

Introducing Eric

Born in Singapore, Eric was an odd boy who sleepwalked through his childhood. He was unaware of feelings and human relationships. Stuck in his private world, he only knew how to repeat what other people said.

As he grew up, he spent much time collecting facts in order to understand the confusion surrounding him. He prided himself on being rational in an irrational world where he was frequently bullied and rejected by everyone else.

After his formal ASD diagnosis in 2001, he was relieved to know of the reason for his differences. Yet he found the human condition disgusting and primitive. He continued to struggle in a world devoid of meaning and joy.

After graduating from the mainstream educational system with a Diploma in Logistics, he was reluctantly drafted into the Singapore Army just as he discovered spiritual philosophy, which opened his mind to the deeper purpose of human existence.

With help of his forgiving colleagues and exploration of his inner world, he reconnected with his emotions and found meaning in his life as a human being. A new dimension of emotions and social interaction opened up to him. Inspired to share his personal experience of autism with the world, he wrote "*Mirror Mind*" and "*Autism & Self Improvement*" to unveil the mystery of autism. (Available on <http://iautistic.com>)

Eric believes in giving back to the world. To inspire more people, he created *iautistic.com* and this booklet. He also gave talks about autism in Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Macau. Eric understands that it is difficult to care for autistic children. May this booklet help relieve the pain of caretakers, parents and autistics.

Listing of Autism Centers (Note: The author is not affiliated with these organizations)

Autism Resource Centre

No. 6, Ang Mo Kio St. 44, Singapore 569253
<http://www.autism.org.sg> || (65) 63233258

National Autistic Society

393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG, UK
<http://www.nas.org.uk> || (44) 0 20 79033599

Society for the Welfare of Autistic Persons

Room 210-214, Block 19, Shek Kip Mei Estate, Sham Shui Po, Kowloon, Hong Kong
<http://www.swap.org.hk> || (852) 27883326

Autism Society of America

7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 300, Bethesda, Maryland 20814-3067, USA
<http://www.autism-society.org> || (1) 301 6570881



A parent's guide to autism

<http://iautistic.com>

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What is autism (in general)?

Autism is a life-long developmental disability that stops autistics from relating with the world around them. Although they look like ordinary people, autism causes them to experience our world very differently. People who could not understand them often see them as selfish, slow, distant and odd.

They are lonely, yet they find social contact disturbing. Lacking the social instincts of caring, sharing and pretending, they do not play, chit-chat and make friends. Human behavior and emotional expressions elude them.

Unable to make sense of their environment, they drown in the constantly changing sights, sounds, touch and smell. Shocked, they escape into their minds. To ward off confusion, they cling desperately to what they can predict, thus developing obsessions.

Because autistic children are never certain of what is happening, they cannot make choices or express themselves. Forced to speak, they copy what they hear. Forced to act, they fumble until they figure out a way to understand the instructions. Unable to express emotions appropriately, they may erupt with panic and violence when they are too confused or frightened.

Many of them are unable to feel an object in 3-dimensions. They see the world flat, like watching television. Without a sense of depth, position and movement, they cannot coordinate their body. Their clumsiness often upsets people - they spill drinks, tie shoelaces wrongly and break things.

Disclaimer: This booklet does **not** contain professional or medical advice.

The information and guidelines in this booklet may not apply to all autistic children. Readers are advised to exercise their own discretion and consult certified professionals.

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What problems does being autistic create?

- Autistics have difficulty cope with the world. They often spend their entire lives avoiding it.
- Autistics have difficulty participate socially. They can only pretend to be normal in order to fit in.
- They tend to feel lonely, angry and frustrated because they are constantly misunderstood by others.
- Deprived of social and sensory pleasures, they tend to find life full of pain and misery.

What is the situation with autism?

Autism is becoming common: in the USA, as many as 1 in 150 children have autism. Although most autistics are male, it affects everyone regardless of race, culture, religion, family income and educational levels. It has a spectrum of severity: the severely autistic needs institutional care while the mildly autistic may be very intelligent and can live independently.

What causes autism?

Autism is a neurological disorder, not the fault of bad parenting or neglect. While most experts believe that it is a genetic disorder, some claim it is caused or triggered by certain head trauma, exposure to heavy metals (such as mercury-laden vaccines) or food allergies. Autism may have different causes and there is no consensus on this yet.

