt.

I eventually wiped away my tears and moved forward because what else could I do? He needed me to be his strength and his voice, and so I continued on this journey. About two months later, in November of 2014, Jackson was diagnosed with autism and mixed receptive language disorder. In that moment, I remember thinking that it wasn’t so shocking. Maybe I expected it. Maybe I knew it all along. I’m not sure, but I was ready for the diagnosis. I still cried a little. I found myself on the floor of Barnes and Nobles, thumbing my way through the small stack of books on autism. I was lost; however, I felt in my core that we would be okay. I just needed to let go, a lesson that I am often reminded of when trying to “figure out” my son’s needs.

Today at four, he is in a weekly 20-hour Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy program with three Therapeutic Staff Support Specialists. He also gets speech and occupational therapy in his verbal behavior classroom. It’s taken a long time to get to this point, sleepless nights on Jackson’s floor, phone calls with insurance companies, and numerous books on sensory needs. The hardest part for me, in all honesty, was before his diagnosis. I didn’t understand my son or his needs. I didn’t know if he was cognitively aware of what we were doing. I had no idea if he heard me when I talked to him. Once we had his diagnosis, my husband and I spent several months learning all we could about autism. Our son was no longer a mystery. We understood his needs. We were able to predict his meltdowns with accuracy (and hopefully learn to avoid them). We realized that our son was fully capable of learning (and is quite smart), but our methods of teaching him have to be creative and on his terms, not our own. He understood much more than we gave him credit for, and he shows us that often. In the months that followed his diagnosis, I felt like my husband and I became better people. If you let it, autism can push you towards something greater within yourself.

About four months after his diagnosis, I started becoming very active in the autism community. I became co-admin for an online support group for other families with children who have special needs. We try to plan playdates and provide information on doctors, insurance, etc. It’s an online family to me, and it feels comforting to be around other parents who “get it.” About the same time, I decided that I was no longer living a life of seclusion. It was time to be a part of our community. Jackson has been to parks, movies, farms, road trips, and airplane rides. These trips are not taken lightly. There is a lot of planning involved, and some anxiety, too. However, with online support, amazing coworkers, supportive friends, our caring family, dedicated therapists, and my “rock” of a husband, I no longer feel lost or alone.

Every so often, I have a weak moment. Sometimes it is something so minor, like hearing a young toddler singing Christmas songs in Target, and I wonder if I’ll ever hear my son do the same. Those moments are still there, and I’m not sure if they will ever go away. Yet, there are so many amazing moments. Those are the moments that fill our lives, like the first time our
I decided that I was no longer living a life of seclusion. It was time to be a part of our community. Jackson has been to parks, movies, farms, road trips, and airplane rides.

son said “I love you, too” just last week. Or each morning when he gets a blanket from across the room and brings it to me to cuddle. Those moments are not just amazing; they are magical to us. We are learning not to underestimate our son because he is starting to master skills that we didn’t think he would ever learn. There is a quote floating around on Pinterest by Ellen Notbohm that I often think of when those negative thoughts seep into my psyche, and it helps me to keep life in perspective: “When you lapse into thinking of all the things your child with autism can’t do, remember to add ‘yet.’”

Lindsay Wieand lives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania with her husband, 4-year-old son, and pug, Dexter. Since their son was diagnosed with autism in November of 2014, they’ve become very active in the autism community. They really enjoy sharing stories and connecting with other parents who are on a similar journey. This piece was originally shared on the blog Grape Jelly on Pizza for the series “Somewhere on the Spectrum.”

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Quick Tips for Helping Young People with ASD

FIND THE RIGHT JOB

By Bill WONG, OTD, OTR/L

So, your child is nearly ready to begin a career in the workplace or perhaps he/she is already working and needs a new job. How do you help the child find the right kind of position and the right fit? How can you guide him/her?

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ometimes young people on the spectrum know which specific job they want based on career aspirations while others may need valuable job experiences as a transition point to the next job. And sometimes a child needs a job to ensure he/she can earn enough to support themselves to the best of abilities.

Regardless of the case, it’s important to define whether the young person is in need of a full-time, part-time, or per diem (aka ‘as needed’) position. For most jobs, full-time and part-time are the only options. However, in certain jobs in healthcare like mine, per diem is an additional option. The question is, “How can I advise my child on what to do?”
Using my recent experiences, I have come up with a few points to consider before applying for and deciding on career options. Here are some good questions to ask yourself and points to keep in mind:

1. How many hours can your child realistically work per week? If he/she can work under 30 hours a week, part-time or per diem (if available) are good options. Otherwise, full-time is ideal.

2. Is having flexibility in work schedules meaningful to your child? If the answer is yes, per diem is the best choice. Part-time is the next best, followed by full-time.

3. Is having benefits important for your child (e.g. health insurance, bonus pay, 401K, other job related reimbursements etc.)? If the answer is yes, full-time is best. Part-time is in the middle, depending on the benefits of part-time employees. Per diem is not ideal in this situation as benefits are minimal or none.

4. Is financial stability important for your child? Full-time usually is the best. However, depending on policies for your child’s workplace, part-time can be just as good as full-time. In my current job, for example, I learned that someone with part-time status could still work up to full-time hours if they wished to. Last on the list is per diem.

