

# Horizons Newsletter

*Winter 2017*

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## Prepare to Leap: Lessons for Adulthood

*Author: Theresa Piccolo*

If you are a young adult on the autism spectrum or the parent of one, you have likely heard about the “cliff.” It’s that moment when you are out of high school, not interested in college, but you know you can’t play video games all day every day anymore. All of a sudden, you know you need to leap off that cliff and into your adult life. Are you prepared?

Whether or not you want to, and whether or not you’re ready, you *will* grow up, so making sure you are ready is a good idea. Here’s what you need:

1. **Know your community resources.** You have many employment supports available, including state vocational agencies, job coaches, day support options, social and soft skills groups, vocational training, and more. Having so many options is great, but choosing among them can be difficult, especially since there may be eligibility requirements in order to use them.

So it’s a good idea to start early. Don’t wait until your last year of high school to know what’s available in your community. Attend transition and resource fairs, meet with employment service providers to learn what they have to offer, and speak with others who have gone through the process and can recommend options so you have the information you need to choose the best match for you.

*Note to parents:* Your child may need your help to learn what's out there and make sense of it. Keep in mind that it is important that they understand their choices and the ramifications of those choices *just* as much as you do. This is their life – have them involved in the process 100 percent.

2. **Learn and practice being independent.** This is important to think about early. If your caregiver is doing all the work for you, what's going to happen when you get to a job and your caregiver is not there? How will you manage on your own if your caregiver speaks on your behalf, coordinates everything within your schedule, and virtually does it all for you? Learn how to navigate your life more independently now, so that when it comes time to find and work at a job, you feel more ready. That is not to say there won't be supports on a job — a job coach and a supportive employment team can be put in place to help you through, but the overall goal is for you to be independent on a job.

Seek any chance to learn, practice, and develop skills that will lead you to self-sufficiency. This can include making your own doctor's appointments, leading your individualized education program (IEP) and employment support meetings, opening a bank account, responding to your emails, etc. The more you can do on your own now, the more equipped you will be for adulthood and employment.

*Note to parents:* Let your child speak for themselves if they can. It's easier said than done, because it's natural that you want to protect your child and give them the world, but it will benefit them, and you, if they learn how to do things for themselves early on. Allow them these opportunities.

3. **Volunteer to learn soft skills.** Volunteering somewhere a few hours a week while you're in middle and high school will give you an opportunity to learn some of the fundamental skills you'll need for a job in the future. Not only can you learn technical skills (different job tasks and duties), but you can also learn soft skills including:
  - Mastering the use of a schedule and the responsibility of being where you need to be when you need to be there
  - Understanding the importance of a work ethic—the expectation that you will work hard and give the job your best effort
  - Polishing your communication skills, from learning to explain problems you may run into to asking for time off when you need it.

Furthermore, volunteering can help you figure out what you want to do (or not do) in a future job, and you can put it on your resume. You might make a few new friends too.

*Note to parents:* Take a step back a bit and begin to let your child figure out this new environment on their own. Depending on the age and abilities of your child, decide if they can navigate this new environment entirely on their own or if they may need some support from you. For example, facilitate communication with a supervisor or show them how to check a schedule, but don't do it for them. A job coach may also be helpful as an expert supporter and cheerleader.

4. **Recognize your strengths.** You have so much to offer employers and your community, you just have to believe in yourself. Autism does not define you. Understand your gifts, talents, and skills as well as your challenges, and share them with your employment team so they can best support you. Getting a self-assessment and talking with members of your support team to help identify your strengths are two good ways to start.

*Note to parents:* Continue to provide positive encouragement and highlight their successes. The I'm Determined project, from the Virginia Department of Education, put out a toolbox of resources for parents to help build their children's self-determination skills.

Growing up and becoming independent isn't easy. There's a lot to learn and it's never a seamless process for anyone. However, by learning as much as you can now about what is to come, you have every opportunity to become an independent, successful adult. The keys are thinking ahead, learning independence early, and being confident in yourself. If you can do those things, you may find your inevitable jump off of the cliff lands you in a great new place called adulthood.