How do I help educate my autistic child?

Because he cannot rely on his instincts and emotions, the autistic child copes by using his prematurely developed logical mind to think about what to do. This is an important survival skill that we can help develop. As he develops his coping skills, we can help him master the use of his body with simple games and activities.

Although it is tempting to focus solely on developing his mind, it will have serious repercussions when he grows up unable to connect socially. When he is ready, it is best to help wean him from his intellect so that he can focus on exploring his emotions and rediscovering his instincts. With instincts to guide him, he can live a happier, more meaningful life.

What future awaits my autistic child?

Most autistic adults are unemployed. Although some have impressive qualifications, their insistence on doing things their way, difficulty coping with uncertainty and lack of social bonding means limited career options.

Being a cashier or waiter may be difficult. Being a manager or supervisor may be too much for them to handle. The most difficult jobs require them to:

- have intensive **social interaction**
- constantly handle **unpredictable changes** quickly yet accurately
- listen to **verbal instructions** which will not be repeated
- perform **fine motor movements**
- work in a **noisy and busy** environment

Autistics tend to be good with details and systems thinking. They often insist on high quality and tend to work for many hours without rest. Suitable jobs take advantage of their autistic traits and provide:

- Minimum social interaction
- A calm and quiet environment
- Repetitive, predictable chores / mentally challenging projects
- Time to think through problems
- Clearly defined written instructions
- Good use of their favorite interests

Examples of suitable jobs include: professors, computer programmer, computer technicians, quality control inspectors, data entry clerks, chemical analysts, lighthouse operators and librarians.

It is impractical to expect autistics to work in a normal job like everyone else. Preparing them for employment requires a different strategy:

- Develop a very important talent that others need
- Find a savvy partner to help promote their talent
- Find a suitable job they love to do
- Find bosses that allows them as much independence as possible

Parents can start by developing the talents, tendencies and obsessions of autistics into useful skills. With highly in-demand skills, they find it easier to choose a suitable job. The autistic Temple Grandin, has found jobs which suit her: as a designer of livestock handling facilities and a Professor of Animal Science.

My child is probably autistic. What do I do?

- **Research:** Learning more about autism is a good strategy. Public libraries and the Internet are good starting points.
- **Get a diagnosis:** Once your child's condition is confirmed, you may be able to obtain special assistance from your government. Do choose a kind and patient professional to give your child the chance to express his skills and intelligence during the test.
- **Ask for legal & professional advice:** Ask for advice on how to apply for special assistance. Your local autism centre may be able to help.
- **Share autism information:** Help friends and relatives understand your child better by sharing autism material with them.
- **Join a support group:** For emotional support as well as friendship, you can join your local autism support group (or start one).

Read books from these authors

- Dr. Temple Grandin, an autistic who designs livestock handling facilities, has written many insightful books explaining the autistic condition. [<http://www.grandin.com>]
- Donna Williams, an artist who is now happily married, also offers many emotionally moving books about her life experiences as an autistic. [<http://www.donnawilliams.net>]
- Dr. Tony Attwood, a professional expert on autism, has written various easy to understand books about how to work with autistic children. [<http://www.tonyattwood.com.au>]

Read other useful books

- "Autism: A Holistic Approach" by Bob Woodward & Marga Hogenboom
- "The Hoffman Process" by Tim Laurence (about *emotional healing in general*)

CAUTION: The famous novel "*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*" by Mark Haddon is a work of fiction. It is not intended to portray the autistic experience accurately.

Visit useful autism websites

- English
<http://autism-resources.com> || <http://cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/ddautism.htm>
<http://autismpress.com> || <http://autism-pdd.net/autism-treatments.html>
- Chinese
<http://hkedcity.net/specialed/autism/> || <http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/自閉症>
http://geocities.com/autism_hk/ || <http://autism.hk>

How do I know if my child is autistic?

Parents are often the first to notice signs of autism in their child, who may avoid eye contact, ignore other people and focus obsessively on something. Previously engaging, babbling toddlers may suddenly become silent, withdrawn or self-abusive.

1) **The autistic child does not know how to share.** If he points with his finger, it is only to request something; he does not intend to share his experiences. If your child spontaneously points to a beautiful butterfly to share with you, then he is probably not autistic.