5. How mentally flexible is your child? If your child is mentally flexible, per diem can create a way to achieve full-time hours. If your child is not, full-time or part-time is ideal. Per diem can be tough because your child might receive schedule changes with little or no notice.

6. If your child is working multiple jobs, he/she is responsible for constantly making a schedule for all the jobs logistically. This includes how many hours constitute part-time at each job and sick day policies. For example, I might make myself available Monday through Wednesday for one job and Thursday through Saturday for another job. I might have to take a switch day on a Sunday if I am out sick one day. Therefore, I recommend your child reads the policies for all the jobs before deciding when they will be available to work.

7. Both longevity in tenure and the number of hours your child can work at jobs are important in future job applications. Your child should aim to stay at a job for at least one to two years before moving on to another one. Meanwhile, 15-20 hours a week can be a good introductory goal for your child to get used to a job. As time goes on, if your child has the ability to work at least 30-40 hours a week regularly, this can expand options in future job searches. However, if your child can only do 20-30 hours a week, it is still good because that means he/she now gains insight that part-time position might be better off in the long run to improve the chances of holding onto a job.

8. Sometimes your child should take risks in terms of applying for positions he/she has skills to perform, but may not be as confident in. For my current position, for example, I was not confident in performing patient transfers and wasn’t sure how I could work with the elderly population. Working with supportive rehab teams and having parents willing to let me practice on them and them practice on me, has increased my confidence levels each week. The experiences I gained working with different types of pa-
tients also has sped up my learning curve. So, I was glad my mom told me to take a risk, as I wouldn’t have realized that my skills fit this setting a lot better than pediatrics.

9. Your child must have a basic idea of what his/her hourly wages should be. This is helpful in the salary negotiation process throughout your child’s tenure at a job. This doesn’t mean your child should pursue top dollar, it just means that your child should have some sense if his/her job is fair in terms of hourly wage and benefits. For example, I am making $40 an hour now in Los Angeles as an occupational therapist with one year of experience. In truth, I know it was a low-ball offer, but I also know that I need this job to last at least a few more years before reevaluating my future career directions. So, I took the hourly wage without putting up much of a fight.

10. If you or your child has family and friends working in similar jobs that your child is applying for, be sure to ask whatever questions you and your child feels necessary.

There is a lot for children on the spectrum to think about once he/she transitions to working in the real world. Finding employment that works and a job that best fits skills and minimizes limitations is more important than trying to maximize what he/she is supposed to earn from day one. If your child has histories of short tenures at past jobs, it is imperative to figure out what went wrong and how to make the next job they land count.

Bill Wong is an Occupational Therapist licensed in California. He graduated with his masters and clinical doctorate in occupational therapy at University of Southern California in 2011 and 2013, respectively. He is the first autistic individual in the world to complete a doctorate degree of any kind in occupational therapy. He currently works as a per diem skilled nursing occupational therapist for Interface Rehab. He also serves as professional development mentors for three autistic occupational therapy students.

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Should You Really Tell Your Child He/She is on the Autism Spectrum?

By Rev. Stephanie C. HOLMES, MA, BCCC, Certified Autism Specialist

One of the questions I am most often asked is, “Should I tell my child that they are different from other children? Should I tell them about their diagnosis?” A common fear of parents concerns “labeling” the child and the stigma associated with diagnostic labels.

Although I understand these fears, we live in a world of labels and I explain to parents, “Your child is different, and because of that, people around him or her are going to label them. I would prefer they get the correct label.”

What does that mean, the correct label? Often, children on the spectrum who are not diagnosed or not “labeled” will be victim to misinterpretations of their behaviors and mannerisms by the adults in charge. It is a fact of life that a child who has learning challenges or who are on the spectrum will not receive the help that can be provided through a 504 plan or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) without the proper diagnostic “label.” The following is taken from a special education website which says, “Only
certain classifications of disability are eligible for an IEP, and students who do not meet those classifications but still require some assistance to be able to participate fully in school would be candidates for a 504 plan.” Disabilities or challenges that meet the requirements for service are specifically outlined. The school system is not required to give services based on a parent’s hunch or because they are failing the grade or have various behaviors of concern. In order for the school to put a plan in place, the “label” or diagnosis is required.

But I don’t want my child to feel that he or she is different. I do not want them to be treated differently. I can tell you that your child will eventually figure that they are different, that they are “differently-abled.” My concern is when a child on the spectrum is in a school setting and is not diagnosed, teachers form other labels like “disruptive,” “defiant,” “lazy,” “difficult,” “selfish,” “rude,” or “does not belong in this classroom.” That is why I say I prefer for children to get the proper label. Eventually the child will figure out that they are different, and different does not mean bad or less than. Different can be good.

