



A PARENT'S GUIDE TO AUTISM

<http://iAutistic.com>

Many thanks to various contributors for making this booklet possible

Updated 03 March 2012

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Autism is a life-long developmental disability that stops people with autism (PWAs) from relating with the world around them. Although they look like ordinary people, they experience our world very differently. People unaware of their condition 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. Unable to estimate probabilities and sense likely futures, they cling desperately to fixed routines and unchanging rules.

Because they 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.

Without a sense of depth, position and movement, they spill drinks, tie shoelaces wrongly and break things. Having a fragmented consciousness, they could not own their body, emotions and history. They may not even perceive the photograph, purring sound and furry feeling as belonging to that of the same cat.

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What problems does being on the spectrum create?

- PWAs have difficulty coping with the world. They often spend their entire lives avoiding it.
- PWAs have difficulty participating 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 PWAs 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), food allergies or environmental pollution. Autism may have different causes and there is no consensus on this yet.

How do I help educate my child with autism (CWA)?

Because he cannot rely on his instincts and emotions, the CWA 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.

How do I know if my child is on the autism spectrum?

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 CWA 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 on the spectrum.

2) **The CWA 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 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 on the spectrum.

3) **The CWA 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 in private, then he is probably not on the spectrum.

4) **The CWA 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 on the spectrum.

5) **The CWA often keeps repeating specific odd behaviors** 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 on the spectrum!

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, we can reduce its severity and may even achieve functional recovery. Some of therapies are listed later in this booklet.

My child is probably on the spectrum. 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 by these authors

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

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.

Browse websites

- Free Information Kit created for families with newly diagnosed CWAs
<http://autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/100-day-kit>
- Links & Books Directory - <http://autism-resources.com>
- PWA Community - <http://www.wrongplanet.net>
- News - <http://sarnet.org>
- Free Autism Course - <http://autism.yale.edu>
- iPhone Apps - <http://momswithapps.com>
- Useful Resources & Articles - <http://iautistic.com>

What is the ideal environment for my child with autism?

Keep quiet: Avoid loud and sudden sounds. Hisses, screeches or sharp noises make CWAs nervous or confused. They may have sensitive ears: Even lowering the volume of the TV set a lot may still disrupt their focus and sleep. If noise is unavoidable, mask it with soothing and calm music.

Avoid company: Avoid having people around, especially strangers. They may disturb CWAs by introducing unintended noise, odors and uncertainty.

No visual distraction: Avoid bright colors (e.g. colorful plastic 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.

Avoid odors: Avoid strong smells, especially perfume. They may be extremely disturbing and confusing to CWAs.

Avoid excess clutter: CWAs 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.

Use functional categories: CWAs rely on categories to tell them what to do. A toothbrush is for us to clean our teeth, not a product from China. The house cat is for us to stroke gently, not a Doll Face Persian. Use only one simple category consistently; save the details until after the CWA has learnt what to do with the object or situation.

Begin at their level of competency: 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.

Redesign the environment to avoid relying on rules: We can change the environment so that rules are unnecessary, such as installing a baby gate at the kitchen entrance. Enforcing rules requires much time and attention.

Watch out for invisible disturbances - CWAs 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 CWAs find their (fast) flickering disturbing

How do I help my child with autism (CWA) play?

The CWA does not understand play the way most children do. He has a different focus because he is probably unable to:

- **Connect with his sense of individuality** (and thus create story characters)
- **Understand make-believe** (and thus create story scenarios)
- **Access his social instincts** (and thus accommodate playmates)
- **Access his temporal-spatial instincts** (and thus use fine and gross motor skills easily)

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. repetitive play)
- **Finding ways to make sense of the world** (e.g. imagining alternate realities which are simplified, ideal versions of our world)
- **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 CWAs 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 them to learn the mathematical and scientific concepts relating to logic, patterns, predictability and experimentation with which they can organize his world
- Let them learn something useful that they can use to coach other children (e.g. computer skills)
- Give them parts with which they can build and dismantle, like Lego bricks.
Avoid clay: it is hard to control precisely and may be frustrating for the CWA who demands absolute perfection.

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

CWAs live in a world 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.

I once witnessed a young boy watching a cartoon 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 specific segment and performs his ritual without tiring.

