

Horizons Newsletter

Fall 2018

www.autism-mi.org

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*Autism Society
of
Michigan*



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Create a Teacher Information Packet for Your Child with Special Needs

By Terri Mauro

Worrying about the upcoming school year? Wondering how a new teacher will react to your child? It's natural to want to send in a pile of stickie-noted books and a thick treatise on Everything There Is to Know about your child and your child's disability. But since teachers have, you know, other things to do with their days, you can't really count on all those words being processed.

Instead, take a little of your summer "down time" to fine-tune a packet that delivers useful information without making the teacher work for it. Include these five parts as needed, while keeping that packet as thin and non-threatening as possible. You may also want to have some handouts ready for other school personnel.

1. Positive Student Profile

A Positive Student Profile is like a cheat sheet to your child's strengths and weaknesses—but it leads with strengths, interests, and helpful things to know. It sends a message that your child is a complete little person, not a bundle of test scores and disabilities. Topping your teacher information packet off with a photo and an upbeat presentation gets the message out right from the start that you are advocating for a loved and lovable kid rather than demanding accommodations for a host of problems.

You can find blank templates and examples of Positive Student Profiles from many sources on the Internet, including the following:

- [University of North Carolina](#)
- [AIM Academy](#)
- [Statewide Parent Advocacy Network](#)
- [Indiana Institute on Disability and Community](#)

Use them as-is or adapt the idea in a way that best suits your child, family, and school situation.

2. Successful Strategies

If you're going to write a note to the teacher, think about what would be useful to you if you were taking over a new job. Would you like a list of all the difficult things you have to do, or some hints on how to make the job manageable? Let the new teacher know about strategies that past teachers and therapists have found useful in working with your child — professional to professional advice is always accepted more easily than parent to professional. But you can also share things that you do at home that seem to help your child in educational and behavioral tasks. Express your willingness to meet and brainstorm.

3. Information from the Internet

Obviously, you don't want to bombard the teacher with reams of printouts. But you also can't assume that every teacher knows about every disability that might turn up in a classroom. It's essential for educators to have that information, and the best way to deliver it is with resources that are created especially for them. Again, professional-to-professional advice is always the way to go if you can find it. (Think of how much you like being lectured on how to parent by professionals.)

To find what you're looking for, try doing a Google search for something like "Preparing the school for a child with" and then the name of your child's disability. You'll likely come up with a number of resources designed for the situations that teachers will deal with. (As a bonus, you may also turn up advice useful to you as a parent.) Print one or two, depending on length, and provide a list of other urls to check out.

4. Important IEP Pages

It seems obvious that the teacher would have a copy of your child's IEP. Yet the reality of clerical workflow at schools and school districts often stands in the way of information getting into the hands of those who need it. Teachers of "specials" like gym, art, and music and other regular-education teachers your child works with are especially likely to not have this important information about the school's legal obligations to your child. Provide that information — not necessarily the entire weighty document, but absolutely any pages that apply to that particular class or subject.

5. Behavior Plan

If your child has a behavior plan every single adult who will come in contact with him or her must have access to it, from the bus aide to the lunch lady to the recess monitor to every grown-up in between. Do not assume this has been done. Make copies. Provide them to those who need them. If you prefer, write a brief summary of the key points of how your child's behavior is to be handled. Offer a full copy if needed.

While this information might eventually be mobilized without your help, you know how much a few bad weeks of out-of-control behavior can mess up a whole class or year. There's a lot about the situation you can't control, but you can make sure the information is delivered. Request a meeting with the teacher as soon as possible to further ensure that it's being taken seriously.

Reprinted from: www.friendshipcircle.org

What is Executive Functioning?

One issue that may be causing a child to write well at school and produce completely illegible or totally sloppy written work at home is a deficit in executive functioning skills.