2) **The autistic child cannot make-believe.** He treats dolls as objects rather than people. He may arrange toys in patterns and categories rather than play with them. As he may not see the entire toy as a unit, he only plays only with certain parts (e.g. the wheels of a toy truck). If your child can weave stories with dolls and toys, then he is probably not autistic.

3) **The autistic child has abnormal speech.** He may repeat your questions or give you a long-winded but irrelevant answer. He may speak in a robotic monotone or use words in ways that make no sense to you. If your child is merely shy but can express himself clearly, then he is probably not autistic.

4) **The autistic child demands consistency.** He may be upset even if you make a minor change in his schedule. He may insist on eating the same food everyday, lining toys in a straight line and placing his toothbrush at the exact place. If your child does not mind unexpected changes and surprises, then he is probably not autistic.

5) **The autistic child often seems "stuck with" certain odd behavior** such as flapping his hands, spinning objects, counting coins or watching the same section of a show over and over again. If your child insists on performing the same set of such behaviors all the time, then he is probably autistic!

Autistic traits are most obvious during early childhood and tend to diminish as the child adapts to the world around him. Officially, a cure for autism does not exist. However, there are ways to reduce its severity. Some of these methods are provided at the back of this booklet.

What is the ideal environment for my young child?

Keep Quiet: Avoid loud and unpredictable sounds. Hisses, screeches or sharp noises make autistics nervous or confused. They may have sensitive ears: Even switching on the TV set softly may disrupt their focus and sleep. If noise is unavoidable, mask it with soothing and calm music.

No People: Avoid having people around, especially strangers. They may disturb autistics by introducing unintended noise, odors and uncertainty.

No Visual Distraction: Avoid bright colors (e.g. modern toys), high contrast objects (e.g. checkerboard floors) and glare. These may forcefully grab and fragment the child's attention. The child may feel more comfortable with simple toys in an evenly lit room with soft, calming colors.

No Odors: Avoid strong smells, especially perfume. They may be extremely disturbing and confusing to autistics.

No Variety: Autistic children find it difficult to handle choice. Remove every distraction (e.g. keep other toys out of sight) and share only one object or topic at a time. Continue only after they finish analyzing it.

No Categorical Confusion: Simplify things into functional categories. Autistics often rely on categories to tell them how to deal with a situation or object. A toothbrush is a cleaner for teeth, not a brush costing \$1. The house cat is an animal we stroke, not a flurry, 4-legged, oxygen consumer. To save the child's sanity, use only 1 category and stick to it.

No Difficult Chores: Lay their foundation with things that the child can do first. Avoid shoelaces until they are familiar working with string. Avoid strangers until they can speak with familiar people first.

No Burden: Instead of imposing rules, rearrange the environment so that they are not necessary. Complying with rules may drain much time and attention which we could use for more constructive purposes.

No Invisible Disturbances – Autistics may be able to hear, see and sense things that most people could not. Avoid these:

- Fat, old TVs: They make an irritating humming sound even when muted
- Fat, old computer monitors: Their irritating flicker may cause headaches
- Fluorescent Lamps: Some autistics find their (fast) flickering disturbing

Squeeze Machine: This has a comfortable surface which applies constant pressure controlled by the user. Temple Grandin uses it to calm herself down. [<http://www.grandin.com/inc/intro-squeeze.html> - <http://www.therafin.com>]

Social Stories: Such stories provide simple illustrations and text examples of how to behave and what the world is about. Topics include: “*What is a Library?*”, “*I am Going to the Library*”, “*What is a Responsibility?*” and “*What are My Responsibilities?*” [<http://www.thegraycenter.org>]

Facilitated Communication: Autistic children learn to communicate by typing on a keyboard or pointing at letters, images or other symbols to represent messages. The facilitator may help with prompts or physical support to their hands. [<http://suedweb.syr.edu/thefci/>]

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) – Autistic children learn in stages to express themselves using picture cards or sentence strips.