The CWA 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 his activity 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 CWA may pursue his interests in a socially inappropriate way, such as collecting toilet brushes from 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 CWAs 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 CWA'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 CWAs.

How can I help my child work with his emotions?

Many CWAs misbehave because they are unaware of their emotions and how to express them appropriately. Although the CWA 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. Another array can indicate the intensity of their emotions.

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.

CWAs tend to be inflexible perfectionists. They are sensitive to criticism since they view even a minor mistake as total failure. Seeing everything as equally probable and important, they spend their life worrying about and preparing for all possible scenarios. They would feel better if they can accept the concepts of "estimating based on similar past events", "satisfactory for others", "economy of effort" and "priority of effort".

As their handicap prevents them from perceiving the sacrifices that other people have made for them, many CWAs see themselves as compromising and helping other people constantly while getting nothing back in return. They are angry with the world for imposing social norms on them, ignoring their needs and refusing to do things their way.

As they do not have a coherent sense of self, most emotions and experiences do not belong to them. Hence, they may not realize that they can control their emotions or find ways to improve themselves based on their past experiences. Parents and teachers have to point this out to them.

Until they come to terms with the world, they cannot end the separation and loneliness between themselves and others. Spiritual and inspiration works that introduces our world as an innately good, beautiful and meaningful place (e.g. Waldorf Education and works by Neale Donald Walsch) can help.

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

Unlike most children who use their senses and instincts to understand the world, CWAs rely on abstract knowledge.

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 can 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. pricing bus fares, how bus companies make profit)
- **anthropology** (e.g. different bus-related customs)
- **politics** (e.g. bus unions, bus driver benefits)
- **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 a 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 to 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 PWA.

How do I help my child with autism 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 familiarize 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 without checking with the teacher. Otherwise they may mischievously direct him to break school rules or offend people, causing him to be punished for such misdeeds.

Provide 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 his 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 with a sympathetic partner in the front row corner next to a wall may be a good idea.

Use written instructions and teaching materials: The CWA 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 CWA 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, CWAs often rely on memorization to cover their lack of common sense. 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 collides with others. 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.

How do I persuade my child to make friends?

CWAs 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:** CWAs 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 CWAs talk to themselves to coordinate their thoughts and decision making.
- **Technical Language:** Many CWAs 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

them, we can explain the concept of the “Emotional Bank Account” with a real weighing balance to them.

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 CWA 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 may understand 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 get other children to accept my CWA?

Children not mature enough to understand their CWA 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 CWA gain acceptance among his peers. I have some suggestions for them in this aspect:

No lecturing: Lecturing the children about being nice to the CWA may backfire. The children may seem well-behaved until the teacher turns her back. Their tactics may also 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 CWA. 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 other 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 CWA with care and respect.

Find a good partner: Provide the CWA with a companion by pairing him up with a kind and patient classmate who will help care and advocate for him. Focus on quality over quantity; a few close friends are more important than many typical friends.

Make the child useful: Create or find a situation that requires everyone to work together. Give the CWA 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 CWA friend.

How do I help my child be more talkative?

Lacking the instinct to prioritize events, everything is equally important to the CWA. 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 questioning 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 you become superman during the race?”

LITERAL: “Did you fall down during the race?”

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 to craft his speech. If he is lost for words, keep quiet and wait for him. It helps him to think about what you said and how to respond. Interrupting his thoughts can delay his response even more.

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.

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.

Why does my CWA lack “common sense” (CS)?

CS covers the general knowledge plus social and executive skills necessary to function in human society. It relies on instincts fine-tuned by personal experience, and thus could not be mastered by exhaustive study. Instead, CWAs tend to rely on logical reasoning of their knowledge and past experiences. Below are the common mistakes that I have noticed:

1) **The CWA often lacks an awareness of purpose-intent.** I used to think that composition test scores are a matter of luck – if I got an easy topic I would score well and vice-versa. I did not realize that the teachers wrote the red markings in the paper to give me clues on how to score better no matter the composition topic. This occurred despite the hundred composition papers I have written in school because no one explained the teachers’ intent to me.

