



PERSPECTIVES

A publication for parents and professionals serving individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

What Qualities Make a Great Teacher or Therapist?

"I wish I could remember my Speech Teacher's name" says Michael. I was only 6 years old but she had a profound effect on my life and I'd like to thank her." Michael's speech therapist would be shocked to hear this. She tried every method in the book and then some to get Michael to talk. She never did witness the miraculous day, when at 8 years old Michael suddenly began to speak in full sentences. "It was her faith in me and the silly games she played to encourage me that finally made it all click into place" says Michael, now 39 years old. As a child he was labeled mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed and finally given a diagnosis of autism. Today he holds a full time job and has meaningful relationships. "I owe it all to my parents and the few teachers that gave it their all" says Michael.



Michael's story proves that just because you're met with blank stares doesn't mean you're not having a profound effect on your student. If teachers and therapists knew what a powerful influence they are, most would be astounded. But students realize the power their teacher's have. And so do parents. Because of this, they spend much of their time hoping and praying for that special educator who'll make a great impact on their child's life.

So what are the qualities that make a teacher or therapist stand apart from the crowd? We heard from parents across the globe. We heard from adults with special needs as they shared their childhood experiences. And what we found is that they all agree! One by one they reiterated the qualities of a top

teacher or therapist. In no particular order, the makings of a great educator are laid out below.

Believe in your students and *Expect Success!*

One skill that never needs to be taught is our sixth sense. Think of your own experiences. You might come home excitedly and announce a new goal you'd like to achieve. "That's great!" says your spouse, but you sense he feels otherwise. Students with special needs have the same intuition. If deep inside an educator feels a student can't achieve a goal, the chances are he won't. But if an educator expects success, a student will pick up on that vibration and rise to the occasion. Strong educators know that anything is possible and they instill this belief in their students. They congratulate their students and smile with pride when new concepts are mastered. They make visual charts of all the student's accomplishments, instilling in them a feeling of accomplishment. When a student believes the sky is the limit and that he can do anything, he'll reach far beyond anyone's expectations, perhaps even his own.

Motivation

We all need motivation. Whether it's a weekly paycheck or an Olympic gold medal, that shining reward is what gets us moving. Students are no different. Find their interest and use it to motivate them. Does your student love slapstick humor? Fall off your chair if he gets the answer correct, or play skits from America's Funniest Home Videos when an assignment is completed. Great educators make learning fun. Are you teaching your students about the

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Civil War? Make it animated. Pretend you're someone from the North and have a student pretend he's from South. Act out a likely scenario. Interactive learning is motivating and fun. Use rewards and privileges to encourage participation. Lunch with the teacher is a favorite with young kids. Pizza parties and extra computer time always goes down well. A token based economy is highly effective. In this method, students gather points or pennies for work well done. As they collect them, they can exchange them for prizes like pencils, notepads and ice cream.

Build self esteem

Children with special needs face a common dilemma. They are constantly being corrected. It might be their language, their pronunciation, their communication skills or their behavior. They might not understand that correcting these issues will help them later in life, but they do get the message that they must change. They feel they're not good enough the way they are. As you might imagine, it can't be easy keeping your self esteem intact. A good teacher or therapist constantly uses character building activities in their sessions. They might give out awards. They might create "What I'm good at" books. They find ways to make each student shine. But most of all, they get the message across that each child is perfect just the way he is, and that learning some new skills will simply help others understand him better.



Think outside the box

There are many that teach a certain way and if repetition doesn't work they say "He doesn't have the comprehension," or "He's just not ready." A good teacher or therapist never falls into this trap. When something's not working, they think "I can't change the student but I can change the teaching method." And then they get busy. They might consult with others or search on-line for ideas. They use their creative talents and devise a new way to explain the lessons. One therapist had a "bag of popcorn strategies." She placed a hot air popcorn popper on a sheet. The children sat on the outside boundary of sheet. As the popcorn began to pop, she asked them to describe what they could see, smell and hear. She had them do a movement activity where the children pretend to be popcorn kernels. The students curled up into tight balls and as they, the kernels, started to

warm up; they wiggled, jumped up to full body extension, arms up, and shouted "POP." Her students did a craft where they made popcorn snowmen. She did a math activity and demonstrated addition and subtraction with popcorn pieces. And I think you can probably guess what they had for snack! This is one example but there are thousands of creative teaching strategies developed by resourceful teachers and therapists.