When I told my daughter she had Asperger’s syndrome she was in the 4th grade. I wanted her to know that autism was only one label or word that describes her behavior. These are the labels I described to my daughter. I said, “Sydney I want to explain to you why you have been having such a hard time at school and making friends, but before I do I want to tell you some very important things about yourself:”

First of all, you are a child of God. You are made in His image and here are some things the Bible says about that. It also means you are:

- Loved 
  John 3:16
- Chosen 
  1 Thessalonians
- A New Creation 
  2 Corinthians 6:13
- Blessed 
  Galatians 3:9
- Victorious 
  Revelation 12:11
- Heirs in Christ 
  John 17:11
- Fearfully and Wonderfully Made 
  Psalm 139:14
- Forgiven 
  Ephesians 1:7

I took the time to read these verses to her and speak them over her. I further explained,

- You are not only a child of God, but you are my child and I love you unconditionally. There is nothing you can do that will make me not love you. I will defend you and protect you at school and anywhere because you are forever my child.
- You are gifted and talented in music and art.
- You have a loving heart for animals.
- You may not know how to tell people that you love them, but I know that in your heart you love people and you try to help people in your way.
- You are a wonderful reader.
- You are gifted in math and science.
- You are so many wonderful things. These things are who you are. But you know how you have had struggles at school and getting in trouble and making friends? That is because you have something called autism. Autism makes it difficult for your brain to understand some things, and it is why you get frustrated sometimes and things bother you so easily. That is autism. I will never allow you to use autism as an excuse to fail. I will never allow you to use autism as an excuse for bad behavior. I will also remind you that you have Asperger’s but you get to decide if Asperger’s has you. Asperger’s is a condition you have. It does not have to define who you are because you are so many other wonderful things. Asperger’s causes some things to be hard but it has some gifts too like your memory for details, your ability to solve math, and your wonderful vocabulary.

But what did your daughter do about her diagnosis? How did she take it? These thoughts have been reinforced for the past five years. Let me share with you the essay she wrote for 9th grade composition. Her prompt was, “Write about a core belief that you hold dearly and be willing to share with the class.” Below is that 500 word essay:

People all over the world face challenges, struggles, and difficulties. The question is, will they let that obstacle define them, or will they rise to overcome what was thought to be impossible? Many believe actions are set in stone, and it is not possible to overcome. There are few who do not. I believe that no matter who you are or what you have done, anyone can overcome an obsta-
No matter how hard, how difficult, or how impossible it seems, anyone can overcome an obstacle.

There was this girl I used to know, who was very close to me. She had trouble in school, with friends, and nearly every aspect of her social life. This is because she has Asperger’s syndrome, also known as very high functioning autism. When she was first diagnosed, the diagnosis was believed to be more prevalent in boys. Few teachers and few administrators knew how to help this girl succeed in school. The special education room was not a proper fit, but she found it difficult to be in the mainstream classroom. When she was confused or having an emotional meltdown, the teachers misinterpreted this behavior as disrespectful or disobedient behavior. In reality, she was communicating she needed help or further clarification of the instructions. Unfortunately, the girl was suspended for over 50 days of school and expelled from five schools by her third grade year. Many people, including people her parents thought to be supportive family friends, gave up on her. They thought she would never overcome her problems or her struggles. They thought she was confined to a path which would lead to juvenile detention.

This same girl who struggled so much in elementary school became an honor roll student throughout middle school. She is commonly referred to as a “goody two-shoes.” In case you have not put the pieces together, that girl was me. How is this possible? Well, I refused to allow others to define me by my behavior and my diagnosis. I was determined to prove to the teachers and the adults around me that their beliefs about me were wrong. I overcame my problems. My faith helped me overcome one struggle at a time. I decided that my diagnosis was not an excuse to fail. I will have to deal with more in my life than my fellow peers, but I refuse to let my problems limit who I can become.

I hope that when my family has finalized adoption that I can help the children who come into our home to believe in themselves. Children in the foster care system have had many struggles and have had many people give up on them. I believe that my story can inspire them to believe that their past does not define who they can become. Nothing is impossible when you set your mind to achieve what you believe.

Do not be afraid of labels. Diagnostic labels are helpful to help you help your child get the services they need. Remind them of who they are, not what they have.

Stephanie C. Holmes is a Certified Autism Specialist and Licensed Christian Counselor with the Board of Examiners for GA Christian Counselors and Therapists and was formerly an LPC in NC. She is a Board Certified Christian Counselor and speaker with the American Association of Christian Counselor’s International Board of Christian Counseling. Stephanie’s career path changed when her oldest daughter was diagnosed with Asperger’s in 2004. She changed her focus to the world of IEPs and 504s as well as helping families deal with their frustrations and challenges having a special needs child. She practices counseling at Dunwoody United Methodist Counseling Center. She also provides phone and Skype consultation for spectrum families and Aspie/NT marriages.
Many children with autism struggle with communication, socializing, and exhibit repetitive actions. As a result, many ASD kids require hands-on parenting in order to meet their daily needs. As parents, you have to schedule health checkups, therapies and be their pillar of support. All of it can prove to be financially taxing since private health insurance does not always cover all costs. It is also emotionally draining since there isn’t enough awareness about the condition. You don’t know when the next meltdown will be and what might trigger it, but you can almost be certain that people around you will be judging you for being different. Sometimes it might feel like you are alone as you care for your child and fight for acceptance, especially if you have given up a job in order to spend more time at home. That’s why it’s important to find a balance — to ensure you have the emotional support your family needs. Here are five tips for striking that balance in your life:

1. **Take Up Freelancing:** You could give freelancing a shot. There are many websites catering to your set of skills that can help you find work. Freelancing allows you to take on work you think you will be good at as well as regulate the workflow. You can take a break when you need to, and no one can hold
you accountable for that. Freelancing also frees up your time leaving you to invest it in other things. You can work for a specific set of hours and without having to dress for or sit in an office. As a matter of fact, your kitchen table can be your office!