Most people will instinctively assume that everything designed or done by someone has an intent or purpose. For instance, if your dinner companion suddenly gives you a gentle, intentional nudge in the middle of a conversation, it may be a hint that you should stop discussing the topic because it may be sensitive or boring to the other guests. The CWA usually lacks that instinct.

2) **The CWA often lacks a human-centric viewpoint.** For instance, I once arranged chairs in a single file for a friend’s talk because it looked neat. I did not consider the fact that people would prefer to sit closer to the stage so that they can see and hear the speaker more easily.

CWAs may not see the functions and purposes that human institutions, rules and etiquette are designed for. They often inspect movies for truthfulness and accuracy rather than for artistic appreciation. As much as we may fail to see the artistic value of a cup with 10 handles, the CWA may fail to see the practical value of an ordinary cup with a single handle.

3) **The CWA’s often narrowly focuses on objective costs and benefits.** As they usually lack the instinct to handle ambiguous or subjective matters, they tend to ignore those matters completely. For instance, I often spent half an hour calculating bus routes to find the cheapest route for a one-off journey. I did not consider the unnecessary time, effort and inconvenience incurred against the few dimes I saved.

4) The CWA often lacks an awareness of personal significance. What did the word “heat” mean? To me, it was merely a dictionary definition rather than the sensation my hand touching a boiling kettle. The word “cat” meant a picture of a cat I saw in a book, not my experience of seeing, hearing or touching the actual animal. The separation of the mental and the physical limited my understanding of how the world works, giving me a grossly simplified version of the world obtained from textbooks.

5) The CWA may not be able to discern what is likely and unlikely. While he may be able to logically reason the probabilities of events happening if asked in isolation, this does not occur to him instinctively. If he does not make an effort to question his assumptions, he would easily treat the far-fetched scenarios found in works of fiction or conspiracy theories as likely to happen as the possibility of rain. I used to spend sleepless nights thinking about what to do if I encounter an alien invasion, meet a time-traveler and survive a nuclear attack etc.

6) The CWA perceives the future in terms of fixed events, not probabilities. To him, the future is merely an extension of the past. Either something has happened, or it did not. Likewise, either something will happen, or it will not. He could only see one possible outcome for his plans and remains blind to the other possibilities outside the rigid chain of events he envisioned.

I used to think that I would start my own businesses to earn SGD\$10 million by age 25 and US\$10 billion by age 35. These funds will go to creating a renowned research lab that will hire the best scientists to solve global problems such as how to cure cancer. Lacking an awareness of the human factors necessary to complete for such a project, I imagined that everything would proceed smoothly and easily as planned.

7) The CWA usually sees other people as an extension of himself. Lacking the instinctive understanding of individuality, he sees his personal beliefs, preferences and perceptions as the only logical possibility. Based on his previous observations, he may reluctantly factor in the possibility that some people will react differently from him due to “irrationality” or having faulty thinking. This does not change the perception that there is only one correct way, and he wishes to follow this “truth”.

What nutritional supplements are helpful for PWAs?

While I am not a professional nutritionist or doctor, I can share my personal experiences which can benefit others. While supplements cannot treat autism, they helped with the secondary issues such as chronic fatigue, sinus allergies, weak immune system and poor digestion.

For years, I have noticed that my blood pressure was abnormally low compared to other people. I also noticed that I tire easily compared to others, needing as much as 10 hours of sleep daily. In late 2009, I suspected that low blood pressure may be the cause of my tiredness. After taking about 1 gram of salt a day for 3 weeks to raise my blood pressure, I no longer felt so worn out after work. However, I still needed to sleep a lot.

In mid 2010, I started working for a biomedical autism treatment company. Taking the initiative to learn more about my job, I read extensively about nutritional supplements and other forms of biomedical treatment. After a parent of a CWA told me about the effects of Vitamin B12 on herself, I realize that I could apply my new knowledge to improve my own life.

I tried taking 250mcg of Vitamin B12 (the cheap Cyanocobalamin version) together with a multivitamin pill in the morning, and it seemed to cut one hour off my sleep time. However, taking 500mcg gave me insomnia.

I then purchased a bottle of 100 billion CFU probiotics and took a pill after lunch. The next day, I felt a “very healthy” sensation in my stomach. My stools became consistent and solid. I then took this (and later, the 20 billion CFU version) once a week and never had any more stomach flu again.

