

Horizons Newsletter

Spring 2019

www.autism-mi.org

email: asmnr@autism-mi.org



*Autism Society
of
Michigan*



2178 Commons Pkwy

Okemos, MI 48864

517-882-2800

Friendship, Teenagers and ASD

Being a teenager isn't easy. But it's even harder for a teen with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) – particularly when it comes to friendship.

By the teen or even pre-teen years, parents no longer arrange “play dates.” And the concept of including everyone is no longer the norm, as kids begin to segment themselves into different peer groups, often determined by common interests. It isn't difficult to see why teens with ASD who have unusual preoccupations may have trouble finding someone who shares their fascinations.

Furthermore, the hallmarks of an ASD diagnosis are impairments in social skills and language abilities. Yet these are the very tools so necessary to make teen friends. Teenage conversations go beyond what is spoken. They rely on more subtle forms of language, such as body language, facial expressions, and speech inflections. They demand the ability to take another's perspective and to interpret someone else's theory of mind. Difficulty picking up on these social cues can lead to social gaffes, misunderstandings, and potentially rejection, isolation, and bullying.

Complicating things are co-occurring conditions that many with ASD have. In particular anxiety can make it difficult for your teen to try to make friends, particularly if he or she has had trouble in the past. Unexpected

behaviors (whether stimming, tantrums, or uncontrolled emotions) may make peers wary of getting to know your teen.

Your child may benefit from counseling to learn social skills, overcome anxiety, and learn to regulate his or her behaviors. But aside from having a really good behavior plan and Individualized Education Program (IEP) and filling the week with social skills groups, what can your teen do to develop friendships?

Initiate and reciprocate. It takes a friend to be a friend. Your teen may need to be the one to make the first move. Though it may be uncomfortable for your teen, encourage him or her to initiate social interaction. This starts by simply saying “Hi” to people in the hallway at school and asking people about their weekend, talking about the upcoming Geometry test, or commenting on the school lunch offerings. When someone talks to your teen, your teen needs to know how to respond appropriately. (Here’s how that social skills group can be helpful.)

Get involved. Encourage your teen to join clubs or organizations at school and in your community. You may even want to require that your teen find two afterschool activities to take part in. After all, if your son or daughter comes home and plops in front of the TV or computer every day, the opportunities for developing friendship are limited. Help your child find something that he or she is interested in. If your teenager likes sports, join a team, even if it is as the manager or statistician. Team sports can sometimes be difficult to learn in the teenage years, but sports like tennis and squash have developmental leagues for people of all ages, which may help your teen to meet new people and even develop a healthy new passion. If sports aren’t your child’s thing, perhaps it might be drama, robotics, or cooking. Your local YMCA and/or community college likely will have an array of classes to choose from if there isn’t something available at your teen’s school. The local church or synagogue likely has a youth group with planned and supervised activities too.

Encourage age-appropriate activities when possible. If your teen continues to have interests in activities that other kids his or her age have outgrown, consider making a deal with your child. Your child can go to a Lego® group (his preference) if he tries something new (robotics, for example). If your child is not developmentally ready for a group with same age, typical peers, consider finding a special needs group that your child can join. Expand your child’s horizons, but don’t put your child in a situation that is too much for him or her to handle. Start with what is comfortable and branch out from there if needed. The point is for your child to have the opportunity to practice social skills and develop friendships. It is important that your teen experience success, regardless of the setting.

Blend in. As most teens will tell you, it is important to act and look like everybody else. Maybe your teenager doesn’t care what he or she wears, but peers at school will notice and judge accordingly. Pay attention to what other kids are wearing and how they wear it. (For example, how low are their pants on their waists? How long is their hair? Do they wear basketball shoes instead of pull-ons? Do they wear graphic t-shirts of popular bands or collared shirts? Jeans or khakis? Carry a backpack or use a rolling cart?) The point is not to inhibit your child’s individuality but to make sure your teen is not an easy target for teasing or bullying.

Practice good hygiene. The easiest way to being ignored, shunned, or worse is to have body odor or bad breath. Make sure your teen takes regular showers, brushes his or her hair, wears deodorant, doesn't wear too much cologne or perfume, and practices good grooming skills daily.

Know what's cool. Learn what is popular and expose your child to it. This will give your teen something to talk about or enable him or her to join a conversation with peers. Watch popular movies and TV shows with your child so you can explain any uncharted content. While you may be worried that a popular show is "too advanced" for your son or daughter, recognize that if it is popular with your child's age group, your child will become exposed to it one way or another.