1. Exchange a card for a desired item
2. Take initiative to find cards and make requests to the teacher
3. Make specific requests with specific cards
4. Use sentences to make requests in the form of “I want _____”
5. Respond to the question “What do you want?”
6. Comment about their environment
7. Describe colors, shapes and sizes

[<http://www.polyxo.com/visualsupport/pecs.html> || <http://www.pecs.com>]

Treatment and education of autistic and related communication handicapped children - TEACCH is an evidence-based service, training and research program for individuals of all ages and skill levels with autism spectrum disorders. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TEACCH>]

Floortime: Instead of changing the child's behavior, why not join him on the floor? In this way, we can help him learn to connect his emotions and intentions with his behavior, words and ideas. [<http://www.floortime.org>]

Son-Rise: This program also advocates joining the child. Parents play key roles as teachers, therapists and directors of their own programs, which occur at home. [<http://www.autismtreatmentcenter.org>]

Relationship Development Intervention (RDI): This program supplies useful tools for parents to teach important missing skills and impart motivation onto their child to interact. [<http://www.rdiconnect.com>]

What are some available treatments for autism?

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA): This very popular scientific approach trains autistic children to learn new skills one small step at a time using reward and punishment. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Applied_Behavior_Analysis]

Mind-altering Drugs: These are often prescribed to treat autistic symptoms. [<http://osiris.sunderland.ac.uk/autism/drug.htm>]

GFCF Diet: Many autistic children improved greatly with a casein and gluten free diet. Casein is found in **milk** and gluten in **wheat, oat, rye, and barley**. Avoid foods and drinks containing these items. [<http://www.gfcfdiet.com>]

Anti-yeast Treatment: Some experts believe that yeast infections (which may result from antibiotic treatment) make autism more severe. Syndromes include thrush (white patches in mouth). Consult a doctor for treatment. Avoid **malt, vinegar, pickles, chocolate, peanuts, corn and chicken**. [<http://nutritioninstitute.com/Autism.html> || <http://healing-arts.org/children/antifungal.htm>]

Supplements: Some experts believe that vitamin and mineral deficiencies contribute to autism. Please consult a licensed medical professional before using these. Start with a small dose and increase it slowly to avoid possible side-effects. (* per kilogram of body weight)

Vitamin B6: 17mg/kg*/day; max: 1,000mg; requires magnesium
Magnesium: 6.7mg/kg*/day; max: 400mg
Dimethylglycine (DMG): 60-500mg; use folic acid to avoid hyperactivity
Folic Acid: 0.55 mg/kg*/day (0.55mg = 550mcg/ug)
Vitamin C: 8,000 mg/day for adolescents and adults

Note: Avoid vitamins containing Aspartame (NutraSweet). It may be harmful. [<http://autismwebsite.com/ARI/newsletter/dosage.htm> || <http://healing-arts.org/children/nutritional.htm>]

Sensory Integration: We can use strategies to compensate for the child's sensory dysfunctions, such as changing his environment, routines and how people interact with him. For example, we can avoid visual clutter, messy art activities and perfume. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sensory_Integration_Dysfunction]

Irlen lenses: Used to treat some forms of dyslexia, these colored lenses also correct visual-perception problems in some autistics. Each individual uses a different color. This treatment was discovered using uniformly colored transparencies. [<http://www.irlenwa.com.au/>]

Neurofeedback - This might improve focus and decrease anxiety in autistics.

How do I help my autistic child play?

The autistic child does not understand play the way non-autistic children do. He has a different focus because he is probably unable to:

- **Connect with his emotions** (and enjoy the story)
- **Understand make-believe** (and so insists on facts)
- **Access his social instincts** (and thus work easily with relationships)
- **Access his temporal-spatial instincts** (and thus react to his surroundings in real time)

Watching dramas and listening to fairy tales often confuse him. Having a different consciousness, in his play he focuses more on:

- **Finding ways to shut off the confusing world** (e.g. obsessive play)
- **Finding ways to cope with the world** (e.g. imagining alternate realities which are simplified, ideal versions of our world)
- **Studying the world** (e.g. looking at a colony of ants for hours)
- **Studying how things work in order to gain control of the environment** (e.g. conducting mini-experiments with sunlight and magnifying glass)
- **Creating order out of chaos** (e.g. lining toys in a straight line)
- **Improving self-esteem** (e.g. learning facts that other kids do not know)

Rather than require autistic children to comply with social norms expected of children their age, perhaps it is easier to work with their situation and special needs. For instance:

