

Horizons Newsletter

Summer 2018

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of
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5 Life Lessons From Moms Who've Been There, Done Autism

By Julie M Green

We're always told to look to our elders for advice. We're supposed to take it firsthand from those who've "been there, done that." But when you have a child with autism, it often feels like you're making your way through an endless dark tunnel with no Yoda to guide you.

Where are all the wise elders when you need them?

Well, they may be few and far between, but they are out there. I know this because at the recent Autism Symposium in Toronto I sat in the same room as three incredible moms who've raised three incredibly different children. Jennifer Kumins, The Honorable Helen E. Hoens and Ms. Eustacia Cutler — better known as "Temple Grandin's Mom" — respectively, an author/educator, a Supreme Court judge and a Harvard graduate.

Between them, their shared wisdom spans decades. I don't for a minute envy what it must have been like having a child on the spectrum in years past, when awareness and acceptance were scarce and the pat response from clinicians was to put your child in an institution and throw away the key.

We're talking tough-as-nails women, veritable mama bears who by necessity learned the real meaning of patience and compassion. Values that, according to Hoens, her son, Charlie, taught her — not the other way around. One child tore out clumps of his mother's hair; another smeared feces on the walls... Though the stories these moms told were sometimes painful to listen to, and though they were stories that would horrify most parents, I recognized a bit of myself and my son in all of them.

We know that autism comes in a spectrum. Not all children will grow up to hold doctorates or become respected speakers, like Temple. Some never utter a word. Sitting before such shining examples of advocacy was humbling, to say the least. Their lives were as different as their children, yet at the core their wisdom was the same:

1. Worry about today and only today “Give us this day our daily bread,” quoted Cutler. And it's true. The Lord's Prayer holds no mention of yesterday, let alone tomorrow or even next year... Just get through this single day, one hour at a time. One breath after another. On the bad days — and these moms have seen many of those — this mantra is nothing short of sanity saving.

2. Love your children for who they are right now Our kids may have autism, but they are all individuals. Their goals and personalities are varied and ever-changing. Celebrate everything your child accomplishes, whether it's zipping their coat or going off to college.

3. Do the best you can... Because the best is the best you can do. The most we can do for our kids ultimately is help them child cope in “an imperfect world.” Do what you can to educate others about autism then, in the immortal words of a Frozen character, let it go.

4. Don't forsake yourself, your partner or your other children Autism tends to suck up all our energies as parents. Don't lose sight of your identity or that of your other children. They need to feel valued in their own right, even if it's only putting aside 20 minutes of time to connect with others or yourself. It's only when you feel nurtured that you're well placed to nurture your child.

5. Pace yourself As Hoens points out, autism isn't a sprint or even a marathon. It's more like “a weird version of the Iron Man.” There is no finish line or trophy at the end. In fact, there is no end per se to autism. The challenges keep coming, thick and fast. So you need to stay positive and above all, hopeful, in order to meet them at every turn.

Though sage and entertaining, these mothers didn't have all the answers. Or rather, that the answers can only be found once you call off the search. Yes, I think Yoda would approve of that.

Reprinted from: www.huffingtonpost.com

Road Trip Snack Box for Kids

I saw this idea on Pinterest a few weeks back but I can't find the pin now... I should have pinned it when I had the chance! But the pinner used a tackle box for a snack box in the car and I thought the idea was just genius! Since we are heading off on our 16 hour drive very soon I thought I would try out the idea.



So, I picked up a tackle box for \$8 from the hardware and checked out the pantry to see what I could pop in it.



It has:

- *Spiced Chickpeas
- *Cornflakes
- *Dried Fruit
- *Rice crackers
- *Cheerios
- *Raisins
- *Banana Chips
- *Peanuts

And never fear, I also have a container of grapes, mandarins and apples plus some sandwiches for the kids too.

Reprinted from: www.actuallyamy.com

TITLE: Beating Anxiety: What Young People on the Autism Spectrum Need to Know

AUTHOR: Hartman, Davida

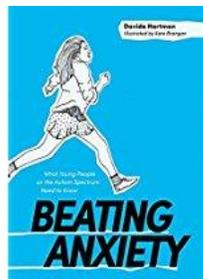
SUBJECT AREA: Autism-Adolescence-Behavioral Strategies

PUBLISHER: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

PUBLICATION DATE: 2017

NUMBER OF PAGES: 109

BY: Anne Carpenter



It is common knowledge that anxiety is part and parcel of the autism spectrum and teenagers seem to bear the brunt of this. Davida Hartman, a Director and Senior Educational Psychologist in Dublin, has come up with a neat little handbook of practical strategies that a teenager with ASD can turn to when the anxiety monster rears its ugly head.

After a brief general introduction, the author devotes the first two chapters to a general description of anxiety including ways that people express and manifest anxiety such as lashing out or staying close to parents, avoiding other people and asking the same question over and over again. I continue to ask the same question over again if I don't feel as though I have gotten a satisfactory answer! This section also includes instructions on how to use this book and relaxation techniques.

The reader then gets to the real heart of the book-the actual strategies themselves that one can use to nip anxiety in the bud. These include getting to know oneself better, learning how to identify and express emotions, taking care of oneself by eating a healthy diet and getting enough sleep, being mindful of what one is doing, learning deep breathing and so much more! Each set of strategies has detailed step-by-step instructions on how to do that particular strategy and each one includes delightful black and white line drawings that make it more fun for the teenage reader.

