

Notes from the Field: Effective Practices for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

By Richard L. Simpson

In recent months, both television and print media have given exceptional attention to the increasingly prevalent and enigmatic conditions of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). This is clear testament to the extraordinary interest this topic holds for both professionals and the general public. For instance, *Town and Country*, a popular magazine best recognized for profiling fashion trends and society events and goings-on, recently published an article on Autism (Guernsey, 2006) that included information on prevalence rates, diagnostic signs, causes, treatment alternatives, and support resources. The notable and widespread interest in ASD was similarly revealed in a recent feature article in *Time* (Wallis, 2006). Both the *Time* cover story and *Town and Country* article (along with myriad similar reports) are particularly noteworthy because they address interests that are shared by professionals and the general public. Indeed, it is clear that many of us are struggling to understand many of the same fundamental issues connected to ASD.

Issues in Effective Interventions

One topic of considerable interest relates to identifying and correctly using intervention and treatment methods that have the best chance of producing positive outcomes in the lives of children and youth diagnosed with ASD. Interestingly, Wallis (2006), the author of the *Time* article, strongly implied that facilitated communication (Biklen, 1993), arguably a highly controversial intervention, was

an effective practice. Many professionals, of course, will recognize facilitated communication as a method that behavioral scientists have unmistakably proven to lack efficacy based on numerous studies (Wheeler, Jacobson, Paglieri & Schwartz, 1993). Conceding that facilitated communication is indeed a controversial method, Wallis nevertheless offered that "it (facilitated communication) clearly turned Hannah's life around. Since her breakthrough, she no longer spends much of her day watching *Sesame Street* and *Blue's Clues*. Instead, she is working her way through high school biology, algebra and ancient history" (p. 44). In highlighting and tacitly recommending a highly controversial intervention for individuals with ASD, this journalist identifies several underlying, fundamental issues that confront parents and professionals connected with ASD:

- There is significant lack of agreement within the field of ASD regarding methods that are most effective.
- The meaning and nature of what comprises and constitutes an effective and scientifically-based practice is imprecise and undecided.
- There are few practical and well-designed guidelines that professionals and families can use to make methodology-related decisions.

Accordingly, a fundamental issue confronting the field of ASD relates to identifying and correctly using the most efficacious methodologies, treatments, and strategies.

The fundamental elements that comprise an effective practice for students with ASD are open to debate. Nevertheless, federal policy, research implications, and logical and commonsense thinking lead to the undeniable conclusion that it is essential that children and youth with ASD have access to the most effective methods. Children and youth with ASD are in particular need of effective practices because they have been especially prone to encounter and suffer unproven and controversial treatments and interventions. A number of these purported ASD intervention methods lack theoretical, clinical and/or empirical foundation, yet often promise dramatic and all-encompassing improvements and even restoration to normalcy. They promise hope for positively responding to a lifelong disability that not only lacks a clear etiology, but also a clearly effective plan of treatment. That's why professionals and parents who are given opportunities to use methods and treatments that promise dramatic improvements, even if the approach being considered lacks scientific validation, may be willing to "take a chance" and consider using techniques and strategies that all too frequently have little to offer.

Identifying Effective Practices

There appear to be two principal actions associated with identifying effective practices. The first involves identifying fundamental features associated with effective interven-

tions, and evaluating the effectiveness of existing methods that are purported to be suitable for use with children and youth with ASD. This includes evaluating the effectiveness with particular types of students who have specific needs and problems. The second involves creating mechanisms for evaluating future ASD intervention methods and strategies. That is, since new methods are constantly being introduced, rating and evaluating existing methods is only a partial answer to the effective practice issue. Evaluation strategies that can be used by practitioners and others are needed to facilitate assessments of new methods and their suitability with individual students.