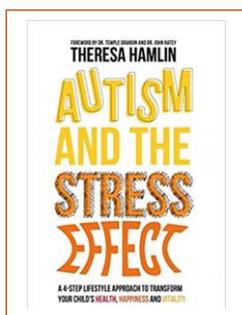
Kids who have trouble managing their executive functioning skills might have trouble with:

- attention
- focus
- problem solving
- impulse control
- emotional control
- organization
- task initiation
- prioritizing and planning
- self-awareness
- working memory
- flexibility in thinking

Handwriting and Executive Function Skills

When asked to complete written work, a lack of executive functions or a inability to utilize executive functioning skills may occur. The child may show resistance to the writing topic, trouble initiating, and difficulties with written work output. Here are signs of executive function problems in handwriting:

- Difficulty generating ideas
- Trouble articulating ideas
- Problems putting their ideas onto paper
- Difficulty forming the letters to produce written text
- Simple or minimized written output despite verbally responding to writing prompts
- Inappropriate pencil grasp
- Trouble initiating writing prompt
- Difficulty organizing work space
- Crumbled paper
- Tearing paper when writing or erasing
- Poor letter formation
- Difficulty with line and spatial awareness on the paper
- Slow writing speed
- Complaints of mechanics of writing (pencil needs sharpened, need better eraser, uncomfortable seat)
- Slow writing speed
- Written work does not answer the question or answers only part of the question despite verbally stating a full response.
- Repeats self in written work (in an open ended writing prompt type of task)



TITLE: Autism and the Stress Effect: A4-Step Lifestyle Approach to Transform Your Child's Health, Happiness and Vitality

AUTHOR: Hamlin, Theresa

SUBJECT AREA: Autism-Environmental Factors

PUBLISHER: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

PUBLICATION DATE: 2016

NUMBER OF PAGES: 271

By: Anne Carpenter

It has been known for some time that children with ASD are often stressed out, anxious and upset much of the time due to sensory processing issues, difficulties with communication and confusion over the social signals that others give off. However, people are discovering that it may be the child's environment that could be contributing to the many problems that these kids have. Theresa Hamlin, Associate Executive Director of the Center for Discovery in New York State, has written a guide to setting up a low-stress environment for children on the autism spectrum; Autism and the Stress Effect: A 4-Step Lifestyle Approach to Transform Your Child's Health, Happiness and Vitality, strives to do just that.

After a few introductory chapters describing the concepts at hand, the author launches into Part 2, where she describes the four elements: Environmental Regulation, Eating and Nutrition Regulation, Emotional Self-Regulation and Energy Regulation. Without being preachy, she suggests healthier alternatives such as a plant-based diet and making one's own version of chicken nuggets and french fries instead of the fast-food variety and strongly encourages much more time in the outdoors, in nature, where a child can get his necessary Vitamin D from the sunshine and plenty of exercise from walking, bicycling or swimming in the summertime. Her suggestions are practical and down-to-earth such as providing as much predictability and structure as possible, feeding the child organic fruits and vegetables and providing different kinds of exercise for energy balance and regulation including using a BOSU ball (a half ball on a solid platform). Yoga, and providing visual cues in the home such as specifying a bed as only for sleeping and not for reading or watching TV are also suggested.

There is no Hocus Pocus, no snake oil here, just ways to retool the home and daily routine so that the child can function in a more optimal way. While I applauded her emphasis on a plant-based diet, that may not always be practical, as this is such a meat-based society. There are workarounds such as veggie burgers and there are so many gluten-free foods now. So, things are changing slowly but surely but in this stressful era of environmental degradation and international conflict, one can always use a helping hand. This book definitely helps, a LOT!

BLOG REVIEW: Not Weird, Just Autistic

<http://www.notweirdjustautistic.com>

NOT WEIRD JUST AUTISTIC

Growing up off the Spectrum

By: Anne Carpenter

As I combed through an extensive blog list, I stumbled on this: Not Weird, Just Autistic so I thought I would take a look and I was intrigued by what I found. The author, J.R. Reed, is a fellow who wasn't officially diagnosed with what was once Asperger Syndrome until he was 46 years old! So, for much of his life he was left to flounder-to sink or swim in a confusing world with a brain that worked in a different way than much of society. In his posts, he writes very candidly and poignantly about his struggles with being undiagnosed and without adequate supports for so many years. It has been a struggle.