Focus on the strengths

Out of the desire for students to be successful, educators attempt to help them become stronger in areas in which they struggle. The problem here is that it's so easy to end up focusing on a student's weaknesses. Years of research show that encouraging the strengths of an individual is the path to greatest achievement. It's not a good idea to ignore a student's challenges but rather to use their strengths when tackling areas of difficulty. Let's take an example. Maggie is poor at reading comprehension. Her task is to read a short story, define the main idea and answer a series of multiple choice questions. The story is about a King who rules over his land. But Maggie has no interest in folk tales. It's hard for her to keep track of the story and she gives up before she's even started. A great educator knows that it's important to take one step at a time.

Initially it's a good idea to use a story that Maggie is interested in. Maggie loves cats and knows almost everything about them. Her teacher finds passages about cats and creates reading comprehension assignments. Since Maggie is fascinated with the subject, she is far more eager and willing to focus on the questions and determine the main idea. As Maggie's

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comprehension improves, so does her confidence. Maggie now learns that she also needs to complete reading assignments of lesser interest.

Positive communication with parents

Parenting a child with special needs brings a lot of joy but it comes along with a fair share of heartache. One never gets used to the judgment, pity and disapproving stares of those in the community. Parents need to feel that teachers and therapists are on their side.



They want to take an active role in their child's education and progress. Strong educators always start a conversation with a parent on a positive note. They recognize a student's strong points at the beginning of each meeting. If a child is falling short of an objective, they don't just notify the parent their child is not making the grade. With an open mind, they discuss ways of motivating the student and possibilities of how to achieve the next goal by using the child's strengths. They listen, they collaborate, they advise and then they take action. By doing so, they have a profound effect on their students and receive everlasting gratitude from the parents.

Flexibility

Great therapists and educators know their subject and they always come prepared. Whether it's an occupational therapy session, speech class or social studies lesson, great teachers never wing it. They have a lesson plan and they carry it out BUT they're not afraid to be flexible and adapt to unexpected circumstances. Strong educators incorporate different learning styles. They understand that students learn differently. Strategies that work for one group of students might not work for another. They use many different methods to facilitate learning. They might use visual strategies, a hands-on approach, role play, games or other tactics to involve students and encourage participation. Great educators know there is a place for tradition but there is also a place for new ways, new ideas, new systems, and new approaches. They're not afraid to listen to other's ideas and progress with the times.

Passion

When teachers and therapists love what they do it's evident to the world. Being an educator is not an

easy job. It can be tiring and emotionally taxing. Despite what's going on in their personal life, great educators leave it outside the door when they enter the classroom. Yet they realize their students are not able to, and they have true compassion for those who are having a bad day or might need some extra attention. Passionate educators genuinely care for their students and they strive for success. They don't stop teaching when the class ends and are always finding innovative ways to instill pride and encourage learning. Their enthusiasm is contagious and students can't wait for their next lesson.

This article is written in thanks to all the teachers and therapists. You always go the extra mile and your unwavering support, open mind and dedication to excellence has touched more lives than you can imagine. We stand in gratitude. Thank you.

By Jene Aviram

Reprinted from www.nlconcepts.com

Ziggurat Model & CAPS

Some states have adopted the Ziggurat Model and the Comprehensive Autism Planning System (CAPS). The Ziggurat Model and CAPS provide a unique way to develop and implement a meaningful and comprehensive program for a student with ASD. The structure fosters consistent use of supports to ensure student success as well as data collection to measure that success. Use of information gathered through the Ziggurat and CAPS process may be used to develop a truly individualized educational plan based on individual assessment and evidenced-based practices. Use of these models ensures that underlying needs are addressed and provides checks and balances to ensure that the carefully designed plan is faithfully implemented.

Compatible with current trends in education, including NCLB, RTI and SWPBS, the Ziggurat Model and CAPS are also easy to use. That is, the framework, designed to be user-friendly for all members of the multidisciplinary team, including parents (Henry & Myles, 2007b), does not require specialized training and can be used across student ages in a variety of settings. The end result is a

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program that addresses the student's multifaceted strengths and needs.