A tremendous amount of work needs to be done on both these fronts, yet progress is being made. For instance, the Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council (2001) identified several basic characteristics that should be in place in educational programs designed for young children with ASD:

...early [age] entry into an intervention program; active engagement in intensive instructional programming for the equivalent of a full school day, including services that may be offered in different sites, for a minimum of five days a week with full-year programming; use of planned teaching opportunities, organized around relatively brief periods of time for the youngest children (e.g., 15–20 minute intervals); and sufficient amounts of adult attention in one-to-one or very small group instruction to meet individualized goals. (p. 6)

In addition, Simpson and colleagues (2005) have evalu-

ated commonly used interventions and treatments for children and youth with ASD. Grouped within 5 categories (interpersonal relationship; skill based; cognitive; physiological/biological/neurological; and other), 33 ASD methods were evaluated using the following considerations:

- Reported outcomes and effects.
- Qualifications of persons implementing the intervention or treatment.
- How, where, and when the intervention or treatment is best administered.
- Potential risks associated with the intervention or treatment.
- Costs associated with using the intervention or treatment.
- Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of the method.

Based on these factors, methods were assessed as being one of the following:

- *Scientifically-based*. Practices that have “significant and convincing empirical efficacy and support” (p. 9).
- *Promising practice*. Strategies that have “efficacy and utility with individuals with ASD” (p. 9), even though the method requires additional objective verification.
- *Practice having limited supporting information*. Those that lack objective and convincing supporting evidence, with unsure or potential utility and usefulness.
- *Not recommended*. Interventions and treatments that were judged to lack effectiveness and that have the potential to be harmful.

The following practices were found to meet the highest standard, that of the *scientifically-based* category:

- Applied behavior analysis (Alberto & Troutman, 2003).
- Discrete trial training (Maurice, Green & Luce, 1996).

- Pivotal response training (Koegel, Koegel, Harrower & Carter, 1999).
- *Learning Experiences: An Alternative Program for Preschoolers and Parents* (LEAP; Strain & Hoyson, 2000).

Basic progress is also being made in creating mechanisms for evaluating future ASD methods. Heflin and Simpson (1998) and Simpson (2005) recommended that basic questions be used by professionals and parents to determine the appropriateness of various interventions with students with ASD, including:

- What are the proven efficacy credentials of purported interventions and treatments, and do anticipated outcomes of particular practices line-up with the needs of individual students?
- What are the potential risks associated with a method?
- What is the most effective means of evaluating a particular method or approach?

Summary Thoughts

There is little chance that there is a single best-suited and universally effective method for all learners with ASD. However, it is clear that there are effective methods that should form the foundation of programs for students with ASD. And without question there are some methods and strategies that are associated with better outcomes for these children and youth. The best programs for students with ASD appear to be those that integrate a variety of objectively verified practices and that are designed to address and support the needs of individual students. It is essential that the field continue to make progress in identifying and using those methods that have the greatest potential for achieving desired outcomes, and evaluating future methods that purport to be suitable for use with students with ASD.

References

- Alberto, P., & Troutman, A. (2003). *Applied behavior analysis for teachers* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice-Hall.
- Biklen, D. (1993). *Communication unbound: How facilitated communication is challenging traditional views of Autism and ability/disability*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Guernsey, D. (2006, August 1). Autism's angels. *Town and Country*, 90-102.
- Heflin, J., & Simpson, R. (1998). Interventions for children and youth with Autism: Prudent choices in a world of exaggerated claims and empty promises: Part 1: Legal policy analysis and recommendations for selecting interventions and treatments. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 13(4), 212-220.
- Koegel, L., Koegel, R., Harrower, J., & Carter, C. (1999). Pivotal response intervention 1: Overview of approach. *The Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 24(3), 174-185.
- Maurice, C., Green, G., & Luce, S. (1996). *Behavioral intervention for young children with Autism: A manual for parents and professionals*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED.
- National Research Council. (2001). *Educating children with Autism*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Simpson, R.L. (2005). Evidence-based practices and students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 20(3), 140-149.
- Simpson, R., et al. (2005). *Autism Spectrum Disorders: Interventions and treatments for children and youth*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Strain, P., & Hoyson, M. (2000). The need for longitudinal, intensive social skill intervention: LEAP follow-up outcomes for children with Autism. *Topics in Early Childhood Education*, 20(2), 116-122.
- Wallis, C. (2006, May 15). Inside the autistic mind. *Time*, 43-51.
- Wheeler, D., Jacobson, J., Paglieri, R., & Schwartz, A. (1993). An experimental assessment of facilitated assessment. *Mental Retardation*, 31(1), 49-60.