*Reprinted from: www.hiringautism.org*


NEW YEAR'S EVE


Time Capsule Questions...

Name.....  
 Today's Date..... Age.....  
 Hometown.....

Favorite Thing.....  
 .....  
 Favorite Movie.....  
 .....  
 Favorite Food.....  
 .....  
 Favorite Book.....  
 .....  
 Favorite TV Show.....  
 .....  
 Favorite App.....  
 .....  
 Favorite Video Game.....  
 .....  
 Favorite Activity.....  
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## BLOG REVIEW: Maranda Russell

<https://marandarussell.com/>

*By: Anne Carpenter*

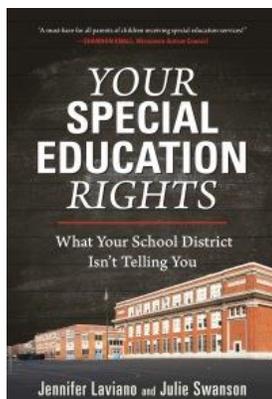
Maranda Russell is a woman who has been diagnosed with both ASD and Bipolar Disorder-her particular diagnosis is Bipolar II, a less severe form of the disorder than Bipolar I. Bipolar II involves fewer extreme cycles of depression and mania than Bipolar I, though one still needs to take medication.

Maranda Russell combines poetry, prose and her own artwork to create a charming and honest blog about feeling lonely, making art trading cards and managing life with a dual diagnosis the best way she can. I found myself liking the author immensely and wowed by her sheer creativity when she shows off art pieces made of stickers combined with watercolor and crayon! She also shows us gorgeous pages she has colored in. In addition, this blog is peppered with numerous YouTube videos of her thoughts on Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Bipolar Disorder, her experience in the hospital and what she learned, and so much more! The combination of YouTube videos, artwork that accompanies all of the written entries, poetry and prose, make for a very rich experience and you feel as though you can really get to know Maranda, it's almost like meeting her in person.

Maranda's thoughts are profound, yet she has a childlike side to her with her love of collecting little toys and all of the color splashed throughout the blog. Watching the videos of her art trading cards is like being back in Kindergarten Show and Tell, my favorite part of Kindergarten! This combination of media also gives the reader an insight as to what it might be like to be on the autism spectrum and have Bipolar II as the combination of ASD and hypomania does allow for creative juices to flow. Interspersed with the gorgeous artwork and moving poetry are posts describing her depressive episodes, along with suicidal ideation-this may seem jarring to the reader but these posts are few and far between and offer some balance to what otherwise might be seen as a candy-coated view of ASD.

I loved the generally upbeat and positive tone of the blog and one can't help but be delighted by the author's desire to keep that sense of wonder and joy alive, in the face of great odds, including Bipolar disorder. I thoroughly enjoyed this blog! *TITLE:* Your Special Education Rights: What Your School District Isn't Telling You





*TITLE:* Your Special Education Rights: What Your School District Isn't Telling You

*AUTHOR:* Laviano, Jennifer and Swanson, Julie

*SUBJECT AREA:* Special Education-IEP

*PUBLISHER:* Skyhorse Publishing

*PUBLICATION DATE:* 2017

*NUMBER OF PAGES:* 204

*BY:* Anne Carpenter

As more and more children are diagnosed with ASD and go to school with typically developing peers, there will be more IEPs done but many of them won't be done optimally to meet the needs of each individual student. There are any number of reasons for this but one thing is for sure-there are many frustrated and angry parents out there!

Fortunately, Jennifer Laviano and Julie Swanson, both attorneys who developed a close friendship, have come to the rescue with their new book, Your Special Education Rights: What Your School District Isn't Telling You and as the authors point out early on in the book, schools aren't keeping parents in the loop. The early chapters are some of the most important ones in this easy to read but eye-opening book and they discuss reasons that parents are often kept in the dark. Such reasons as an education director who doesn't know the parents, money (a huge factor, it turns out!), keeping teachers' jobs intact and possible political reasons such as disagreements on philosophy and teaching practice. These can get in the way of an effective IEP and the authors spare no details in letting parents know just exactly what they're in for, in what seems like a veritable lion's den.