The blog is divided into several sections: Daily Life, Work, Family, Relationships, Tye Rants (Tye is his service dog) and Aspie Problems. Subjects include his fear of math stemming from a bad experience at school when he was younger, the problem of anxiety attacks that can often come out of the blue and bullying. He also writes about how he moved from the overwhelming environment of Southern California to a cabin in the Ozarks in Missouri. While the Ozarks are absolutely stunning in its natural beauty and a calmer, more peaceful environment, it has also resulted in more isolation and loneliness which he writes about in a more recent post.

He also writes about ASD and the workplace; he worked for a long time as a car salesman and he knew he was in the wrong kind of work dealing with difficult and demanding customers in a high-pressure environment, so he quit and struggled for a while. Finally, he became a freelance writer. He describes his experience with dating, that didn't go well either (he has a daughter from a previous relationship or marriage) who is an adult now. He tries to stay upbeat with his trademark purple goatee and he soldiers on despite all the difficulties late-diagnosed ASD imposes.

He pulls no punches here-he has to deal with roadblocks at every turn and wants to let adults with ASD know what they're in for so that they can get the help and support they need. His closed Facebook group, Asperger's Life Support, is a step in the right direction and he is just releasing a new book [An Asperger's Guide to Dating Neurotypicals](#), which I may indeed, read, to see if I can get some dating tips-I can download it on my Kindle for free! Now, that's the way to really help and support fellow adults on the Spectrum who feel that they have lost their way and need a good compass to point the way. Getting a Best Blog award doesn't hurt, either.



Autumn Snack Mix

Ingredients:

- 1 cup shelled pumpkin seeds roasted and salted
- 1/2 cup sunflower seeds roasted and salted
- 1/2 cup sweetened coconut flakes
- 3/4 cup raisins
- 1/2 cup red-skinned Spanish nuts or a nut of your choice
- 3/4 cup Reese's pieces

Instructions:

1. Stir together all ingredients in a large bowl.
2. Store at room temperature in an air-tight container.

MAKES 4 CUPS



Microbusiness Spotlight



By Mandy Anderson

Last year, Aaron Johnson and I founded Lake Effect Kitchen, a meal-prep business in Grand Haven. LEK was started to help fill the gap of job training and competitive employment opportunities for people with autism and other disabilities in our community. Aaron and I each have a child with autism spectrum disorder and have served for many years in the local autism advocacy community.

Currently, we employ two people with autism and mentored three students through our internship program during the Winter 2018 school semester. Students and employees learn skills from food prep to customer service to website maintenance. There can be challenges in hiring people with disabilities, but most can be overcome with the right supports - and a willingness to be flexible and have a sense of humor. We work on “soft” skills as well, such as workplace etiquette and personalize their training to their interests as much as we can. We come from a place of presuming competence and have been pleased with the progress of our employees and students; they really met the challenges when given the opportunity. We learned as much as we taught during this past year and are finalizing plans for four interns from our young adult program during the Fall semester.

Our vision for LEK is to build the foundations for people of all abilities to be authentic members of our community. We hope to grow into a family of businesses in a variety of sectors, increasing opportunities for people of all abilities to have the dignity of work and to be included in the community, not working in segregated environments. You can reach Lake Effect Kitchen at 616.935.7229, on Facebook and at LakeEffectKitchen.com

**Become a
Member**

Traditionally, ASM’s quarterly Horizons newsletter was only shared with our members. Recently, we have included others that are not members. If you are enjoying receiving our newsletter, please consider becoming an ASM member at:

<https://www.autism-mi.org/membership/>

*Your membership helps us continue to provide information & referral to families throughout the state of Michigan.

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