Richard L. Simpson is a Professor in the Department of Special Education, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

Reprinted with permission from Cadigan, K., Craig-Unkefer, L., Reichle, J., Sievers, P., & Gaylord, V. (Eds.). (Fall/Winter 2006/07). Impact: Feature Issue on Supporting Success in School and Beyond for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, 19(3). [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration]. Available online at <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/193/default.html>.

Notes from the Field: Effective Transition Planning for Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorders Approaching Adulthood

By Peter F. Gerhardt

Despite the transition requirements of IDEA and a growing body of research in support of effective transition planning for middle and high school students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (e.g., Schall, et al., 2006), adults on the spectrum remain without employment in large numbers (e.g., Howlin, 2000) and, even those generally regarded as most capable too often live lives of social isolation, dependence, and few opportunities to improve their quality of life (Howlin, Goode, Hutton, & Rutter, 2004). This outcome can be seen as an indicator of system failure, and evidence that there is a "disconnect" between what research indicates is possible in terms of competent adulthood for learners with ASD (e.g., Smith, Belcher & Hughes, 1995), and the out-

comes most commonly realized (Gerhardt & Holmes, 2005).

There is a critical need to revisit the ways in which such learners are prepared for adult life beyond the classroom, in the community, and on the job. Although not exhaustive, some considerations toward that end should include the following:

- Consider all learners to be "employment-ready."
- View first jobs as learning experiences.
- Promote creativity in job development.
- Provide co-worker training.
- Develop active ties with the local business community.

Consider All Employment-Ready

If we are to consider all learn-

ers with ASD to be employment-ready, then the concept of "work-readiness" needs to be redefined. Work-readiness is a term generally used to describe a cohort of skills considered pre-requisites for employment success. These might include time on task, low levels of challenging behavior, some degree of social competence, etc. In practice, however, work-readiness as a barometer of employment competence has, instead, excluded far more people with ASD from the workforce than it has enabled to find employment. Given that many of the basic skills necessary to get (and keep) a job are best learned while on the job (hence the phrase "on the job training") then the generally accepted definition of work-readiness results in a "Catch

22" situation for the majority of learners with ASD. In effect, high work-readiness expectations result in a system where, first, you are considered unemployable because you don't have the requisite skills and, second, you can't acquire the requisite skills because the opportunity to do so is denied to you. Redefining work-readiness to acknowledge all persons with ASD as being potentially viable candidates for employment, and providing practical, hands-on employment opportunities, is clearly in order.

View First Jobs as Learning

I know of few typical adults for whom their first job turned out to be their final, or dream, job. Most adults go through a series of jobs – some bad, some good – on their own particular path toward an, ideally, fulfilling career. The question that presents itself, then, is "Wouldn't this be the same for adults with ASD?"

As noted earlier, first jobs are most important in that they provide the transitioning learner with ASD the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to keep and hold a job. In addition, first jobs provide the opportunity for individual learners to develop a sense of which types of work and working conditions would be best for them, and subsequently, increase their level of community inclusion and status. Even a first job that fails to last longer than a few hours (though certainly not the goal) can be a valuable experience, particularly if we are then able to determine what about the job did not meet the learner's needs, abilities, interests, preferences, and idiosyncrasies. Was the job too noisy? Were the production demands too high? Was there too much general activity and confusion? Was there not enough for him or her to do? This meeting of

individual preferences and job characteristics is at times referred to the "job match" (e.g., Ochocka, Roth, & Lord, 1994) or goodness of fit (e.g., Shalock & Jensen, 1986). A positive job match means that the production and social/communicative demands, and environmental characteristics, of a job are preferred or, in fact, enjoyed by the employee. For many learners with ASD for whom pay may not be a primary motivating factor, the degree of job match can be the critical variable determining employee/employer satisfaction versus a return to unemployment.