- Give them a calm, quiet and empty room to play alone
- Supply them with technical books to widen their knowledge and interests
- Provide them with different interesting things to observe every week
- Give them something complex that they can experiment with safely (e.g. a toughened computer)
- Encourage him to learn the mathematical and scientific concepts relating to logic, patterns, predictability and experimentation with which he can organize his world
- Let him learn something useful that he can coach other children (e.g. computer skills)
- Give him parts which he can use to build and dismantle, like Lego bricks.
Avoid clay: it is hard to control precisely and may be frustrating.
Avoid jigsaw puzzles: They may create more confusion than help.

How do I cope with my child's special interests?

Autistic children live in a world full of chaos and frustration. When he finally encounters something which brings joy or makes sense to him, he clings on to it. This clinging may develop into an obsession.

The author once witnessed this: A young boy watches a specific video clip of a tiger biting a bear's bottom. As the bear screams out in pain, the boy flaps his hands excitedly, turns around in circles and jumps in joy. For hours, he rewinds the video to watch that segment without tiring.

The child often develops special interests, such as collecting coins, key rings, vacuum cleaners and toilet brushes. He will spend much time with his collection, for example, shaking coins to hear their sound or counting them repeatedly. As it may be impossible to stop him completely, we may restrict him with a clock and a rigid timetable instead. When the clock rings, the child must stop and do the next thing in his timetable.

We can also:

- Give him something more constructive that he can and likes to do
- Move him to another room where he cannot see his obsessions
- Reassure him with the schedule that he can play again soon

Ignorant of social rules, the child may pursue his interests in a socially inappropriate way, such as collecting toilet brushes from other homes (without permission), walking in and out of glass sliding doors for hours and opening bottles in shops to inspect their contents (without paying for them).

If we cannot find an alternative to do these without causing trouble, we may persuade him to switch to another more useful and acceptable activity. When he "falls in love" with a useful skill that his friends are weak at, he can be useful tutoring and solving their problems, earning their respect.

Many autistics like working with emotionless computers, providing them with potential employment as programmers and technicians. However, beware of computer games and online chatting: They are highly addictive.

Special interests may be a sign of your child's special talents. With the right guidance and lots of patience, he may become a great person some day. However, if your child insists on engaging in dangerous or criminal activities, it is best to consult a professional who is sympathetic to autistic children.

How do I help my child be more talkative?

Lacking the instinct to prioritize events, everything is equally important to the autistic child. He may not know how to answer questions that require more than 'yes' and 'no' because his mind could not integrate and summarize his experiences.

Consider speaking to him as if you are a lawyer cross-examining witnesses in court. Here are some guidelines:

- Be **precise** – avoid phrases like "How's your day?"
- Be **literal** – avoid metaphors; he cannot understand humor or puns
- Be **direct** – avoid giving hints as he will not understand them
- Be **objective** – avoid emotionally laden questions or you may get a misleading answer

VAGUE: "How's your day?"

SPECIFIC: "Did anyone throw your belongings around in class today?"

METAPHOR: "Did your shoe kiss the floor during P.E. lesson?"

LITERAL: "Did you participate in a race during P.E. lesson?"

INDIRECT: "Some people dislike like your habit of daydreaming."

DIRECT: "Annie is upset with you because instead of helping her do class duties, you were looking out of the window all the time."

EMOTIONAL: "Did you enjoy yourself at the zoo?"

OBJECTIVE: "Do you want to visit the zoo again?"

He needs time and freedom to craft his words. If he is lost for words, keep quiet and wait for him. Unlike us, he is comfortable with silence. It helps him to think about what you said and how to respond. Interrupting him will mess up his thought processes and further delay his response.

One way to encourage him to converse is for him to express himself in writing first, and then have him read aloud what he wrote. Provide him with structure (e.g. timetables and fill-in-the-blanks answers) and enough time to think. Rushing him will only create confusion and anxiety. If someone talks to him and he does not know what to say or remember their names, you can whisper the correct responses to him.

How can I help my child work with his emotions?

Many autistic children misbehave because they are unaware of their emotions and how to express them appropriately. Although the child may have experienced bullying and other stressful situations, his facial expressions may not show the stress and tensions within him. However, these may build up to an unbearable level, resulting in a massive outburst.