The most important variable in whether your teen develops friendships is his or her desire to do so. Some teens with ASD don't much care if they have a friend until they see a reason for having one, perhaps to have a girlfriend or a date to a school dance. Until that motivation, they are comfortable being alone. After all, friendship is hard work: sharing, compromising, showing interest in someone else's passions, and being sensitive to someone else's feelings.

Being able to be a friend as well as having one doesn't happen overnight. Remind yourself and your child that friendship is a process, not an end to itself.

Reprinted from: www.carautismroadmap.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.

eat a rainbow

red

strawberries, raspberries, tomatoes,
red bell pepper, watermelon,
cherries, pomegranate, guava

orange

orange bell pepper, sweet potato,
carrots, peaches, oranges, nectarines,
apricots, squash, pumpkin, cantaloupe

yellow

bananas, yellow bell pepper,
pineapple, lemons, papaya, mango,
corn, yellow apples, yellow pears

green

spinach, lettuce, green apples, kiwi, pears,
celery, cucumbers, peas, broccoli, zucchini,
green bell peppers, honeydew, green beans

blue

blueberries, black currants, black grapes,
prunes, blackberries

purple

red grapes, plums, purple cabbage,
raisins, figs, prunes, eggplant,
purple carrots, purple cauliflower

Step One

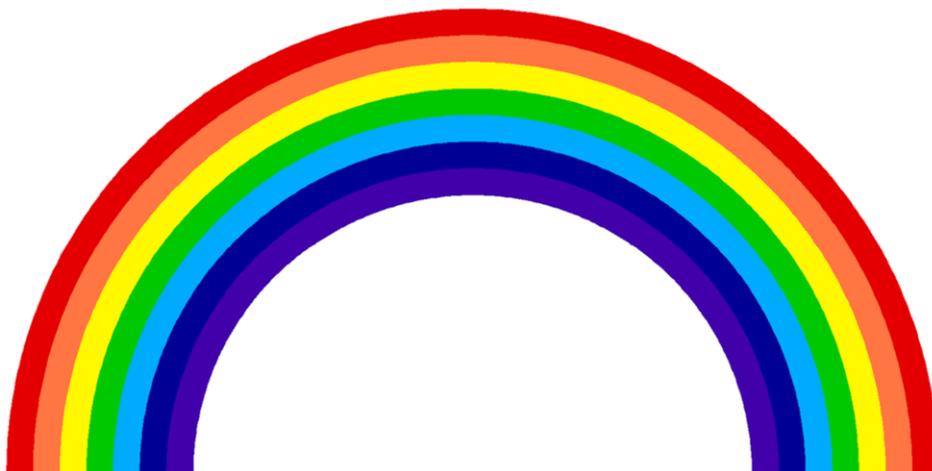
Pick a variety of fruits and veggies in a variety of rainbow colors and place them in a muffin tin. A 12-compartment mini muffin tin works great because you can offer a large variety and just a small sampling of each. Don't give them a tray full of brand new choices. I like to mix it up a bit. Offer fruits and veggies that you know they already love, and then incorporate just a few new choices. If you offer too many new choices, it may turn off the picky eater. By offering familiar favorites and just a few new choices, kids are more likely to sample everything.



Step Two

Have your kiddo sample each fruit and veggie and give you their honest opinion. My kids like doing the “thumbs” approach”: two thumbs up if they love it, two thumbs down if they don't love it, and one thumb up with one thumb down if they think it is okay. The only rule here is that they have to at least try it.

Reprinted from: www.cbc.ca



BLOG REVIEW: The Outnumbered Mama

(<https://autisticmama.com/>)

By: Anne Carpenter

This is a charming and eye-opening blog and I was immediately captivated by the look and the welcoming tone of it. Kaylene first married at 16, had five children then she meets Chris and got a second chance at marriage. Four of her children have some sort of disability.

Kaylene's blog is divided into several categories including Diagnosis, Understanding Autism, Behaviors, Being Autistic and Advocacy and Accommodations with each subject having its own set of blog posts illustrated with large, colorful photos. The author describes raising her children with various learning and developmental challenges including ADHD and learning disabilities, as well as ASD.

I admire her courage and audacity in the face of continuing negativity toward ASD and neurological conditions in general. In addition, she includes posts on how to help a child through a meltdown and to avoid one altogether and as a work at home mom she gives advice on being a blogger and how to go about it successfully. I don't know how Kaylene does it all without having a nervous breakdown but the strategies she uses are brilliant and the blog entries are infused with knowledge, insights, a positive attitude and lots and lots of love! I was so impressed by the breadth and depth of the topics-I just wish there were more new ones and that it was updated more frequently but to be fair, the author has a lot on her plate already, so what she has now is more than enough. But wait, there's more! She discovered that she has autism herself so she is able to better understand the needs of her children and to find ways to juggle marriage, parenthood, homeschooling and work! This was one of the better Mom blogs that I have seen and I would put this on my A list.