2. **Find Work Equilibrium With Your Spouse:** Even though the intensity of ASD differs for every child, he does need your undivided attention. For a single parent to care for an ASD kid is a monumental task, and that is why spouses need to pitch in whenever they can. Your spouse and you can try to find work and home life balance, by stepping in for each other when needed. In this manner, your child will be aware and be able to normalize the involvement of both you and your spouse in his life.

3. **Teach At Your Child’s School:** If you are uncertain how to put your time to use after you have seen your kid to school, maybe you could consider teaching at his school. You can continue to be close to your child and see to his needs, as well as to the needs of many more delightful kids like him. You have the opportunity to share your experience as a hands-on parent of an ASD kid with other teachers, who may or may not have the same experience. You can engage in fun activities and games that may have been a hit with your kid at home, and see how these activities fare with a different and larger group of individuals.

4. **Find a Care Center:** If your workplace does not have policies covering parents with autistic children and demands more commitment from their employers, you can try looking for a care center. It will take a considerable amount of time getting used to for your kid given he is unfamiliar with that space. However, if he can socialize with his peers, he should not have a rough time. Also, it is OK to feel guilty as you leave him behind on your way to the meeting, but you will also learn to acclimatize with this change.

5. **Try Telecommuting:** Another option you could try out is telecommuting, or in other words, working from home. You should address it with your employer. You can begin by learning about the company’s policies on working from home and if they would apply to you. Working from home will allow you to be around your child, cater to his needs as well as meet deadlines at work.

You have to remember that the intensity of ASD varies for every child. So, your opportunities to explore career options depend on how much your child with autism needs you to be at home, and the support you get from your spouse. It’s vital for both you and your child to find that balance in daily life so everyone is happy and healthy.

Sources:
- http://www.autism.org.uk/About/Family-life/Parents-carers

Aradhana Pandey is a writer from India. She covers topics concerning parenting, child nutrition, wellness, health and lifestyle. She has more than 150+ publications from reputable sites like Huffington Post, Natural news, Elephant Journal, Lifehacker and MomJunction.com to her credit. Aradhana writes to inspire and motivate people to adopt healthy habits and live a stress-free lifestyle.
There has been a surge of interest in the idea of self-regulation, and the enormous immediate and future benefits and implications that direct intervention, consultation, training, and environmental supports can have on all children as they grow, across a range of environments.

The author, a senior occupational therapist and leading figure in her field in the area of self-regulation, with extensive training in this arena, has devoted the past ten years to honing her practice, paired with clinical research, to helping individuals to manage seemingly out-of control physical and emotional feelings through the utilization of simple and clinically effective emotional and physical regulation tools and exercises that place control back in the hands of the individual:

“This is a super book for empowering kids, teens, and even adults with real-life power tools for managing frustration, anxiety, anger, sensory challenges and more!” (Lindsey Biel, OTR/L, Author of Sensory Processing Challenges: Effective Clinical Work with Kids & Teens, and Co-author of Raising a Sensory Smart Child)

How to Be a Superhero Called Self Control! was designed to be read in a flexible manner; that is, either independently by the individual, or as a read-aloud with children as young as four.

The narrative, or voice of superhero ‘Self-Control,’ has the readers utilize superpower emotional regulation-based strategies, to change the stories or outcomes of difficult situations that characters encounter throughout the book.
The book is divided by short chapters that are characterized by physical or emotional state of regulation (i.e.-frustration, anger management, anxiety, sensory processing, etc.); the child or the individual reading can pick and choose scenarios to read (depending on an area they wish to address at the time). Each scenario presented has one strategy that is introduced that addresses self-regulation.

The simple black and white visuals are visually non-distracting, while the presented scenarios are extremely relatable, as they represent common situations and feelings that occur to many kids:

“Lauren Brukner’s relatable narrative and pictures put words to charged emotions and feelings, empowering students with strategies to conquer them... Be prepared to “Throw your Worries Away!” (Beverly Moskowitz, DOT, MS OTR/L FAOTA, CEO at Real OT Solutions, Inc.)

This book utilizes movement that involves laterality (asking for right/left sides of the body), that crosses midline (goes across the body), for certain amounts of movements (i.e.-“touch your nose four times if you ever feel frustrated.”) along with concepts of motor planning (i.e.-touch your ear and then clap once). These scattered motor commands work on different key developmental skills, while keeping kids focused, and making the book even more fun!