To help them express their emotions, we can draw an array of simple cartoon faces with the names of their associated emotions. They can answer short, close-ended questions about their inner state by pointing at one of the faces.

Clumsy and rushed for time, they are prone to break things. Having to think about what to do after an accident delays them further. Buying durable, unbreakable things helps avoid such unnecessary frustration.

Many autistics are perfectionists who insist on doing things their way. They may judge themselves by very high standards and spend their life preparing for all possible scenarios because they fear failure. When they believe that they are doing everything right and making their best effort, they become sensitive to criticism. Even a minor mistake can mean total failure to them. They would feel better if they can accept the concepts of “good enough”, “economy of effort” and “priority of effort”.

Many autistics are also angry with the world around them, disliking other people for forcing social norms on them, ignoring their needs and refusing to do things their way. Until they come to terms with the world, they cannot end the separation (and loneliness) between themselves and everyone else.

The author has a highly positive experience with the Neale Donald Walsh’s “*Conversations with God*” trilogy, “*Friendship with God*” and “*Communion with God*”. These works introduce our world as an innately good, beautiful and consistent place.

Other spiritual works may also help provide a sense of why the world is the (imperfect) way it is, why we are here and how we can work with our life experiences to bring peace, meaning and harmony. However, beware of the tendency for autistics to become fervent missionaries of whatever they believe in.

How do I help my autistic child cope with school?

Help raise autism awareness: Start by sharing information on autism with his teachers and school. Let them know what they are expecting. This way, they will be more prepared to accommodate him.

Familiarize your child with school: Show your child photographs, textbooks and other materials about his future school life. If possible, bring him to school to familiarise him with the surroundings and see how class is conducted. Let him wear his uniform and rehearse at home. This reassures him and prevents problematic behavior (such as temper tantrums) from occurring.

Teach him to observe other children: When he is not sure what is happening, he could use other children as cues on what he should be doing.

Beware of sabotage: Tell him not to listen to the instructions of his classmates. Otherwise they may mischievously direct him to break school rules or offend people, causing him to be punished for such misdeeds.

Make a photo of all teachers & classmates with their names: He needs help if he cannot recognize faces and remember names.

Tell him how to report bullying: Explain with simple pictures and text the concept of bullying (e.g. verbal abuse, sabotage, withholding belongings). Tell him how to deal with bullies appropriately, such as reporting them to his teacher. Train him on strategies of how to remember the name and appearance of the culprits and rehearse with him.

Make a simple signaling system for him: Work out a way that he can signal to his teacher during lesson time if he is in danger of becoming overwhelmed, confused and bored. Find a way for him to excuse himself to calm down in a corner whenever he feels unwell.

Strategic Seating: Seat him where he is least distracted by the rest of the class and least likely to be bullied. Sitting alone in the front row corner next to a wall may be a good idea.

Use written instructions and teaching materials: The autistic child often has problems hearing speech. Request for written instructions or simple pictures. Use textbooks and notes instead of lectures. If speech must be used, there should be a pause between instructions so that he can catch on to them.

Use checklists: He has little capacity to keep track of and prioritize what he must do. Putting these tasks in a checklist in chronological order will help him focus his attention and finish his job.

Use a schedule & stick to it: He needs to feel secure. A schedule prepares and reassures him about what he will face. It tells him what to do so at any time so that he need not spend much effort and energy deciding what to do.

Keep a daily account or a diary: The autistic child tends to live life in a subconscious state much like sleepwalking. To help him become self-aware, develop his ability to remember, reflect and express what he experienced. Start by letting him use a timetable to record what he did. Gradually, encourage him to write summaries covering the day.

Provide concrete explanations: Lacking intrinsic understanding, autistics are often good with memorization but poor at application. Knowing “1+1=2” does not mean that they will pay \$2 for two \$1 sweets. Let them learn the theory and then the application through physical reenactments with real examples.

Teach him basic courtesy: Rehearse with him what to say and do in different social situations. For example, he should say “thank you” when given something and “sorry” when he knocks against people. We can use comics or simple social stories to show him. This may save him from a lot of trouble.