BLOG REVIEW: Autistic.ly: Reinventing the Workplace by and for Autistic People

<http://www.autistic.ly>

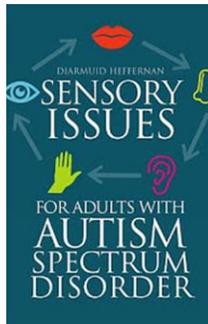
By: Anne Carpenter

As more and more adults come forward with that all important diagnosis of ASD, more and more workplace, including schools, businesses, libraries and retailers will be forced to acknowledge and work with a population that is still marginalized and still not well-understood. Robert Watkins, an adult on the autism spectrum, knows this all too well having been unemployed himself.

He describes that experience in his blog post about being unemployed as an IT person, but not wanting to go back into that same field. Knowing that finding a new job will be a long and rough road, he keeps stating that he will be persistent and not give up. This is one of the positive qualities that autism confers, though it is often combined with other, less desirable qualities, which the author acknowledges. Nevertheless, I admire his willingness to persist and to soldier on despite the odds.

Other posts focus on presenting ways for businesses to create a more inclusive workforce and to create more neurodiversity in the workplace including using marketing strategies. Other posts cover mindfulness at work, his hatred of driving and getting around by motorcycle to commute to and from work. The most recent post is about Quest Diagnostics, a testing lab in Tucker, GA, that is hiring people on the autism spectrum; they are actively capitalizing on the strengths of people with ASD in their attention to detail and making sure that a task is done correctly. This is especially important in the medical field where even one tiny error can make the difference between life and death in a patient. This post can be seen as a template that other employers can use as a guiding tool to help them adapt and accommodate a workforce that is increasingly more neurodiverse-not just with ASD but also with ADHD, learning difficulties, mental illness and substance abuse issues.

This is truly an amazing and important blog, but I wish there had been more posts. Hopefully, the author will come up with more material in the coming months. *TITLE: Sensory Issues for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder*



AUTHOR: Heffernan, Diarmuid

SUBJECT AREA: Autism Spectrum Disorder-Adults-Sensory Processing

PUBLISHER: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

PUBLICATION DATE: 2016

NUMBER OF PAGES: 188

By: Anne Carpenter

When one thinks of sensory issues in autism a picture of a child covering his ears because of the LOUD school fire alarm buzzer comes to mind (that's what I did!) or spinning a colorful top on the floor may come to mind, but what about adults? Not much has been discussed about the sensory problems in adults on the autism spectrum as it has been assumed that these problems would ameliorate once the person got older. Now, however, it has been discovered that they do indeed, have their own set of sensory challenges that make going to college, forging a career path or being in an intimate long-term relationship more difficult. Diarmuid Heffernan, an ASD consultant in Ireland, has written a new book Sensory Issues for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder that describes to a T what goes on in the mind of a person with ASD. There is a swirling sensory maelstrom that an adult with ASD must cope with from getting up in the morning to cooking dinner to putting the kids to bed. Each chapter in the book focuses on a specific aspect of life that is impacted by sensory processing differences.. These include college, the workplace, public spaces such as restaurants and movie theaters, home and other private spaces and sexuality and intimate relationships.

The first two chapters describe the sensory system and sensory processing, in general, so that the reader can have a basic understanding of the sensory process itself. The writing is clear and straightforward and free of technical jargon which is a boon to adults who just want to understand what is going on and why the world feels like such a roller coaster at times. Each chapter has a set of strategies that the reader can use to make that situation more comfortable and easier to manage-not an easy feat when you can't filter out all the sensory noise or when you just can't get enough of those color-changing lights! This can help the adult rearrange his or her environment for maximum sensory benefit and comfort so that navigating the world can be easier and more enjoyable. In addition to helpful, practical advice and strategies, the author provided information that I never knew, about the sheer complexity and wonder of how our sensory processing affects every single aspect of our lives and how sensory processing difficulties can compromise the quality of life for adults with ASD unless accommodations are provided at every turn.

This book was a fascinating read and a valuable and important resource for adults with ASD who have to face the sensory kaleidoscope that is the outside world every day but who are often left behind.

Special Thanks To:

In Honor of Lisa Kimes:

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