The transfer of skills and strategies is simple to carry through across a range of environments, through the use of photocopiable desk strips, reminder bracelets, and at-a-glance charts divided by physical and emotional state of regulation. The simple visuals that connect to the text are a quick reminder to learned strategies in times of dysregulation:

“Fantastic book full of easy to implement strategies for school and home. Proactive strategies that make emotional management (self control) fun, accessible and achievable! I love the timesaver with proformas and pictures ready to use. Recommend used for whole class and family!” -- Sue Larkey, Author, Teacher, International Speaker

People of all ages seek empowerment; through the use of these superpowers; this book is definitely a means to help individuals feel in control, happy, and confident:

“Fantastic book full of easy to implement strategies for school and home. Proactive strategies that make emotional management (self control) fun, accessible and achievable! I love the timesaver with proformas and pictures ready to use. Recommend used for whole class and family!” -- Sue Larkey, Author, Teacher, International Speaker

Lauren Brukner is a Senior Occupational Therapist and author who graduated with a Masters of Science in Occupational Therapy from New York University. She is a mom of three kids, ages 8, 6, and 5. She specializes in sensory integration and self-regulation strategies in children and young people, and their implementation in home, school, and community settings. She is an author with Jessica Kingsley Publishers, and is the author of «The Kids’ Guide to Staying Awesome and in Control: Simple Stuff to Help Children Regulate Their Emotions and Senses» (July 2014), and “How to Be a Superhero Called Self-Control!: Super Powers to Help Younger Children to Regulate their Emotions and Senses» (November 2015). She holds advanced training and certification in Integrated Listening Systems, and is a Certified Screener for Irlen Syndrome/Scoptic Sensitivity. She is a contributing author to Autism Parenting Magazine and Firefly-friends Special Needs blog. She has appeared as a guest on The Autism Show and The Manhattan Neighborhood Network’s School-Home Connection. Her books have been listed as resources on websites such as Everyday Health, Aol’s Health and Wellness, MSN Health, and Friendship Circle, as well as Special Needs Book Review, among others. She blogs at www.awesomeandincontrol.com.

For more information, please visit:

http://www.jkp.com/author/authors/view/id/lauren-brukner-8312

http://www.amazon.com/How-Be-Superhero-Called-Self-Control/dp/1849057176/ref=la_B00HIU9ZGA_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1451918020&sr=1-2
Amulet is a magical story of cave dwellers, clowns and vegetarian dragons. Eleven year old Dion has Asperger’s. The structure Dion so heavily relies on falls apart when he is kidnapped and taken to a mysterious land. With his life now in danger; he will have to use all the skills he has been taught, to cope in this strange new world. Will his sister Megan get to him in time? Not if the evil Queen has anything to do with it.

For a boy who doesn’t like change. Dion’s inner strength and determination is the one thing he will have to rely on.

Amulet is a valuable reading resource for individuals, families, professionals, carers and schools.

Throughout the book Dion talks about his autism and explains the ways in which he copes with daily challenges.

Reviewed by Anna Kennedy OBE Autism Ambassador:

“Amulet is a delightful story about Megan and Dion. On one level the reader is taken through a beautiful fantasy world which is a product of the children’s imagination. On another level it intelligently highlights the difficulties presented by the real world to a child on the autism spectrum. The reader is shown how the child on the autism spectrum can be guided through life such that he becomes a full participant. I have no hesitation in recommending this book.”

For more information please visit:
http://www.candy-jar.co.uk/books/amulet.html and is also available from some online book retailers such as Amazon, WHSmiths & Waterstones.

Amulet is published by Candy Jar Books, Cardiff, UK.
Autism Science Foundation to Hold Talks on Research Advances in April

Talks Focus on Research Advances – from Gene Discovery to Siblings and Gender Differences – and Progress in Areas like Anxiety Treatment and Educational Technologies

The Autism Science Foundation (ASF), a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting and funding innovative autism research, will host its third annual “Day of Learning,” a science conference for the autism community, on Wednesday, April 14. The conference – with an audience including parents, advocates and other autism community stakeholders – will feature TED-style talks by respected autism researchers, clinicians and service providers who will discuss the latest developments in autism research, treatment and services.

Each TED-style talk will be thoughtful, 15-minute distillation of a critical issue in autism and mental health. Speakers and topics will include:

- **Dr. Gerald Fischbach**, chief scientist and fellow, Simons Foundation: *Autism Research: Where Are We Now?*
- **Dr. Alex Kolevzon**, professor, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai: *Understanding and Treating Anxiety in Autism*
- **Dr. Jeremy Veenstra-VanderWeele**, professor, Columbia University: *Pathways to Progress: From Gene Discovery to Treatment*
- **Dr. Peter Szatmari**, chief, Child and Youth Mental Health Collaborative between CAMH, the Hospital for Sick Children, and University of Toronto: *Are Females Protected from Autism?*
- **Dr. Jacqueline Crawley**, professor, University of California at Davis: *What Can We Learn from Animal Models of Autism?*
- **Dr. John Constantino**, professor and pediatric psychiatrist, Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis: *Determining Recurrence Risk for Autism in Children of Siblings*

- **Dr. Theresa Hamlin**, associate executive director, The Center for Discovery: *Technologies Transforming Teaching and Learning in Autism Classrooms*

“The Day of Learning is an important opportunity for parents, advocates and other stakeholders to not only hear from the leading autism researchers, but to also interact and engage in meaningful discussions to advance autism science,” said Alison Singer, president of the Autism Science Foundation. “Our speakers will provide a fascinating snapshot of where the science stands today, and where it needs to go. And attendees will also hear about innovations in treatment and new technologies that are making life better for people with autism right now.”

