

Fall 2022 Horizons Newsletter



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Making Friends: The Ups and Downs of Friendship on the Spectrum

As one who grew up on the autistic spectrum, friends were hard to make and even harder to keep.

We all have ways to cultivate and maintain friendships, and many on the spectrum face unique challenges regarding this aspect of life. What comes easily to some may not for others? For me, it was a lifelong learning process that required much patience and open-mindedness.

Unfortunately, we're all human, and we all make mistakes. When it comes to social boundaries, one on the spectrum may find making and maintaining friendships more difficult than usual - and the cost of losing a friend can be quite burdensome.

One such instance that comes to mind was when I was in high school. I managed to nudge my way into a group that tolerated me for the most part. One day, when someone started eating a bowl of chicken noodle soup, I - in my matter-of-fact manner - pointed out that it easily resembled vomit. Not only did this person stop eating, but so did everyone else at the table. A minute later, I was the only one left sitting there, as everyone had politely excused themselves.

This, unfortunately, offered me a hard lesson in communication. It's not one of my best memories, but when it comes to personal development, I easily trace my journey back to this little moment.

Through trial-and-error, I've narrowed what I've learned about making friends down to a few observations. This is one area in my life where progress does not come easily, but once the ball gets rolling, the rewards are plentiful and enriching.

As is the usual caveat, the following recommendations stem from my own experience. There are plenty of resources available, such as [Ambitious About Autism](#) and [Marcus.org](#). Much of what they recommend may be echoed in my own recommendations below, but it is my hope this tidbit helps one person on the spectrum put another piece of a puzzle together in their lives.

1. Remember The Simplest Rule

"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."

It's a simple saying, and we've all heard it. However, in today's world, where nearly every syllable is held under a microscope for insensitive undertones, one on the spectrum may struggle with this concept more than others. I know I've had my share of errors in this field. One such instance occurred in my first year of college when a friend got a haircut, and I promptly asked, "What happened to you?"

We're friends now, but she didn't speak to me for a while after that one.

Nevertheless, in the laboratory of friendship-building, this simple tip can be the best tool when it comes to navigating social boundaries. This is where trial-and-error comes into play more than ever, and one on the spectrum will benefit from finding those who're more than forgiving of their mistakes. Some will not be, and that's where learning experiences come into play.

While sifting through today's ever-changing social norms, those on the spectrum can always benefit from the basics - "Please," "Thank You," "Yes," "No," and "Have a Nice Day."

Ultimately, it boils down to making people smile, leading to my next point.

2. Keep 'Em Smiling

All my life, I've found that if the other person in question is not smiling, I'm doing something wrong. Quite often, I come off as a joker or boyish in my behavior, and this is an area I need to improve as a 35-year-old man. What I will never sacrifice, however, is the desire to keep a smile on everyone's face.

As is, I have a group of friends now that I spend time with - and I would not trade a single one of them for the world. Out and about, I try to keep them laughing as best as I can. I often find self-deprecating humor a good tool, only because I'm my harshest critic (as are most successful people, mind you), and I don't want to risk losing a friend over a careless comment.

Plus, smiles are free to give out and easy to exchange. Once you've got the rhythm down, people will want to be your friend no matter what.

3. Stick With Those Who're Honest

When I was in Middle School, a bunch of clowns talked me into making an obscene gesture with my hands and tongue to teachers whenever their backs were turned. They would laugh, as would others, and I interpreted the laughter as positive feedback. That is until my friend Justin pulled me aside and explained the nature behind the gesture.

As it were, Justin was my only friend in the matter - and he would remain my friend for years to come. He stayed honest with me when others didn't.

As one on the spectrum, as well as an actor and a writer, I benefit from direct feedback where I need improvement. I've always had problems interpreting certain gestures and cues in public, and I find those who tell me the hard truth about my shortcomings to be my true friends.

One on the spectrum might appreciate this approach like no other. Once direct feedback is given, the individual in question will be left to pass or fail the next test. Ultimately, it all boils down to interacting with the right people at the right time - but when in doubt, look for the person who says, "No, don't do that."

It'll make life way easier to navigate from there.

4. Take Your Time - And Don't Be Afraid of It

Many on the spectrum have been known to exhibit significant degrees of anxiety - and this is no joke regarding interpersonal contact. Basic eye contact is enough to trigger a rush of dopamine in the brain; for some on the spectrum, this rush can be too much.

I myself come off as overly energetic and repetitive at times. This is by and large due to my own anxieties when it comes to speaking with people. Some on the spectrum may gush with energy, while others might withdraw into their own little worlds.

Thankfully, this is where the concept of "practice, practice, practice" comes into play. The more one interacts with another, the more one might ease into the routine of establishing connections with them. One can work on curbing excessive energy, while another can work on direct engagement with another person.