Other factors may include a lack of training about ASD among school personnel and complaints about a child from other parents also come into play and the authors describe all these in clear, language that is free of jargon.

The second part of this book describes action steps that parents can take to bring about change, albeit difficult. These include ways to advocate for one's child, dealing with school personnel and administrators and myths about the IEP process itself which often trip up unsuspecting parents making them more vulnerable.

I can't think of a more valuable IEP resource than this one-every parent should have this book handy to prepare for any eventuality and to better understand the IEP process itself before trouble ensues!

## French Toast in a Mug

French toast in a Mug is quick and easy breakfast that will be a new family favorite. It only takes one dish and is ready in 5 minutes! Your kids will beg for it!

*Author: Jennifer Fishkind, [www.pinkyprincess.com](http://www.pinkyprincess.com)*

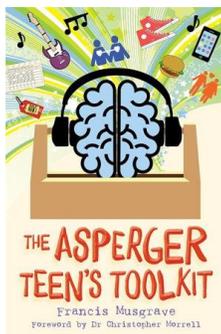
### **Ingredients:**

- 1 piece buttered bread we used challah and I would totally recommend if you have it
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons syrup
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- a pinch of salt
- 1 tablespoon of chocolate chips we used mini chocolate chips which melted really nicely
- Powdered sugar (optional)
- Cinnamon sugar (optional)

### **Instructions:**

- In your microwavable mug, mix together the egg, milk, syrup, cinnamon and salt until all combined
- Cut your bread into square bit sized pieces
- Add the bread to the mug and press them down so they are submerged within the liquid
- Add the chocolate chips to the mug and give a little stir to incorporate them in the mixture
- Sprinkle the optional cinnamon sugar on top
- Microwave for a total of 2 minutes stopping every 30 seconds (count to ten and start again - this is so it doesn't explode in your microwave)
- Let cool for about 1-2 minutes
- Sprinkle powdered sugar on top





*TITLE:* The Asperger Teen's Toolkit

*AUTHOR:* Musgrave, Francis

*SUBJECT AREA:* Autism Spectrum Disorder-Adolescence-Life Skills

*PUBLISHER:* Jessica Kingsley Publishers

*PUBLICATION DATE:* 2017

*NUMBER OF PAGES:* 136

*BY:* Anne Carpenter

More and more adults are being diagnosed with ASD every day and there is more interest in supporting their needs and helping them to live more successful lives. What about teenagers with ASD? This is a group that may still be waiting for help and for answers as to how to go about the challenges that adolescence brings. These challenges include dating and sexuality, getting a job after school, making friends, sports and after-school activities, studies and grades, and so on.

There have been few roadmaps to guide teens with ASD along the way. Francis Musgrave's new book, The Asperger Teen's Toolkit, strives to do just that by providing the middle school reader with a set of tools to help them navigate difficult areas of life.

The author outlines a set of six tools: Inner Power, Positive Attitude, Emotional Control, Bouncing Back, Human Connection and Self-Care. Each tool represents an important aspect of managing life's ups and downs and each has its own recognizable symbol. Starting out with Relationships, including gender identity, sexuality and dating, the author covers such topics as bullying and working with social media. This is all in Part I: Relationships.

In Part II: Well-Being, the author discusses brain development in adolescence, depression, managing anger and stress, drug and alcohol use, self-harm, and eating the right kinds of food. Part III: Interests, covers the value of pets, music and drama, managing money wisely and the common problem of video game obsession. After each chapter, there is the set of six tools, each one of them corresponding to the topic at hand and offering its own special way of dealing with the specific topic. Some of the chapters have additional tools, as well.

The illustrations are cute as a button but may seem childish to some readers. At first, the book seemed a bit condescending but as I went on I changed my mind and found many of the suggestions and tools very helpful. This could be a helpful book for young adults with ASD and I liked the emphasis on positive thinking and using concrete tools to get things done.

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