“This is the perfect setting for top researchers to talk directly with the stakeholder community,” added Alycia Halladay, Ph.D., chief science officer of the Autism Science Foundation. “The Day of Learning is also a day of dialogue and a reminder that research can and must be informed by the unique knowledge of people who live with autism every day.”

Tickets for the “Day of Learning,” which includes lunch, are available [online](http://www.autismsciencefoundation.org). Proceeds from the conference will benefit the Foundation’s [pre- and post-doctoral autism fellowship programs](http://www.autismsciencefoundation.org), which support early career research conducted by the nation’s most promising young autism scientists.

**About the Autism Science Foundation**

The Autism Science Foundation (ASF) is a 501(c)(3) public charity. Its mission is to support autism research by providing funding to scientists and organizations conducting autism research. ASF also provides information about autism to the general public and serves to increase awareness of autism spectrum disorders and the needs of individuals and families affected by autism. To learn more about the Autism Science Foundation or to make a donation visit [www.autismsciencefoundation.org](http://www.autismsciencefoundation.org).
The person had concerns regarding the effectiveness of what was being done by a Behavior Therapist as it did not appear the challenging behavior was getting any better, and she was also concerned for the future of this child. Specifically, she was concerned that he would become a violent adult and that he may be expelled or removed from the school that he attends.

It can be very difficult to see our loved one in distress or to hear that they were in the manner described above. Putting ourselves in the shoes of the child with autism, imagine not being able to get your needs met without engaging in some sort of distressful, or what I like to call challenging behavior. For some children with autism this may mean hurting themselves by hitting themselves or engaging in head banging. For other children with autism this may mean hurting others by kicking or hitting. Whatever it is that they are doing, it is always important to remember that it is just a behavior, it is not a reflection of the child him/herself. That this challenging behavior is fulfilling a need for that person. It absolutely does not mean that they are a bad person or that they will become a bad, violent person. This challenging behavior is how he/she has learned to get the help needed in that moment. It is critical to address it as early as possible so that we can empower them with a better way to get his/her needs met, ultimately improving his/her quality of life now, and for his/her future. This article offers tips on how to mitigate the type of situation described above.

Tip #1 Check in with the Behavior Therapist

This may seem like common sense and it is unfortunate that it appears that the Behavior Therapist may not have been proactive in this regard in this particular instance. Whenever I am working with a family and a child with autism that presents with some challenging behavior it is important to keep the family in-
volved as much as possible. This means keeping them up-to-date on how the behavior plan is going and if there are changes to it that the family is on board with those changes. If the Behavior Therapist is not volunteering information then you must seek it out.

Sometimes we may be expecting too much too soon. On occasion, it may take a little longer than we would like to see meaningful changes in the behavior we are trying to address. This may be because we are collecting information or facts around why it is happening. The information and/or facts collected will inform what we do to address the challenging behavior. Recall, challenging behavior is serving a purpose, it is fulfilling a need for that child. In order to help them find a better way to get their need met we must get to the bottom of why they are doing it. The plan will outline very different procedures if he/she is doing it because he/she finds the work too hard and can’t tell anyone vs. whether or not he/she is doing it because he/she has a headache. A qualified Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) would be able to identify the why and develop a suitable plan that is informed by that child’s unique reasons for engaging in the challenging behavior. This assessment can take some time to complete but it is well worth the wait. The Behavior Analyst should keep you posted on how it is going.

On the other hand, if your Behavior Therapist already completed this functional behavior assessment and you still think it is taking too long or is not working, you should be able to get to the bottom of what is going on by speaking with them. The Behavior Therapist will be tracking how often, or long or intensely the behavior is occurring depending on the child’s unique situation. If the plan was designed based upon a well-conducted functional behavior assessment you should start to see a positive impact on the behavior. Sometimes this is only evident when looking at the data at first so you would want to check in to find that out for sure. Depending on the situation, it is possible that the behavior may get worse for a few days before it gets better. Your Behavior Therapist should go through all of this with you and you should consent to the procedures being used. Having consented to the procedures would require that the Behavior Therapist review the procedures in detail with you and outline any potential risks.

In summary, check in with the Behavior Therapist to find out how it is going and what is being done to address any problems with the process. It is important to keep in mind though, that sometimes it is getting better and we just can’t tell yet by watching, sometimes it is not doing any better because there are some assessments being completed first and sometimes, depending on the procedures it will get worse before it gets better. In the unfortunate situation where there are no data being collected or the plan is indeed not working, it would be in your best interest to address it as soon as possible by speaking with the Behavior Therapist and have them report on how they are going to deal with it. The bottom line here is check in with them to have them explain what is going on with the plan and what is going to be done if the plan is not working.