It must be stressed, though, that the individual must be free to go at their own pace. I've had my share of peers try to push me into a social situation despite my objections, and it almost always ends in failure (think being forced to speak on stage for the first time with no prompt - yes, you will fail, and you will not be happy with the person who forced you onto the stage).

One on the spectrum can benefit from social interaction in their own home with parents and siblings to start with. Once effective rapport is established, they can be eased into other circles. Time and patience will be vital in this area, but once they're intermingling with friends - and even trying to introduce you to them - many goals will have been accomplished in this area.

Final Note

I confess that this has been tough to write, as developing interpersonal relationships has been the greatest challenge in my life. Among my biggest regrets in growing up is failing to be a better friend to other people.

As always, one must remind him or herself that it's part of an adventure. There will be pitfalls, but the rewards at the end of the journey will make these setbacks worth it. In the meantime, remember to keep smiling and treasure those looking out for you. They're worth more than money will ever be.

Reprinted from: www.blog.stagesoflearning.com

ZUCCHINI MUFFINS



INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups shredded fresh zucchini (*about 2 medium zucchini*)
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup mashed ripe banana (*or applesauce*)
- ½ cup honey (*or pure maple syrup*)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 ¾ cups white whole wheat flour (*or all-purpose flour*)
- ½ cup chocolate chips or chopped nuts (*optional*)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350° F. Spray a muffin pan with cooking spray and set it aside.
2. Wrap the shredded zucchini in a clean kitchen towel or paper towels & squeeze out excess moisture. Set aside.
3. Place the butter in a large microwave-safe mixing bowl and melt it in the microwave. (Or you can melt the butter in a pan on the stove.)
4. To the bowl with the butter, add the mashed banana (or applesauce), honey (or pure maple syrup), vanilla and eggs. Whisk until well combined.
5. Add the cinnamon, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Whisk until very well combined, making sure there are no clumps of baking soda or baking powder in the batter. Add the white whole wheat flour and mix it in using a rubber spatula until just combined. Stir in the zucchini (and chocolate chips or nuts, if using), being careful to not over-mix the batter.
6. Scoop the batter into the muffin pan, dividing it evenly between the 12 muffin wells. Bake muffins from 16 to 18 minutes, or until a tester inserted into the center of a muffin comes out clean. Let muffins cool in the pan for 5 minutes and then transfer to a wire rack to finish cooling.

Reprinted from: www.kristenskitchenblog.com

How to Write Social Stories

In 1990, author Carol Gray developed what she calls “Social Stories” – a way of teaching social and life skills to children on the autism spectrum, using a blend of visual and auditory tools. Gray’s Social Stories are designed to help children navigate others’ emotions, which in turn can foster positive relationships with peers, teachers, and family, as well as reduce the feeling of isolation.

Social Stories are carefully worded descriptive and coaching sentences that teach perspective and independence in common social situations. Each story follows Gray’s special formula to ensure success.

Structuring Your Social Story

Social Stories have seven key components. Together, these components—or sentences, describe and coach any upcoming experience before it happens. Gray suggests using two descriptive sentences for every one directive sentence so as not to overwhelm your child with details.

Preparing the Story

Once you’ve picked the topic, begin to write a sentence for each component. When possible, involve your child in the creation of your Social Story. This allows them to take ownership of the story and in turn, may increase compliance. Try asking open-ended questions to get your child interested and invested in doing the right thing.

Seven Key Components of Social Stories:

- **Descriptive** – the “who, what, where, and why” details are emphasized to allow your child to relate to the situation when it occurs.
- **Directive** – clear instructions as to how your child should appropriately respond.
- **Perspective** – this should describe one of your child’s possible responses to or feelings about a given event.
- **Affirmative** – states a common value or opinion. Here, you can emphasize the important points by referring to a law or rule the learner should understand.
- **Cooperative** – describes the actions of the people around your child based on their response to the social setting.
- **Control** – technique to stop time and think about their next step.
- **Partial** – this should encourage your child to make a guess about the next step.. This is usually represented by a blank in the story.

Here is an Example of a Social Story with the sentence components identified:

- All people need personal space. (*Descriptive*)
- If I move inside someone else’s bubble when I am talking to them it might make them feel uncomfortable. (*Perspective*)
- I give my friends, family, and teachers personal space by standing 2 steps away when talking to them. (*Directive*)
- Sometimes I go into Mom and Dad’s personal space to give them a hug or a kiss. (*Descriptive*)
- That is okay because they are my family. (*Affirmative*)
- I can hold onto my favorite stuffy while I decide. (*Control*)
- When I give people personal space, I know I am being a good friend. (*Cooperative*)

Adding Pictures

Visual aids are a great way to show exactly what your story is telling. Determine what pictures will help explain the situation. Placing the picture(s) above the text allows the image to be ingrained in your child’s mind as they process the story. Make sure the pictures are clear and represent the meaning of the story. These images are most effective when using photographs of your child, their peers, their classroom or your home.