Use his strengths, avoid his weaknesses: He may be very clumsy and could not kick football, tie shoelaces or write tidily. However, he may be an expert in other areas. Arrange with his teacher to give him opportunities to use his strengths (such as assisting in computer class), while downplaying his weaknesses (such as giving him simple errands to do during football games).

Make him useful: If he is an expert on some subject, let him tutor other children. If he is skillful, let him share the fruits of his skill with everyone. The satisfaction of participation is a priceless gift indeed.

them, we can use this to guide them. With a real weighing balance, we can explain the concept of the “Emotional Bank Account”.

1. Each of us has an individual bank account with everyone in our life.
2. When we give or do something that the other person likes, we add to it (from our side).
3. When we give or do something that he dislikes, we take away from it.
4. How much he likes (or dislikes) the gift is represented by its weight.
5. Give only when it does not hurt or harm you.
6. Take only what you need (via requesting a favor) when you need it.
7. To make a new friend, make a good impression with a small deposit.
8. Keep the relationship in balance with roughly equal weights.
9. A great relationship is like a scale with balanced, heavy weights given willingly and freely to each other.
10. “Heavy” gifts may also be non-material. Depending on the person and situation, smiles and expressions of gratitude may “weigh” more.

The autistic child tends to understand other people **through studying theories**. Psychology and self-help books can boost his social confidence. Making a close friend may help reveal the hidden aspects of friendship. Focus on quality, not quantity.

He understands communicating as the **literal transfer of information** rather than mutual exchanges of influence or expressions of emotions. Blind to the relevance of phrases such as “I love you”, he may seem impolite, aloof and uncaring. We can teach him the correct way to respond, but he must master emoting and relating to express himself naturally.

He may be ignorant or unaware of what his friends talk about, such as cartoons, fashion and pop stars. To participate in such conversations, we may have to create a social image for him: define his taste (e.g. acceptable hobbies), fashion preference, membership (e.g. soccer club) and favorite idol. Then, guide him on how to converse with the necessary background information.

He understands play more as a **difficult chore** than an enjoyable pastime. If he must play, teach him how to excuse himself when he gets upset or stressed to avoid emotional meltdowns. The author suggests that perhaps the enormous effort of learning to play can be put to better use helping him work with his body and manage his schedule.

How do I persuade my child to make friends?

Autistic children often have social experiences fraught with:

1. **Confusion:** They are lost without their social instincts guiding them.
2. **Pain:** They may be hurt or rejected before and hesitate to make friends.
3. **Loneliness:** Social relationships feel empty and meaningless to them. Their handicaps make relating a heavy burden rather than a joyful act.

In addition, they may have other difficulties:

- **People blindness:** Lacking inner awareness, they cannot use their experiences and emotional reactions to understand the concept of self. Thus, they are oblivious to the different needs and beliefs of others.
- **Face/Name blindness:** They find it hard to remember faces or names.
- **Body language blindness:** They cannot read body language and may be unaware that other people are angry, upset or bored with them.
- **Context blindness:** They may not understand that the intent of social communications. Thus, they fail to “read between the lines” and give inappropriate responses.
- **Group blindness:** They do not feel the sense of belonging and may not share with and accommodate to others appropriately. Other people think of them as selfish, uncaring and odd.
- **Unable to make eye contact:** They are uncomfortable looking into other people’s eyes and may appear not to pay attention during conversations.

Their unusual habits complicate the issue:

- **Monologues of their special interests:** Autistics are often so excited by their interest that they constantly talk about it, boring everyone else.
- **Talking out loud:** Rather than whisper or think silently, some autistics talk to themselves to coordinate their thoughts and decision making.
- **Technical Language:** Many autistics use formal language in their social interactions. They speak like professors with technically accurate terms rather than socially or emotionally appropriate ones.

We can help them get in touch with their emotions and become aware of their habits. They may understand friendship not as an emotional concept of liking and sharing but as a **mental concept** of trading. Rather than correct

How do I teach my child when he is only keen on X?

Unlike non-autistic children who use their senses and instincts to understand the world, autistic children rely on their abstract knowledge. They build their world on what they understand, be it prime numbers or train models.

Their fixations are expressions of their inner world, which they use to understand the world outside. To communicate with them, we must enter their world and speak their language. If they happen to fixate on bus routes, we talk to them in terms of bus routes.