Promote Creativity

Today, the economy of the United States is primarily a service economy (as opposed to a production economy) with many of the available jobs requiring some degree of technical, social and organizational (i.e., the ability to multi-task) competence. While certainly challenging, this complexity can work to the advantage of transitioning learners through a process known as job-carving (Nietupski & Hamre-Nietupski, 2000). Job-carving is a process which takes advantage of the complexity of the job market by "carving out" individual tasks from more complex, multi-task jobs. Carved-out tasks are then combined to create a new, economically viable job specifically designed to meet the needs of the transitioning learner, his or her employer, and customers. For a job-carve to work, it is of critical importance that the needs of all noted parties are met, otherwise the economics of the situation will eventually require the termination of the carved job. Good job-carving requires a direct knowledge of a potential employee's abilities, interests, and limitations; a comprehensive understanding of the employer's needs; solid obser-

vatational and analysis skills; and competent negotiating skills.

Support and Train Co-Workers

Despite professional recognition of the diversity of expression associated with ASD, the community at large has generally come to understand the disorder through the character of Raymond Babbit in the movie "Rainman." As such, absent any direct experience with someone on the spectrum, employers and co-workers will tend to have a fairly limited understanding of ASD in general, and almost no understanding of the potential of someone on the spectrum to be a valued employee and/or co-worker. In most cases employers, supervisors, and co-workers will require some degree of training if both work-based production competence and social inclusion are to be realized. A few potential areas of training include:

- A brief, jargon-free introduction to ASD and how it impacts the life of their new colleague.
- Individual likes, dislikes, and preferences as they may relate to the performance of the job.
- Effective strategies for interacting with their new colleague (e.g., a preference for concrete language).
- Effective strategies for supporting a socially inclusive workplace.
- The role and responsibilities of the job coach, if one is provided.
- How to provide performance feedback to their new colleague.
- Basic information regarding any idiosyncratic or unusual patterns of behavior that may occur on the job.

Develop Community Ties

Most schools or agencies providing services to transitioning learners with ASD are either government entities or are in-

corporated as non-profit organizations. As such, they are generally organized and administered differently than a similarly sized, for-profit business in the community. Differences in mission, organizational structure, and finances (to name a few) may result in something of a "culture clash" between the goals of the educational organization (i.e., providing the education necessary to succeed post-graduation) and those of the for-profit business (e.g., promoting an efficient workforce to maximize investors' profits). In order to better understand and address these potential differences, the development of active ties to the local business community in the form of a Business Advisory Council can be of significant benefit to the school or other non-profit agency. While the primary goal of the Business Advisory Council (BAC) is to increase employment opportunities for individuals with ASD, the secondary goal is to provide information, insight and, if necessary, direct instruction to school staff on how to most effectively work with the local business community. The BAC can promote greater access to employment by:

- Identifying areas of potential job development and local hiring trends.
- Providing training on how to more effectively interact with potential employers for developing jobs.
- Offering training in clearly identifying employer demands and expectations, and soliciting mutually useful feedback.
- Providing direct access to a pool of potential employers.
- Assisting in the development of employer-friendly materials.

Developing and maintaining active ties to the local business community, through an involved BAC, should be consid-

ered a worthwhile, if not essential, tool toward translating the transition goals of each individual into more readily obtainable transition outcomes.