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Having Fun with Idioms

After perusing Who Let the Cat out of the Bag? with my son Nicholas a few years ago I started keeping track of phrases I used that made no sense to him.

I figured maybe one day we would write a book on Idioms. Since that time a book specifically geared to those on the Autism Spectrum was published, although we have yet to read through it. I thought this would be a good time to share our collection of Idioms and encourage other families to do something similar to prepare for April Fool's Day and bring some silliness into the mix.

The one I use the most is the first one and each time I do Nicholas grabs a piece of his arm and looks at me. As a child I had a habit of asking my father, "What time does your watch say?", and he would always put his watch up to his ear to show me he was trying to answer my question.

- ✦ Get a grip
- ✦ It's not the end of the world
- ✦ At the eleventh hour
- ✦ Blabber Mouth
- ✦ Wet Noodle
- ✦ Don't get bent out of shape
- ✦ Burning the Midnight Oil



- ✦ It's a piece of cake
- ✦ What goes around comes around
- ✦ That's a hot tamale
- ✦ Blow One's top
- ✦ Bite off more than you can chew
- ✦ My nose is killing me
- ✦ Beat your brain's out
- ✦ All Thumbs
- ✦ Kick the Bucket
- ✦ Two pennies to rub together
- ✦ As easy as Pie
- ✦ At death's door
- ✦ Knocked the wind out of me
- ✦ On it's last legs
- ✦ Take your breath away
- ✦ Anything Ring a Bell
- ✦ Nothing to Sneeze at
- ✦ Keep Your Ears Open
- ✦ Keep Your Eyes on the Prize
- ✦ No guts no glory
- ✦ Dust bunnies
- ✦ Stuffed to the gills
- ✦ Like a walk in the park
- ✦ If the shoe fits
- ✦ Go for broke
- ✦ Down the hatch
- ✦ Kick him to the curb
- ✦ So hungry I could eat a horse
- ✦ In a pickle
- ✦ Quick on your feet
- ✦ Budge an inch
- ✦ Slept not one wink
- ✦ Dead as a doornail
- ✦ Without rhyme or reason
- ✦ Lie low
- ✦ The long and short of it
- ✦ Tongue-tied
- ✦ Green-eyed with jealousy
- ✦ It's Greek to me



I suggest spending some time gathering some phrases you utilize in your household and compiling a list to teach your child on the Autism Spectrum what these idioms mean by acting them out, doing a homemade show and tell or a game of charades.

Start getting ready to stump your child for a delightful April Fool's Day. Check out the Idiom Site for some you may have missed.

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For those on the spectrum and others who need to know what certain phrases mean or want to discuss idioms, visit the [The Phrase Finder](#).

Reprinted from www.bellaonline.com

NewsBrief

Innovative Websites Hold Promise for Children with Autism

Two innovative websites well worth investigating are just a few clicks away! The first, [MakeBeliefsComix.com](http://www.makebeliefscomix.com), offers children the opportunity to work independently or with their parents to create original comic strips online. The visual format is not only inviting, but also capitalizes on the visual strengths associated with autism. The possibilities for improvement in reading and writing are obvious and clearly important. Less obvious, perhaps, but critical nonetheless is the possibility of improving the skills needed to sequence events in storytelling; increase overall communication; and “power up” imagination. To learn more about this creative website, log onto <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/>

Children ages three through ten will love the activities provided by *Skill Building Buddies*, a company based in Connecticut whose mission is to provide children with autism with video modeling opportunities to teach important skills. According to information on its website, “*Skill Building Buddies*” video modeling programs are valuable, high-quality teaching tools that have been independently reviewed and recognized by the most respected parenting organizations.” And they have the awards to prove it! For additional information about this innovative website, please log onto: <http://skillbuildingbuddies.com/>

Reprinted from *Autism Spectrum Quarterly*, Summer 2009

NewsBrief

Autism Speaks Launches Autism In The Workplace

New York, N.Y. (April 2009)—Autism Speaks, the nation’s largest autism science and advocacy

organization, announced on April 16th the launch of *Autism in the Workplace*, an online resource for individuals with autism, families and employers, in an effort to increase awareness about the many benefits of employing individuals with autism spectrum disorders and to connect them with potential employment opportunities. The online resource also features testimonials by satisfied employers and links to employment resources.

