

Horizons Newsletter

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21 Tips for Presuming Competence

In the disability world, presuming competence means that a person with a disability has the ability to think, learn and understand – even if you may not see any evidence that this is the case. Often there is an assumption that autistic people, especially people who are non-speaking, can't understand what is being said. When teaching children, it is important that teachers presume that children **can** learn once we find the way to reach them, rather than assuming they **cannot** learn because they do not learn as others do.

A highly-recommended resource for Presuming Competence is the Autistic Self Advocacy Network's Curriculum for Self-Advocates.

Below are the tips they suggest with a discussion on some and an addition of 3 other tips added.

1. Always ask before giving assistance and let the person tell you what you may do to be helpful.
2. Treat adults as adults. Use a typical tone of voice, just as if speaking with a friend or co-worker. (In other words, don't talk to adults like they are babies).
3. In general do not assume a person can't read, but also don't assume they can. (For teachers assume that a student can learn to read even though you may think they don't have the ability to read.)
4. Speak to the person directly, not the support person or companion (parent or aide in the classroom).

5. Don't assume a person who has limited or no speech cannot understand what is being said. People usually understand more than they can express.
6. Never pretend you understand what is said when you don't! Ask the person to tell you again what was said. Repeat what you understand.
7. Do not try to finish a person's sentence or cut them off. Listen until they have finished talking, even if you think you know what they might say. (And even if they make take longer to express themselves than you are accustomed to).
8. You might not be able to see someone's disability. There are many disabilities that are hidden within a person. (That's why they call autism an invisible disability).
9. Avoid using stereotypes in your thinking. We all have different personalities and our own ways of doing things. To find out what a person prefers, ask them directly. ("If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism.")
10. Offer compliments but avoid giving a lot of praise when people with disabilities do typical things.
11. Most people with disabilities want to help others, as well as be supported, and enjoy making a difference in someone's life. (Just like everyone else)
12. Look for something that indicates a person understands. Respond to any attempt the person makes to communicate.
13. Avoid speaking for others. Encourage a person to speak on their own behalf. If you must restate something, be careful not to change the meaning.
14. Because some people like to please others, it is important to be mindful of your body language, tone of voice, and other gestures that may influence a person's decision.
15. Have your support of the person be low-key, almost "invisible" to others. Don't "over support."
16. Let a person make their own decisions. Don't take over and make decisions for them. It can be difficult for some of us to make quick decisions. Be patient and allow the person to take their time.
17. Focus on what a person can do. All people want a chance to live a typical life, just like everyone else.
18. Find ways to include a person in a conversation. Do not talk about the person to others as if they're not there. (This is especially common among parents and their children).
19. Avoid using the terms "low-functioning" and "high-functioning."
20. Include people with disabilities in meetings about their own goals. Begin at a young age to include students in their own IEP meetings and have them talk to the teachers about their struggles and how best to accommodate them in the classroom.
21. Remember there is much research about expectations. Children perform to the level of expectations of teachers and parents.

Decompressing after School: Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

For children and teens with an autism spectrum disorder

The start of the school year brings many more demands on our children than they typically face during the summer. They now have more non-preferred tasks and activities, longer more structured days and a return to waking early and going to bed early. For many children with ASD this transition is, to say the least, challenging. Many expend a lot of energy to just “hold it together” and make it through the school day while clearly feeling overwhelmed.

When children with ASD get home from “working all day” they need to “decompress” just like us. How often have you gotten home from a full day and thought, “I just need five minutes to decompress.” After taking time to regroup you feel better and are able to reconnect at home. Well, children with ASD are similar.

When they get home, we want our kids to let us know how the day went and then to do their homework (to get it out of the way). However, for some children this may work but for many it may add fuel to the significant stress they are already feeling. You may wonder why they are acting like little time bombs waiting to explode at the most trivial request from you. It’s not you. They need to decompress.

Teaching your child ways to decompress and re-energize is a critical life skill. Ways for you to facilitate this process will depend on your child. In general, however, there are several things you can do. Here are some additional useful strategies:

1. Time is key

We suggest you give your child 30-40 minutes right after coming home to wind down. Do not put any demands on him or her during this time other than (having previewed this beforehand) where to put their school packs, shoes and jackets upon arriving at home. Keeping demands to a minimum can aide a child’s already over-loaded system to calm down.

2. Keep questions to a minimum

In general keep questions to a minimum unless your child chooses to engage with you. We are curious and want to know what happened at school so we ask a lot of open-ended questions. These can put more pressure on a child when the child just wants to “let it go”.

3. When it’s time to ask questions keep them concise and shift focus to positive

Instead of an open ended question like “how was school day or what did you do today?” ask instead “Tell me one thing you were grateful for today” or “Tell me one thing that made you happy or smile, or “tell me your high and your low.” Shifting the focus to moments of gratitude/happiness instead of dwelling on the negative can in itself help the child decompress.

4. Keeping demands to a minimum

Have a snack ready but don’t force it and let the child engage in a preferred activity. For those who come home very wound up let them have some outdoor play or movement; others may need quiet music, reading or to be alone. Sometimes electronics or TV can be a decompression tool. Sometimes “zoning out” for a set amount of time is enough to “clear the head.” Know your child and his/her rhythms and what works to help them regroup. But stay away from putting increased demands on your child right away.



Anxiety presents itself in many different ways...