The book is written in simple, easy to understand language so that one can follow the steps quickly and easily-all the better to stop anxiety in its tracks! This can be a wonderful book for any teenager as all teens are caught up in society filled with uncertainty and social turmoil making the transition to adulthood all the more difficult. Add ASD to the mix and you get a problematic combination indeed. This book provides a valuable lifeline and not a moment too soon! What really makes this book special is the section at the end for adults to better assist their son or daughter in utilizing the techniques so that they can really benefit from them. There are additional suggestions on helping kids with ASD deal with anxiety and fears including desensitization to something that one is afraid of such as dogs or water. This adds something to the book making this an even better tool!

Sensory Gardens for Kids: Plants and Accessories to Stimulate the Senses

An objective in sensory garden design is to encourage users to interact with the plants, often directly, for instance by breaking off leaves to smell or taste. So, all plants must be non-toxic, hardy and sturdy enough to withstand handling. Another reminder is make gardening FUN and that all involved think it is PLAY!

Touch

Choose plants that are durable enough to withstand frequent brushing or handling. Look for textures in soft flowers, fuzzy leaves, springy moss, rough bark, succulent leaves, and prickly seed pods. Enjoy the textures of sage, rosemary, thyme, tarragon, both types of parsley, mint. Accessories can include rocks and sculptures in a variety of shapes, sizes and textures. Use sculpted handrails for safety and added textures.

Smell

Rosemary, sage, tarragon, fragrant creeping herbs, such as thyme, are planted along pathways, walking or wheeling on them will release their aroma intense smell like rosemary or peppermint. Rosemary also has a very good texture and in the spring/summer it has tiny pretty purple flowers. All these herbs are great for cooking too! With over 700 cultivated varieties of fragrant smelling Heather you are sure to find one for your growing region. Heather is a low-growing plant with evergreen leaves. The short stems have many branches. The most common type of wild heather produces bell-like, purple flowers at the top of the stems and branches. The flowers of heather plants produce excellent nectar and bees produce delicious honey. Roses are a good choice in flowers if you know how to deal with 'its' thorny issues'. Crushing and smelling a plant part works well.

Sight

Use plants in all shades of green foliage with various leaf shapes, and different colors of flowers. Choose colorful plants that change through the season offering a new facet with each one. Mobiles, bird baths and sculptures can add visual stimuli as well as sunlight and shadows dancing along all surfaces. Accessories for enhancing visual pleasure include color flood lights, torches, mirrors, and gazing globes.

Taste

Have herbs like mints and chives to provide both scent and taste opportunities. Cherry Tomatoes, strawberries, blueberries, edible flowers, fruit trees and the endless vegetables will offer the taste buds an array of choices. The courgette also grows a flower and the flower is edible too. "But what could be better than going Halloweening with the pumpkins we grew ourselves in our sensory garden or eating pumpkin pie or muffins?" say three of my granddaughters.

Hearing

Kids will hear the sound of wind rushing through the leaves, grasses rustling and seed pods of some plants rattling. The eucalyptus tree has a fantastic sound to it because when there is a breeze it almost rattles.

Have non-plant materials (wind chimes, fountain bubbling).

Birdsongs will fill the garden if bird baths, bird-attracting plants, bird feeders and bird houses are provided and maintained.

Accessories for bringing sounds to the garden include waterfalls, fountains, water harps and wind chimes.



Reprinted from: www.kidcompanions.com



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If you have any questions, please contact us at 517-882-2800 or 1-800-223-6722 (MI only)

TITLE: Asperger's and Adulthood: A Guide to Working, Loving and Living with Asperger's Syndrome

AUTHOR: Grossberg, Blythe, PsyD

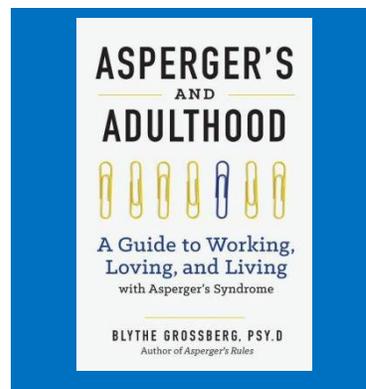
SUBJECT AREA: Autism Spectrum Disorder-Adulthood

PUBLISHER: Althea Press

PUBLICATION DATE: 2015

NUMBER OF PAGES: 115

By: Anne Carpenter



I had seen this book on Amazon for some time and although it was published three years ago, it looked like a good and useful read. I was lucky enough to be able to download it for free on my Kindle Fire. This is the Alpha and Omega of guides for living as an adult on the autism spectrum and covers everything from moving out of Mom and Dad's nest into one's own place, finding and keeping a job and most importantly of all, making friends and dipping one's toe into the seemingly treacherous but rewarding waters of an intimate relationship-that wonderful, but sometimes fraught package deal of friendship, sexual intimacy, marriage, and raising children.

Each chapter covers an important skill area for living a happy and successful adult life and is written in clear, easy to understand language with practical ideas and suggestions along with short case examples. An example of this is the chapter on dating; the author helps the reader to decipher signals that indicate that Jane likes John with the touch of a hand or a pat on his arm. Grossberg does everything she can to dish out advice without being condescending. Even though much of the material, such as moving out into one's own place from Mom and Dad's home is geared toward young adults, a lot of this material could be helpful to older people, too. There are many older people who still haven't found that special someone (most of them women), and they might find some of the advice helpful.

The author guides the reader through the process of seeking employment and making that all important first impression including acing the interview! Interspersed in each chapter is a section in blue that gives additional information such as making one's new place a one of a kind living space and being reciprocal in interacting with others.

This book is short, 115 pages in the print edition, but packs in a great deal of material. The author also provides a gentle push to try to get the reader out of his comfort zone and to try to push the proverbial envelope and to stretch his capabilities. I was impressed with this book and I highly recommend this to all adults on the autism spectrum, for 18 to 108 years old!

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