“There are thousands of teens and adults with autism across the country who have both the ability and the desire to do meaningful work for fair pay and benefits,” said Lisa Goring, Autism Speaks director of family services. “*Autism in the Workplace* will help connect these individuals with employers who are seeking dependable workers, while highlighting the significant contributions people with autism are already making in a variety of job settings.”

Autism in the Workplace is a collection of videos that feature individuals with autism and their successful work experiences—from an individual running his own business from home to a teaching assistant working with children with autism in a school setting. Each video shows a person with autism at work, accompanied by commentary from his or her employer. In addition to the videos, this element of the Autism Speaks web site features suggestions about how to create employment opportunities that are rewarding and valuable for both parties, as well as links to resources for employers and potential employees. To learn more about the program please visit *Autism in the Workplace* online: www.autismspeaks.org/community/family_services/autism_in_the_workplace.php

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Holiday Social Skill Strategies

The holidays are a wonderful time for participating in cherished traditions and making new memories. However children often spend time with family and friends they see only a few times a year, and for many children, social situations associated with the holidays are relatively unfamiliar. Help children prepare for holiday social situations with these

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strategies.

1. Remind Children – Although children may hear about relatives and talk to them on the phone, they may have difficulty remembering people they do not see regularly. Help children remember family members' names and information by creating a family and friends book. On each page include a photo and one or two facts about the family member or friend. For example, their cousin Sam lives in Maine and is on the swim team. Include pictures from past holiday gatherings to review traditions. If you do not have pictures of specific activities, draw pictures or write stories.

2. Make Contact in Advance – Have children send letters or emails to family members in advance. This is a good way to open communication for children. They can tell their relatives how much they are looking forward to seeing them. They also can mention shared interests such as being in the same sport as their cousin or having a model plane similar to the one Uncle Ed flew in the Air Force. Reminders of past shared experiences such as a favorite holiday dish or playing the family game of charades are another way to bring people together.

3. Practice Unfamiliar Situations – Holiday gatherings often have specific etiquette. Practice new situations. For example, children may have food served to them at home, but holidays meals may be buffet style. If children are old enough to serve themselves, practice taking appropriate portions by having a few meals family style (food in bowls so children serve themselves) before the holidays. If it is a gift giving holiday, practice manners for giving and receiving gifts.

4. Bring Items that Initiate Social Interactions – For children who are shy or working on social skills, help them initiate interactions by bringing familiar toys or items they can share with others. Discussing their favorite robot or sharing their favorite game with a cousin can help children transition to a new environment with less stress and anxiety. Be sure to discuss and practice sharing the toys in advance so children are prepared to share them with other people.

5. Review and Praise – Review and remind

children of social expectations in advance, immediately before, and in some cases during the event. The excitement of being around people, eating holiday foods, and participating in activities can be overwhelming so children may quickly forget what they practiced. Be sure to praise children for appropriate behavior.

6. Have Additional Plans – If a child has special food or seating needs, parents should let the host know in advance. Although children may be told not to eat certain foods, they may not recognize the ingredients in some holiday dishes. For children with very limited food interests, have them try new foods, but prepare and bring a separate meal in case the menu is limited. Sitting at a table without a parent may be extremely stressful for some children so having some tables with adults and children rather than just tables for children and just tables for adults may be a way to plan in advance and reduce a child's anxiety.

Reprinted from www.sandbox-learning.com

Strategies for Challenging Holiday Situations

Holiday excitement and routine changes can be very difficult for children. This article focuses on three challenging areas families face during the holidays: giving and receiving gifts, managing holiday excitement, and understanding schedule changes.

1. Gift Giving and Receiving – The excitement of getting gifts can be overwhelming for children. Help them understand polite giving and receiving of gifts with these strategies.

Involve Children in Giving – Let children help pick out and wrap gifts. By participating in the gift giving process, children become interested in seeing other people's reaction to the gift. Even young children can choose between two gifts, put a bow or tape on the wrapping paper, and decide where the gift should go under the tree.