If pictures of the real setting are not available, you can do an image search online and print pictures out.

Reading the Story

You've got your sentences and visual aids... it's time to read! Set yourself up for success by showing excitement yourself and choosing a time when your child is in a "ready to learn" mood and eager to pay attention to the story. Read the story several times and, if possible, have your child read it aloud.

After Reading the Story

Once you have read the story several times, try role-playing to deepen your child's understanding of their behavioral expectations. Don't forget to promote good responses and behavior as you ask questions and role-play. Discuss personal experiences regarding the story to make connections to real-world situations. Asking questions that trigger memories gives them a chance to reflect and apply what they've learned to the story. Keep the Social Stories easily accessible so that your child can re-read the story as many times as they want!

Reprinted from: www.discover-hope.com



Special Announcement from ASM:

We are pleased to inform you that the name of our organization has been changed from Autism Society of Michigan to **Autism Support of Michigan (ASM)**.

We ensure you that this rebranding will not change our mission or availability to help those on the spectrum, their families and professionals that assist these individuals.

Our contact phone number, website, email and mailing addresses will remain the same. Please feel free to contact us at: 517-882-2800 or asminr@autism-mi.org with any questions, or concerns.

10 Autumn Activities for Children with Autism

1. Heavy Body Work on a Hill

So, this is my favorite fall activity: rolling down hills. I don't know why but finding a great hill and just going for it seems to go together with this season. Rolling encourages large motor coordination, vestibular orientation and motor planning. If you have a child who doesn't like to roll, get a cardboard square and find a dry grassy hill to slide down. My mother-in-law used to do this with my twins, and I can tell you now, it is their favorite memory. Oh...and she was 78 at the time. No excuses.

2. Heavy Feet

Have a pile of leaves? Well, someone does. Go find it and jump in! The crunchy sounds and smells are just enough to get a great workout and sensory integration therapy all at once. Stomp, jump and roll around! Then have your kids' stuff them into lawn bags or a garbage can and jump in those too!

3. Heavy yard work

Speaking of leaves...Grab a couple rakes and let your kids do some heavy work in the yard: raking, dragging branches, pulling the leaf bags down to the bottom of the driveway and sweeping all promote muscle tone, circulation and a good work ethic. Plus, you may get a well-manicured yard...but don't count on it!

4. Hike

Hit the trails. Don't forget some good shoes for walking or hiking, water bottles, a backpack with snacks and cell phone. You can search online for walking trails where you live. October is a perfect time of year to do this, but you can hike well into the early parts of the winter too.

5. Sidewalk chalk

I love sidewalk chalk for its heavy handwork benefit and creative outlet. Draw circles for jumping in and out of or draw a hopscotch board. Have your kids trace their foot over and over again in a row, and then make the footprint into horses. When they are done, they can wash the sidewalk off with a water hose and watch the colors mix and swirl together.

6. Treasure Hunt

Give your kids a list of items to find that are seasonal: red leaf, pinecone, naked stick, rock, and so on. Then send them off to bring back these autumn treasures. Spill them all out and let them tell you where they found each one. This is a great speech/language activity as well as fine motor and motor skill activity that brings organizational skills to the forefront, as well. You can even pull one object from the bag, hide it and see if they notice which one is missing.

7. Noodle hop

It's time to do something with all of those swimming pool noodles. Spread them out across the lawn and have the kids leap over the noodles. If you have round ones, use them as targets for tossing.

8. Ladder toss

Grab an outdoor ladder. Hang the numbers 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 on the rungs. Now have your kids toss balls, beanbags or even pinecones through the rungs, scoring points for when they make it through each rung. A great visual tracking and visual motor skills.

9. Make a Face!

Fall and pumpkins go together. If you prefer, you can cut out a face, but you can also just have your kids dig out the guts with you. It's a great tactile, sensory activity. Have them separate the seeds from the guts. You can dry the seeds, count the seeds and even cook them. And, you can make pumpkin pie!

10. Camp out

Most people think of camping out as a summer vacation activity, but the fall weather is great for kids who are sensory sensitive. Grab a tent, sleeping bags, matches, hotdogs or hamburgers with the fixings and head for a campsite. Your kids may not remember every moment of the fall, but they will remember a camp out!

With Special Thanks To:

In Memory of Susan Punch:

Milton & Ruth Lagasse
 Peter LaPine
 Jan Milner
 Bruce & Teresa Sutherland
 Courtney Venker
 Patricia Weigel

In Memory of John “Dick” Jones:

Martha Bamfield
 Cynthia Church
 Andrew Rosales

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