Because all knowledge is inter-connected, we can use creative ways to relate new knowledge to his obsession. For example, with bus routes we can expand to:

- **physics** (e.g. bus engines)
- **biology** (e.g. germs & creatures living on buses)
- **geography** (e.g. different areas on bus routes)
- **law** (e.g. how the legal system regulates transportation)
- **logistics** (e.g. how the transportation network works)
- **finance** (e.g. bus fares & how bus companies make profit)
- **anthropology** (e.g. different bus-related customs)
- **politics** (e.g. bus unions)
- **design** (e.g. how buses are designed)
- **marketing** (e.g. the ways different bus companies advertise)

As they learn to expand their circle of knowledge, feed their interest by with something that strongly arouses their curiosity. Show them how to find out more by themselves. Steer their development towards useful skills and talents but keep this secret from them: Let them think that they are the ones who want to learn more.

With proper guidance, their original approach to problem solving and ability to focus strongly on a subject may lead a genius mind.

Our bus route specialist may become a top researcher in artificial intelligence (in the field of path theory). An obsession with trains can create a top engineer for magnetic levitation trains of the future. Be creative in seeing your child’s potential career. After all, many say that Albert Einstein was an undiagnosed autistic.

How do I help my autistic teen take charge of life?

Autistics find it difficult to plan and make decisions. The different parts of their mind cannot work as a team to bridge their thoughts and actions. Their problems include:

- **Limited focus:** As everything seems equally important to them, they become confused. They can only work on one thing at a time and find it hard to focus on things outside to their special interests. They appear slow compared to other people who can multi-task.
- **Poor cause & effect judgment:** They are unable to feel and understand the consequences of their actions in the future. As a result, they may act recklessly in an emotionally immature manner
- **Indecision:** They cannot handle the unknown, uncertain and unexpected. They tend to postpone decisions due to their poor situational awareness and past mistakes.
- **Weak organizational skills:** They may have a strategy and vision of what to do but find it hard to focus and direct their life to work towards their goals in real-time.

They can start taking charge of their lives with a framework of questions:

1. Who do I choose to be?
2. What do I choose to give to the world?
3. What kind of life will I create with this choice?
4. Who is going with me on this journey?
5. What effort and sacrifices must I commit to?
6. How do I start?

Set an example by doing the above exercises yourself. After this, write your mission statement, list out your roles in life (e.g. parent, employee, friend, volunteer) and record how you plan to nurture each role every week. Once you are familiar with this process, guide your teenager to do the same. Stephen R. Covey's "*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*" provides a comprehensive framework for this process.

However, be aware that a framework based solely on logic may reinforce his reliance on his intellect over developing his emotions and instincts.

How do I get other children to accept my autistic child?

Children not mature enough to understand their autistic peers may mistreat them. Although adults can stop most physical bullying, psychological bullying may continue as it often occurs outside their supervision.

The latter involves poking fun at the victim with nicknames, tossing his belongings around the classroom, blocking his passage repeatedly, splashing him with water in the toilet, shooting rubber bands at him during lessons and conspiring to make him the scapegoat of a misdeed.

Teachers play an important role in helping the autistic child gain acceptance among his peers. The author has some suggestions for them in this aspect.

No lecturing: Lecturing the children about being nice to the autistic child may backfire. The children may seem well-behaved until the teacher turns her back. Their tactics may become discreet and hard to catch.

Set an example: Treat the children as you would like them to treat others. Be a nice teacher. Use diplomacy instead of force.

No Favoritism: Some teachers have a tendency to overprotect the autistic child. This will create the impression of favoritism and induce jealousy.

Tell a story: Use stories like the Ugly Duckling to drop a hint to the non-autistic children. Rather than lecture on the moral of the story, just convey the story with passion and empathy. Done well, they will absorb its emotional impact and treat the autistic child with care and respect.

Find a good partner: Provide the autistic child with a companion by pairing him up with a kind and patient classmate who will help care and advocate for him. He does not need many friends, just one very good friend.

Make the child useful: Create or find a situation that requires everyone to work together. Give the autistic child a role that he can excel in but which the other children either dislike or perform poorly. For instance, he can take photographs during playtime. When the children feel that everyone is contributing something important, they will value each other, including their autistic friend.