Tip #2 Ensure the Behavior Plan is Developed Appropriately

A well-designed behavior plan will help reduce the challenging behavior and empower a child with autism with a more appropriate way to get his/her needs met. These are the things you would want to ensure are included or considered:

1. Functional behavior assessment completed by a qualified BCBA with the relevant clinical experience.
2. Behavior Plan designed and informed based upon the results of that assessment.
3. Objective measurement of the challenging behavior is ongoing and reviewed on a regular basis.
4. That the plan includes teaching an alternative response to the challenging behavior. For example, if he/she is engaging in hitting and we found out it was because the worksheet is too hard, we would want to make sure that there is something in the plan to teach him/her how to ask for help.
5. That there is a plan in the event that revisions are needed. That the data are monitored regularly for the need to make revisions.
6. That family and other caregivers are involved in the development and implementation of the plan. This means that the child with autism will be empowered with the same skills everywhere he/she goes.
7. That there is a plan for ensuring that the plan is implemented with fidelity and that this is a pri-
My hope is that these tips will help parents and/or caregivers advocate for the right supports for his/her child with autism. Fortunately there are plenty of well qualified BCBAs doing exceptional work to help children with autism and their families. A properly-designed and implemented behavior plan that is based on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) should help children with autism like the 8-year-old boy described in the question submitted to Autism Parenting Magazine. It is about empowering him with skills that will improve his quality of life, that will lead to him getting his needs met in a safe way that does not interfere with his ability to be integrated and learn new skills with his peers. I know there is a lot of information in this article, if there is anything that you would like me to review in greater detail please feel free to submit a question.

Sarah Kupferschmidt has her Masters in Psychology with a specialization in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) who has worked with hundreds of children with autism and their families since 1999. She has clinically supervised and trained hundreds of staff on how to implement treatment strategies that are based on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), she conducts parent coaching and training in the form of workshops for families and teachers on a variety of topics (e.g., safety skills, toilet training, language development, using technology to teach, and challenging behavior) just to name a few. She is a Part-Time Professor and Co-Founder of Special Appucations, which is an mhealth company that develops solutions for children with special needs using ABA to inform the instructional design. Sarah has appeared on Hamilton Life, CP24, CHCH news, the Scott Thompson radio show, The Bill Kelly radio show and on A Voice for All on Rogers TV and Mom Talk Radio.

CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS TO DETERMINE IF BEHAVIOR PLAN INCLUDES CRITICAL ELEMENTS.
Help: I Don't Know How to Choose an Applied Behavior Analysis Provider
By Angelina M, MS, BCBA, LMFT

Help! I am going to be starting Applied Behavior Analysis for my son who has autism. Can you tell me things to ask and what to look for in an ABA provider?
— Jane

I am so glad you asked this. Within the autism community there are mixed feelings about Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). But, research has shown time and again that ABA is the most effective treatment for autism for reducing problematic behaviors and increasing adaptive skills! When correctly implemented ABA can be life changing, not just for your son, but for your entire family.

Trusting people with your child, especially one with special needs, can be scary! How do you know they’re treating your baby with love and kindness? How do you know they’re staying calm and patient when your child has a meltdown? How do you know that what they’re doing is working? Here are things to ask when working with any ABA provider:

1) What type of ABA do you provide and what will sessions look like?

There are several styles of ABA and they can look very different. Therapy sessions can range from very structured and repetitive (Discrete Trial Training), to very play-based (Verbal behavior or Pivotal Response Treatment). Different styles are better suited for different learners. However, naturalistic and FUN learning is typically best and helps promote generalization. You definitely want to make sure that what they teach your child is generalized to his everyday life, and isn’t just evident in sessions with the therapists.

2) How much and what type of training does the team have?

Most importantly, you need a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) on your team. Whether the BCBA manages the program or has a hands-on role, their oversight is critical. Some agencies may provide you with a BCBA who will come to your home and supervise the team and your child’s progress each month. Others will have a BCBA monitor progress through analyzing data and not through any in-person interaction. The more involved the BCBA, the better. But even if the BCBA is only overseeing things, their role is vital. Next, be sure that your team’s direct intervention staff is well-trained. Effective training includes not only didactic teaching but also hands on experience. Training may include:
classroom style lectures, role-playing, ride-along observations, and hands-on experience.

3) How involved will I be with the assessment and treatment?

A good ABA provider will ALWAYS ask for parent input and will require parent involvement in sessions. For example: before deciding which self-care skill to teach, I will check with the parent to see which self-care skill they feel is most important to start with. I may think we should work on teeth brushing, but the parent may want us to work on dressing first. Your preferences and values should be considered in all parts of treatment. Additionally, an effective ABA treatment will focus on teaching the family intervention strategies so when services end you are fully equipped to help your child continue to make progress. One side note — sometimes it’s important for the team to establish instructional control and rapport with your child and your presence may be a hindrance. In those situations it may be best for you to step away and observe from a distance. But as a general rule of thumb, you, your spouse, and any other caretakers should be involved in sessions.

4) How will you determine when my child no longer needs services?

It is critically important for you as the parent to know when the ABA provider will consider your child “graduated.” From working in the field so many years I have lots of experience with different ABA providers and how they determine when a child no longer needs ABA. On the one hand, you want to celebrate when your child is ready to move on from receiving services. But on the other hand, I encourage you to think long term. The skills a four-year-old needs are very different than the skills a 14-year-old needs. Just because your child masters their original goals does not necessarily mean they should be graduated. I encourage parents to take advantage of the services they receive and use them to their full benefit. Always keep in mind that as your child ages he or she will have different challenges and will need to acquire new skills. For example, if your child masters a goal to request 10 items, that’s amazing, but that should not be considered the “end-all-be-all.” A child needs more than 10 words in their vocabulary, so ideally the team would then revise the goal to be 20 words, or maybe 50 words. Point being, be sure to understand how your team will decide when to terminate services.