Practice Receiving – Role play receiving a gift and thanking someone for it. Make writing thank you cards part of your family routine so children understand how to thank people politely for

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Conferences

Date	Title & Location	Speakers	Fee	Contact Info
Nov. 19, 2009	Sensory Integration in Children—Processing and Strategies for ASD, ADHD & Other Neurobehavioral Disorders Romulus	Susan Larson Kidd, Ed.D., Ed.S	Varies	www.health-ed.com 800-839-4584
Nov. 20, 2009	Effective Neurological Managing of Sensory Processing Disorder Detroit	Charlene Young, OTR/L, CEAS	Varies	www.crosscountryeducation.com 800-397-0180

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presents.

2. Holiday Energy – Holiday events often mean sweet foods and late bedtimes. Use the strategies below to manage energy levels and make bedtime successful.

Keep Children Active – Sledding, walking, and playing games outside during the day can help children use their energy in a healthy and positive way. Keep children active during the day so they will be tired at night making bedtime easier.

Limit Sweets – Candy, cookies, and soda are prevalent during the holidays. These foods are high in sugar and caffeine. They cause children to be overly active and make falling asleep difficult. Set rules about how much and when these foods can be consumed and provide healthy alternatives.

Stay on a Sleep Schedule – Even when children are not in school, a consistent sleep schedule is important. Have children wake up and go to bed at a regular time. Plan morning events such as

holiday shopping to motivate children to wake up and get ready for the day.

3. Holiday Schedule Changes – Many children benefit from consistent routines and have difficulty with change. Make holiday schedule changes less stressful with these simple tips.

Use Visuals – Have a holiday calendar that lists events in writing, drawing, or picture format depending on the child's level. Refer to the calendar to prepare children for the day's events and help them understand what is going on and when.

Involve Children – Let children add new events to the calendar. If there are important events the family must attend, explain why attending is important. If there are events that are debatable,

include children's input in decisions about attending the event.

Reprinted from www.sandbox-learning.com

Delay in processing sounds may be clue to ASD language problems

A new study reports that children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) process sounds slightly more slowly than other children, a finding that may help explain their language and communication problems.

Timothy Roberts and colleagues used a technique called magnetoencephalography (MEG) to study the brain wave patterns of 64 children with ASD and a group of age-matched nondisabled controls as the children listened to beeps, tones in pairs, vowel sounds, or sentences. The researchers presented the sounds at different frequencies and the tone pairs in rapid succession, interjecting unusual streams of incongruous tones and vowels.

Autistic children, the researchers say, experienced delays of a fraction of a second in responding when processing rapid-succession sounds and unusual streams. "This delay in processing certain types and streams of sound," Roberts says, "may underpin the subsequent language processing and communication impairment seen in autistic children." Roberts, who reported the study's findings at the annual meeting of the Radiological Society of North America, suggests that the brain "signatures" seen on MEG may prove useful in diagnosing autism in very young children.

Reprinted from www.autism.com

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Support Groups

- * Autism Support Group of Genesee County:
www.geneseeautism.org
- * ASA/Oakland County Chapter Events:
www.asaoakland.org
- * OUCARES, www.oucares.edu offers soccer, baseball, music, learn through movement, social skills, martial arts, basketball, animals in art, cartooning, & after hours adult social. Call 248-370-2424 for more information.
- * Mott Children's Health Center Parent Empowerment Program for parents and caregivers of newly diagnosed or suspected ASD. Karen Shoemaker 767-5750, ext. 5292
- * Kathleen's House: www.kathleenshouse.org, 810-720-0667.
- * Young Adult HFA/Asperger Group: Patrick or Mary Kubik. Call 810-603-2166 or e-mail: pk1851@gmail.com or marykubik@gmail.com

Websites

- ☞ Autism Society of America: www.autism-society.org
 - ☞ Autism Society of Michigan: www.autism-mi.org
 - ☞ ASA Oakland County Chapter:
www.asaoakland.org
 - ☞ Dr. Tony Attwood: www.tonyattwood.com
 - ☞ On-line Asperger's Information and Support-OASIS: www.aspergersyndrome.org
 - ☞ The Gray Center: www.TheGrayCenter.org
 - ☞ Liane Holliday-Willey: www.ASPIE.com
 - ☞ Free pictures of visual schedules, etc.:
www.usevisualstrategies.com
 - ☞ Picture Exchange Communication System:
www.pecs.com
 - ☞ TEACCH: www.teacch.com
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