Determined to end my frequent bouts of sore throat, I started taking 1g of Vitamin C and 30mg of OptiZinc® daily. I kept the doctor away even when my colleagues were sneezing and calling in sick. I now take the zinc supplement 3 times a week to prevent overdosing. If I feel any discomfort, I will also take Life Extension’s 300mg Lactoferrin 3 times a day.

My next major breakthrough came when I took DHA, an essential Omega-3 fatty acid. When I started taking 300mg of DHA for about a week, I noticed that I seemed to be waking up feeling more refreshed. Increasing the dosage to 550mg cut another hour off my sleep. Now I take a softgel of the molecularly distilled Mega EPA/DHA sold by Life Extension twice a day.

I read about digestive enzymes and thought that better digestion might help improve my energy levels. I tried a cheap enzyme supplement but it had no effect. I later ordered a bottle of Enzymedica Digest Gold after reading many positive reviews about it. I took one right after dinner. My stomach never felt so wonderful. A gentle lift of energy swept through me and helped me focus throughout the night. I take a pill after dinner 3 times a week – money well spent.

Another supplement that works for me is Acetyl-L-Carnitine Arginate. Although it does not make me feel more energized after taking it, it helps to keep fatigue (both mental and physical) away. As it is rather expensive for the effects it provides, I reserve it for occasional use only.

Trying new supplements means that many of the supplements don't work, or may have unwanted side effects. I tried 500mcg melatonin to reduce my sleep time but it did not work. Instead, I found my body "sleeping" the next day (e.g. lethargic movements, slow pulse). I tried 5-HTP to improve my mood but the effects wore off after about 2 weeks of use. Meanwhile, an amino acid complex and an expensive brain booster had no effect on me.

Sometimes supplements don't work because the dosage is too low (e.g. DHA). Sometimes, they only work if taken in combination (e.g. zinc and vitamin C). Sometimes we will have to take good quality supplements (e.g. Digest Gold) or a well-absorbed supplement (e.g. OptiZinc® rather than zinc oxide).

It is unwise to blindly follow the recommendations of salespeople selling expensive supplements. For now, I still remain skeptical of the miracles of antioxidants, immune system factors, homeopathic remedies and traditional medicine. There is no substitute to having a good general knowledge of science and nutrition to avoid making poor judgments.

Please note the following:

- I am not sharing any advice, just my personal experiences.
- Please consult with a qualified doctor before taking any supplements.
- Supplements have different effects on different people.
- I do not earn any money for introducing the above supplements.
- I **only started** taking supplements **years after** I connected with my emotions, but they will probably help me if I took them as a child.

What are some available treatments for autism?

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA): Breaks down skills into discrete steps and uses reward and punishment to train children with autism. Very popular. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Applied_Behavior_Analysis]

Miller Method: Helps children form organized chunks of behavior & develop developmentally appropriate behavior. The theory developed by the program closely resembles the author's. [<http://millermethod.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>]

GFCF Diet: Many CWAs benefit from a casein and gluten free diet. Casein is found in **milk** and gluten in **wheat, oat, rye, and barley**. Taking certain enzyme supplements (e.g. TriEnza by Houston Enzymes) may avoid the need to go on this diet. [<http://www.gfcfdiet.com>]

Anti-yeast Treatment: Yeast infection may worsen autistic syndromes. Watch out for white patches in the mouth. Consult a doctor for treatment. Avoid **antibiotics, 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 low dosage and increase it slowly to avoid any side-effects. Below are some commonly used nutrients: (* per kilogram of body weight)

Vitamin B6:	17mg/kg*/day; max: 500mg; requires magnesium
Vitamin B12:	1-5mg/day (methylcobalamin, avoid cyanocobalamin)
Vitamin C:	8g/day for adolescents and adults
Magnesium:	6.7mg/kg*/day; max: 400mg (avoid oxide)
Zinc:	1-3mg/kg/day (monomethionine, picolinate or citrate)
Dimethylglycine (DMG):	60-500mg; use folic acid to avoid hyperactivity
Folic Acid:	0.55 mg/kg*/day (0.55mg = 550mcg/ug)

Note: Avoid Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) and Aspartame (NutraSweet) [<http://www.child-autism-parent-cafe.com/autism-treatment.html>]