Conclusion

In the United States, adults with ASD continue to exist outside the employment mainstream in numbers far greater than is appropriate or acceptable. Among the many reasons for this continued underemployment are the disconnect between the potential of adult learners with ASD and the resources of the systems designed to provide programmatic support, the absence of a legislative entitlement to services as an adult, inadequate or inappropriate transition planning, and, to some extent, limited interest in supporting adult learners in general and in particular those with greater cognitive or behavioral challenges. While these challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable. It is both possible and desirable for adults with ASD to be gainfully employed, and to live lives of quality (e.g., Bannerman, Sheldon, Sherman, & Harchik, 1990). The task ahead then is to take this possibility and translate it into a certainty... sometimes one person at a time.

References

- Bannerman, D. J., Sheldon, J. B., Sherman, J. A. & Harchik, A. E. (1990). Balancing the right to habilitation with the right to personal liberties: The rights of people with developmental disabilities to eat too many doughnuts and take a nap. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 23, 79-89.
- Gerhardt, P.F. & Holmes, D.L. (2005). Employment: Options and issues for adolescents and adults with Autism, In F. Volkmar, R. Paul, A. Klin, & D. Cohen (Eds.) *Handbook of Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders* (3rd Ed.), (pp. 1087-1101). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Howlin, P., Goode, S., Hutton, J.,

& Rutter, M., (2004). Adult outcomes for children with Autism. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 45, 212-229.

Howlin, P., (2000). Outcome in adult life for more able individuals with Autism or Asperger Syndrome. *Autism*, 4, 63-83.

Nietupski, J.A., & Hamre-Nietupski, S. (2000). A systematic process for carving supported employment positions for people with severe disabilities. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 12, 103-119.

Ochocka, J., Roth, D., & Lord, J. (1994). Workplaces that work: Successful employment for people with disabilities. *Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 3, 29-50.

Schall, C., Cortijo-Doval, E., Targett, P.S., & Wehman, P. (2006). Applications for youth with Autism spectrum disorders. In P. Wehman (Ed.), *Life beyond the classroom: Transition strategies for young people with disabilities*, (4th Ed.), (535-575). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Shalock R.L, & Jensen C.M. (1986). Assessing the goodness-of-fit between persons and their environment. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 11, 103-109.

Smith, M.D., Belcher, R.G., & Juhrs, P.D., (1995). *A guide to successful employment for individuals with Autism*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Peter F. Gerhardt is President of the Organization for Autism Research, Arlington, Virginia.

Reprinted with permission from Cadigan, K., Craig-Unkefer, L., Reichle, J., Sievers, P., & Gaylord, V. (Eds.). (Fall/Winter 2006/07). Impact: Feature Issue on Supporting Success in School and Beyond for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, 19(3). [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration]. Available online at <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/193/default.html>.

Notes from the Field: Ten Things Every Child

with Autism Wishes You Knew

By Ellen Notbohm

from the book *Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew* (2005, Future Horizons, Inc.)

Some days it seems the only predictable thing about it is the unpredictability. The only consistent attribute — the inconsistency. There is little argument on any level but that autism is baffling, even to those who spend their lives around it. The child who lives with autism may look “normal” but his behavior can be perplexing and downright difficult.

Autism was once thought an “incurable” disorder, but that notion is crumbling in the face of knowledge and understanding that is increasing even as you read this. Every day, individuals with autism are showing us that they can overcome, compensate for and otherwise manage many of autism’s most challenging characteristics. Equipping those around our children with simple understanding of autism’s most basic elements has a tremendous impact on their ability to journey towards productive, independent adulthood.

Autism is an extremely complex disorder but for purposes of this one article, we can distill its myriad characteristics into four fundamental areas: sensory processing challenges, speech/language delays and impairments, the elusive social interaction skills and whole child/self-esteem issues. And though these four elements may be common to many children, keep front-of-mind the fact that autism is a spectrum disorder: no two (or ten or twenty) children with autism will be completely alike. Every child will be at a different point on the spectrum. And, just as importantly — every parent, teacher and caregiver will be at a differ-

ent point on the spectrum. Child or adult, each will have a unique set of needs.