One final thing to consider…

The team will create goals for your child hopefully based on assessment results AND your input. There may be some goals that you don’t quite see the value of but your team should be able to justify why they’re important. Some skills we teach are not critical in-and-of themselves, but they are building blocks to gaining higher level skills. For example: being able to match flashcards isn’t super necessary in-and-of itself, but it leads to the ability to sort items. Sorting is later going to be important for things like doing laundry, putting groceries away, and putting dishes away.

In the same way, the team is going to implement behavior strategies that seem completely counter-intuitive to you. For example, they may ignore when your child bites them and instead just redirect him back to the task. While sometimes it may seem backwards, there has to be balance between trusting your instincts as a parent but also trusting in the science of ABA. These strategies are scientifically proven in literally hundreds of thousands of research articles so do your best to give them a fair shot, even when it gets hard. Just like you only know if a prescription works when you take the full dosage for the full length of time, you’ll only know if the ABA is working if you give it time.

I hope this helps and I wish you luck in finding an excellent ABA provider for your child!

Angelina M. works as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst, specializing in assessing and treating children and adolescents with autism, down-syndrome, and other developmental delays. She began her career in Applied Behavior Analysis in 2006, following her youngest brother’s autism diagnosis, and has since worked with dozens of children and families. She also writes a blog about her experiences as both a professional and a big sister. Her brother, Dylan, remains her most powerful inspiration for helping others who face similar challenges.

Learn more about Angelina and her blog, The Autism Onion, at www.theautismonion.com or www.facebook.com/theautismonion
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 autistic children.

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 SITE 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.
Sarah asks: “I had a special needs trust created by our family attorney years ago, and I am wondering if someone should review this document to make sure it was written right. I ask this because another mom in our parent support group who had a testamentary special needs trust had issues when the grandmother passed away and their child ended up losing benefits.”

Sarah, thank you for your question.

My quick answer is yes; unless your family attorney has a specialty practice that focuses in creating Special Needs Trusts. The reason I lean in this direction is because working in the Special Needs Arena demands specific knowledge that is not only created by certifications but also by experience serving families. If your family attorney has the education and experience to review the document he initially created for you then that is great, but if not it makes sense to find another professional for a second opinion.

It is very common that we find Special Needs Trusts initially set up as testamentary. Testamentary simply means that the trust lives inside your will (another legal document that tells the court system who you would like to administer your wishes, how your assets are allocated to your heirs, and who you would like to care for your children, i.e. Guardian). By having a Special Needs Trust be testamentary it limits its ability to “fully” function because it will not exist until after you die. This can cause a problem when other family members (like grandparents) want to leave money for your child while you are still alive, because with a testamentary trust there is nowhere for them to put that money unless they give it directly to your child which can then cause a possible forfeit of government benefits.

In order to avoid issues, it may be best for you to consider an Inter Vivos special needs trust. This simply means that the trust exists now. It is alive on the day you sign the paperwork with the attorney. This type of Special Needs Trust allows family members to contribute to your child’s future support needs while you are still alive. It also allows you to begin planning more appropriately at the end of your life as to the funding and managing of your child’s Special Needs Trust.

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 what they call Unleash L.I.F.E.™- L.I.F.E. meaning Lasting Independence For Everyone™. This is accomplished with education, action, and support in the creation, implementation, and continued monitoring of a specifically designed lifelong and integrated plan for your family: parents, caregivers, your loved one with special needs and their siblings.
Roast Chicken with Jacket Potatoes and Salad

A simple-to-prepare dish which can be used to feed guests or as a tasty family meal.

**INGREDIENTS**

1 chicken
Oil
Salt
Pepper

1 jacket potato per adult, or half for younger children

Salad
Lettuce
Cucumber
Lettuce
Tomatoes

Dressing
Juice of 1 large orange
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons honey
¼ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Healthy Eats courtesy of

By Elouise ROBINSON,
Autism Food Club

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Method:

Preheat an oven to 450°F / 220°C / 200°C fan / Gas mark 7

Place chicken into a roasting pan, rub the chicken with a little oil and season all over the outside of chicken.

Roast in the preheated oven until skin is browned and crisp, the juices run clear, (a meat thermometer inserted into the thickest part of a thigh, not touching bone, reads 160°F / 70°C) for around 1 hour 30 minutes for a medium chicken (check the chicken instructions for exact timings). Let chicken rest for 15 minutes before carving.

For the jacket potatoes, wash and prick a potato with a fork. Rub a little oil and seasoning over the potatoes, bake for around 1 hour 30 minutes more until the flesh is tender and the skin crisp and golden.

Optional: for a fluffy jacket potato, cut the jacket in half and mash the flesh with a fork and a little olive oil.

For the salad:

Wash and chop salad items, ensure items like baby tomatoes are cut at least in half lengths ways for younger children to prevent choking hazard place all the items in a salad bowl.

To make the dressing, mix all the ingredients together thoroughly.

Alternatively the salad can be left plain or add a simple zesty dressing of juice of orange.

Carve the chicken and serve family-style.