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The desire to control people and events



Difficulty getting to sleep



Feeling agitated or angry



Defiance and other challenging behaviors



Having high expectations for self, including school work & sports



Avoiding activities or events (including school)

Pain like stomachaches and headaches



Struggling to pay attention and focus



Intolerance of uncertainty



Crying and difficulty managing emotions



Over-planning for situations and events



Feeling worried about situations or events

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Gilpart by Kate Hadfield & Sarah Peorino

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TITLE: Visual Supports for People with Autism: A Guide for Parents and Professionals, Second Edition

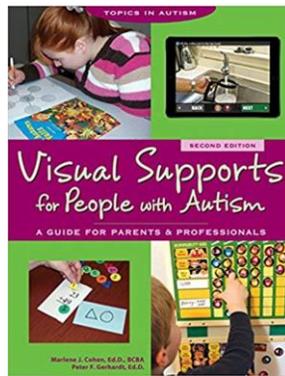
AUTHORS: Cohen, Marlene J., Ed.D, BCBA and Gerhardt, Peter F., Ed.D

SUBJECT AREA: Autism Spectrum Disorder-Visual Supports

PUBLISHER: Woodbine House

PUBLICATION DATE: 2016

BY: Anne Carpenter



It is now a given that most, if not all folks on the autism spectrum from early childhood all the way through adulthood learn best and function better with visual supports (I know I do!) This includes lists, calendar apps, Post It notes and so much more! Because the use of these supports is so varied and can be complicated, there needs to be a thoroughly written guidebook for teachers and parents to go by. Visual Supports for People with Autism: A Guide for Parents and Professionals, Second Edition, does the job by providing extensive instruction and guidance.

Each chapter describes different kinds of visual supports that can be used and how to use them effectively with clear, easy to understand instructions and plenty of illustrations and photos in black and white with color photos in a separate section at the end of the book. In addition, there are case studies that illustrate the use of visual supports so that the concepts can be reinforced. I was amazed by all the different tools that can be used and the authors cover both low-tech and high-tech supports so paper calendars and sticky notes get equal treatment right alongside smartphone apps, computers and I-Pads.

I was impressed by how thorough the authors were in describing how to use various visual tools for different aspects of life and was pleased that there was a chapter on the use of these with teens and adults. It has been thought that they should be used with younger children and that teens and adults wouldn't need them as much but that is not the case, they can be used throughout the lifespan. There is even a chapter on how to fade the use of these supports, if it is felt that the individual does not need them at some point.

The authors state that the book doesn't need to be read cover-to-cover but just let the reader read the most relevant sections and refer to them later or just go to the sections that are more important at the time. I read the whole thing to get a sense of the material and was impressed. The second edition covers the high-tech supports that weren't around back in 2007 as the I-Phone was just launched that year and websites and apps weren't nearly as advanced as they are now. The options for visual supports are plentiful and we can also be grateful for the doors that technology and particularly visual technology can open to people with ASD and similar challenges.

Texting Etiquette for Individuals with Autism

Ethan Hirschberg - www.thejourneythroughautism.com

Question:

“Hey Ethan! I’m having an issue. I’m 19 and have Autism. I have many difficulties when it comes to texting people. It’s hard to read what they’re exactly saying and I don’t like it when people take a long time to respond, even if I know they have read it. Do you like texting? What do you find difficult about texting? Do you ever get anxious?” - Andrew

Answer:

Hey Andrew, thank you for your email! I can completely relate to your problem because I have difficulties texting all of the time. I know that having issues with texting is not something that only neurodiverse individuals experience. While neurotypical individuals go through some of the same types of texting issues, I believe that Autism can certainly play a factor in increasing the prevalence and severity of these issues.

I have a hard time understanding what people are saying in texts. Not literally, as in I cannot comprehend the actual words, but I cannot always understand the social context that comes with it. Because I have trouble understanding sarcasm, when people text me, I have no way to tell if someone is being sarcastic or not! Even emojis can be hard to read! I’ve learned to clarify via text to make sure that I am accurately understanding what the other person is trying to say. People who know me really well also have learned to just not be sarcastic via text because there’s no way that I will understand it.

In addition, there is the aspect of people not responding to texts. This is one factor that I have a lot of trouble with. If someone doesn’t respond to a text within a few hours, I occasionally think to myself if I have done anything wrong. It’s a little bit weird for me because in reality I know that there are many logical reasons why people might not be able to text, but nevertheless I still worry. I think I am definitely getting better at this though.

I get upset and annoyed when someone says that they will text me, but then they don’t. For instance, “I’ll text you back in 10 minutes” or “I’ll text you later.” I am totally fine when these phrases are texted, but get bothered when they’re not accurate. I get annoyed when “10 minutes” turns into me sending the “???” text after 30 minutes and when “I’ll respond later” or “later tonight” turning into a nonexistent text.

I understand there are things that get in the way of life. I survive off of structure and am disappointed when people give one timeline and then do another (or not at all). I’m starting to realize more and more that when neurotypical individuals say “I’ll text you when I get home,” it may mean “I’ll text you later tonight.” I constantly try to work on my flexibility... slowly but surely it’s coming along.

With all of this in mind, Andrew, there are certainly aspects of texting that is much harder for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Nonetheless, many others experience the same types of frustration. What I have found to be the most helpful is to (no matter how tough it is) come straight out and explain your feelings! If you don’t like it when people take a long time to respond, ask. If it’s hard to read what someone is trying to say, clarify.



Easy Egg Sandwich for School Breakfast

You will need:

1 egg

1 slice of American cheese

1 slice of deli ham or Canadian bacon

1 English muffin

Place the English muffin in the toaster. In a microwave-safe dish, scramble the egg with a splash of water. Place in microwave oven for 1 minute. It will cook into a flat, round disk.

To assemble the sandwich, place the cheese on the hot, toasted muffin, add the egg and then the ham on top. Top with the other half of the English muffin.

Voila! The healthiest and fastest egg sandwich I know! Move over, cereal...



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