Here are ten things every child with autism wishes you knew:

1. I am first and foremost a child. I have autism. I am not primarily “autistic.” My autism is only one aspect of my total character. It does not define me as a person. Are you a person with thoughts, feelings and many talents, or are you just fat (overweight), myopic (wear glasses) or klutzy (uncoordinated, not good at sports)? Those may be things that I see first when I meet you, but they are not necessarily what you are all about.

As an adult, you have some control over how you define yourself. If you want to single out a single characteristic, you can make that known. As a child, I am still unfolding. Neither you nor I yet know what I may be capable of. Defining me by one characteristic runs the danger of setting up an expectation that may be too low. And if I get a sense that you don’t think I “can do it,” my natural response will be: Why try?

2. My sensory perceptions are disordered. Sensory integration may be the most difficult aspect of autism to understand, but it is arguably the most critical. It means that the ordinary sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches of everyday can be downright painful for me. The very environment in which I have to live often seems hostile. I may appear withdrawn or belligerent to you but I am really just trying to defend myself. Here is why a “simple” trip to the grocery store may be hell for me:

My hearing may be hyperacute. Dozens of people are talking at once. The loudspeaker booms today’s special. Musak whines from the sound system. Cash registers beep and cough, a coffee grinder is chugging. The meat cutter screeches, babies wail, carts creak, the fluorescent lighting hums. My brain can’t filter all the input and I’m in overload!

My sense of smell may be highly sensitive. The fish at the meat counter isn’t quite fresh, the guy standing next to us hasn’t showered today, the deli is handing out sausage samples, the baby in line ahead of us has a poopy diaper, they’re mopping up pickles on aisle 3 with ammonia...I can’t sort it all out. I am dangerously nauseated.

Because I am visually oriented (see more on this below), this may be my first sense to become overstimulated. The fluorescent light is not only too bright, it buzzes and hums. The room seems to pulsate and it hurts my eyes. The pulsating light bounces off everything and distorts what I am seeing — the space seems to be constantly changing. There’s glare from windows, too many items for me to be able to focus (I may compensate with “tunnel vision”), moving fans on the ceiling, so many bodies in constant motion. All this affects my vestibular and proprioceptive senses, and now I can’t even tell where my body is in space.

3. Please remember to distinguish between *won’t* (I choose not to) and *can’t* (I am not able to). Receptive and expressive language and vocabulary can be major challenges for

me. It isn't that I don't listen to instructions. It's that I can't understand you. When you call to me from across the room, this is what I hear: "*&^%\$#@, Billy. #%^*&^%\$&*....." Instead, come speak directly to me in plain words: "Please put your book in your desk, Billy. It's time to go to lunch." This tells me what you want me to do and what is going to happen next. Now it is much easier for me to comply.

4. I am a concrete thinker. This means I interpret language very literally. It's very confusing for me when you say, "Hold your horses, cowboy!" when what you really mean is "Please stop running." Don't tell me something is a "piece of cake" when there is no dessert in sight and what you really mean is "this will be easy for you to do." When you say "Jamie really burned up the track," I see a kid playing with matches. Please just tell me "Jamie ran very fast."

Idioms, puns, nuances, double entendres, inference, metaphors, allusions and sarcasm are lost on me.

5. Please be patient with my limited vocabulary. It's hard for me to tell you what I need when I don't know the words to describe my feelings. I may be hungry, frustrated, frightened or confused but right now those words are beyond my ability to express. Be alert for body language, withdrawal, agitation or other signs that something is wrong.

Or, there's a flip side to this: I may sound like a "little professor" or movie star, rattling off words or whole scripts well beyond my developmental age. These are messages I have memorized from the world around me to compensate for my language deficits because I know I am expected to respond when spoken to. They may come from books, TV, the speech of other people. It is

called "echolalia." I don't necessarily understand the context or the terminology I'm using. I just know that it gets me off the hook for coming up with a reply.

6. Because language is so difficult for me, **I am very visually oriented.** Please show me how to do something rather than just telling me. And please be prepared to show me many times. Lots of consistent repetition helps me learn.

A visual schedule is extremely helpful as I move through my day. Like your day-timer, it relieves me of the stress of having to remember what comes next, makes for smooth transition between activities, helps me manage my time and meet your expectations.

I won't lose the need for a visual schedule as I get older, but my "level of representation" may change. Before I can read, I need a visual schedule with photographs or simple drawings. As I get older, a combination of words and pictures may work, and later still, just words.

7. Please focus and build on what I can do rather than what I can't do. Like any other human, I can't learn in an environment where I'm constantly made to feel that I'm not good enough and that I need "fixing." Trying anything new when I am almost sure to be met with criticism, however "constructive," becomes something to be avoided. Look for my strengths and you will find them. There is more than one "right" way to do most things.

8. Please help me with social interactions. It may look like I don't want to play with the other kids on the playground, but sometimes it's just that I simply do not know how to start a conversation or enter a play situation. If you can encourage other children to invite me to join them at kickball or shooting baskets, it may be that I'm

delighted to be included.

I do best in structured play activities that have a clear beginning and end. I don't know how to "read" facial expressions, body language or the emotions of others, so I appreciate ongoing coaching in proper social responses. For example, if I laugh when Emily falls off the slide, it's not that I think it's funny. It's that I don't know the proper response. Teach me to say "Are you OK?"

9. Try to identify what triggers my meltdowns. Meltdowns, blow-ups, tantrums or whatever you want to call them are even more horrid for me than they are for you. They occur because one or more of my senses has gone into overload. If you can figure out why my meltdowns occur, they can be prevented. Keep a log noting times, settings, people, activities. A pattern may emerge.

Try to remember that all behavior is a form of communication. It tells you, when my words cannot, how I perceive something that is happening in my environment.

Parents, keep in mind as well: persistent behavior may have an underlying medical cause. Food allergies and sensitivities, sleep disorders and gastrointestinal problems can all have profound effects on behavior.

10. Love me unconditionally. Banish thoughts like, "If he would just....." and "Why can't she....." You did not fulfill every last expectation your parents had for you and you wouldn't like being constantly reminded of it. I did not choose to have autism. But remember that it is happening to me, not you. Without your support, my chances of successful, self-reliant adulthood are slim. With your support and guidance, the possibilities are broader than you might think. I promise you – I am worth it.

And finally, three words: Patience. Patience. Patience. Work to view my autism as a different ability rather than a disability. Look past what you may see as limitations and see the gifts autism has given me. It may be true that I'm not good at eye contact or conversation, but have you noticed that I don't lie, cheat at games, tattletale on my classmates or pass judgment on other people? Also true that I probably won't be the next Michael Jordan. But with my attention to fine detail and capacity for extraordinary focus, I might be the next Einstein. Or Mozart. Or Van Gogh. They had autism too.

The answer to Alzheimer's, the enigma of extraterrestrial life—what future achievements from today's children with autism, children like me, lie ahead?

All that I might become won't happen without you as my foundation. Think through some of those societal 'rules' and if they don't make sense for me, let them go. Be my advocate, be my friend, and we'll see just how far I can go.

© 2005 Ellen Notbohm

Ellen Notbohm is author of **Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew** and **Ten Things Your Student with Autism Wishes You Knew**, both

ForeWord Book of the Year finalists and iParenting Media Award recipients. She is co-author of *1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, winner of Learning Magazine's 2006 Teacher's Choice Award, and a columnist for Autism Asperger's Digest and Children's Voice. For book excerpts, more articles, reprint permission, or to contact Ellen, please visit www.ellennotbohm.com.

Reprinted with permission from Ellen Notbohm.

Notes from the Field: Resources for Educators, Families, and Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

- **National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (www.nichcy.org; 800/695-0285 voice/tty).** Funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, and operated by the non-profit organization Academy for Educational Development, this clearinghouse has extensive information about research on Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), educating students with Autism, what Autism is, Spanish resources, ASD organizations, and commercial publishers.
- **Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders: The Role of the Paraprofessional (2002).** By T. Kluba et al. and published by the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. A curriculum module designed for training paraprofessionals working with students with ASD. Available in facilitator module and corresponding student module (student modules may be photocopied.) For ordering information call the Institute at 612/624-4512 or visit <http://ici.umn.edu/products/curricula.html>.
- **Assistive Technology for Children with Autism.** By Susan Stokes. A detailed article describing specific low, mid, and high tech strategies that can be used with children with Autism to support their skill development and educational goals. Published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and available online at www.cesa7.k12.wi.us/sped/autism/assist/asst10.htm.
- **Autism Spectrum Disorders From A to Z (<http://www.asdatoz.com>).** By Barbara Doyle and Emily Doyle Iland. A book and Web site offering practical tips for families and school personnel related to supporting students with ASD, from a parent and special educator perspective.
- **First Signs, Inc. (www.firstsigns.org).** First Signs educates parents, healthcare providers, early childhood educators, and other professionals with the goal of improving screening and referral practices and lowering the age at which young children are identified with Autism and other developmental disorders. The Web site offers a variety of practical resources.
- **Professional Development in Autism Center (<http://depts.washington.edu/pdacent>).** The Center, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, provides training and support for school districts, families, and communities to ensure that students with ASD have access to high quality, evidence-based educational services in their local school districts. The Web site has resources, workshops, services, courses, and a troubleshooting board.

- **Organization for Autism Research (www.researchautism.org)** OAR uses applied science to answer questions that parents, families, individuals with Autism, teachers, and caregivers confront daily. The Web site includes discussion forums, research, resources, a database of Autism organizations, and downloadable publications including *Life Journey Through Autism: An Educator's Guide*.
- **Skilled Dialogue: Strategies for Responding to Cultural Diversity in Early Childhood** (2003). By Isaura Barrera with Robert Corso and Dianne Macpherson, and published by Paul H. Brookes Publishing. This book teaches practitioners how to use Skilled Dialogue – a field-tested model for respectful, reciprocal, and responsive interaction that honors cultural beliefs and values – to improve their relationships with the children and families they serve and better address developmental and educational goals. Available at www.brookespublishing.com.
- **Developing Cross-Cultural Competence: Serving Families** (2003). By D.L. Rogers-Adkinson et al. In *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, vol.18, #1, published by PRO-ED. The article presents research-based techniques and practical ideas to facilitate increased competence of teachers in working with families of children with disabilities for whom English is not the first language. On-line at <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/proedcw/focus/2003/00000018/00000001/art00002>.
- **Aquamarine Blue 5: Personal Stories of College Students with Autism** (2002). By Dawn Prince-Hughes. Published by Ohio University Press. A book written by college students who have Asperger's Syndrome or high-functioning Autism, and who describe in their own words both the challenges they face and the gifts they can offer to enrich higher education.
- **Autism Society of America (www.autism-society.org)**. ASA promotes education, awareness, and advocacy on critical issues for individuals with Autism. The Web site has information of use to individuals with ASD, family members, professionals, and advocates, including news, resources, events, and ASA chapters.
- **Autism Asperger Publishing Company (www.asperger.net; 877/277-8254)**. A publisher specializing in practical books on ASD for parents, teachers, individuals with ASD, and others working with them. The Web site lists publications, and also includes the organization's newsletter featuring articles by parents, teachers, and individuals with ASD, as well as extensive links to other resources.
- **Future Horizons, Inc. (www.FutureHorizons-autism.com; 800/489-0727)**. A publisher specializing in publications and conferences on ASD for families and professionals.

Reprinted with permission from Cadigan, K., Craig-Unkefer, L., Reichle, J., Sievers, P., & Gaylord, V. (Eds.). (Fall/Winter 2006/07). Impact: Feature Issue on Supporting Success in School and Beyond for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, 19(3). [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration]. Available online at <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/193/default.html>.