Intensive Interaction: Works on improving the quality of the interaction, encouraging the client to develop shared attention, turn-taking and understanding non-verbal language. [<http://www.intensiveinteraction.co.uk>]

Occupational Therapy: Helps enhance people's ability (e.g. improving motor skills) or modify their environment to support their participation in everyday life. [<http://autism-in-the-christian-home.com/occupational-therapy-for-autism.html>]

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) – CWAs 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>]

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]

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>]

Speech Therapy: Helps CWAs with verbal pronunciation, communication rules, conversation skills and understanding concepts. [<http://autism.about.com/od/whatisautism/a/SLP.htm>]

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>]

Mifne Method: An intensive program for the nuclear family focusing on the child's potential abilities. [<http://www.mifne-autism.com>]

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>]

List of all therapies: <http://iautistic.com/autism-therapy-intervention.php>

What future awaits my child with autism (CWA)?

Most adult PWAs are unemployed. Even with impressive qualifications, their insistence on doing things their way, difficulty making decisions 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 continuous and intensive **social interaction**
- 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

PWAs often insist on high quality and tend to work for many hours without rest. Suitable jobs provide:

- Minimum social interaction
- A calm and quiet environment
- Repetitive, predictable chores
- Time to think through problems
- Clearly defined written instructions
- Good use of their favorite interests
- Mentally challenging projects in the PWA's area of expertise

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

It may be impractical to expect PWAs to work in a normal job like everyone else. Preparing them for employment may require a different strategy:

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

Parents can start by developing the talents, tendencies and obsessions of PWAs into useful skills. With highly in-demand skills, they find it easier to choose a suitable job. For instance, Temple Grandin works as a designer of livestock handling facilities and a Professor of Animal Science.

How do I help my teenage CWA take charge of Life?

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

- **Limited focus:** As everything seems equally important to them, they do not naturally focus on the key areas. 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 others who can multi-task.
- **Poor cause & effect judgment:** They may be unable to feel and estimate the consequences of their actions in the future. As a result, they may make poor decisions that they stubbornly refuse to change. This behavior may seem silly or emotionally immature to others.
- **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.

For more information on time management, read Stephen R. Covey's "*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*" and David Allen's "*Getting Things Done*".

Do note that a framework based solely on logic may reinforce his reliance on his intellect and fixated planning. Focus on developing his emotional awareness and generalization abilities during visioning.

What advice do you have for Teenage PWAs?

Accept the truth. Listen to feedback. The truth (about yourself and Planet Earth) is very unpleasant. Accept it, so that you can grow and mature.

Be responsible for your life. Make only promises that you will keep. Buy only what you can afford to pay. Accept fault for your mistakes and ensure you do not repeat these again. If you do not know how to do something, go and learn it. Find ways to improve yourself and solve your own problems.

Be part of the solution. Accept that Planet Earth sucks and help to make it better. Clean up the mess instead of complaining about the culprit. Recycle paper. Switch off your computer to conserve energy. Throw your rubbish into litter bins. Finish your food. While you may not be able to stop other people who create problems, you can at least avoid joining them.

Accept "good enough". Accept that you have limited time, energy, resources and endurance. Do only what is necessary, no more and no less. Accept that while you may never achieve your ideal goals and dreams, you can get something that you can live with. Planet Earth is a place of limitation, and wise people work with rather than against the limits.

Invest with the big picture in mind. Term life and accident insurance plus bank savings can buy peace of mind. Carefully selected supplements can buy health. A large monitor, fast computer and fast Internet connection can buy productivity. Learn to make worthwhile investments to improve your life in the long-term instead of saving blindly or spending recklessly.

Avoid unworthy risks and liabilities. Mountain climbing and scuba diving are dangerous and expensive. Drinking alcohol and smoking costs much money and leads to health problems. Permanent tattoos are hard to remove and often give employers a bad impression. I personally will not engage in these because I feel that any benefits are not worth the risk or liabilities.

Finish the projects you have started. It is better to have one successfully completed project rather than 100 incomplete ones, because you can list the completed project in your resume as your accomplishment. If you do not have the time or energy to see a project through, postpone or cancel it. Focus only on what you can handle but make sure you finish it well.

Be humble. Do not despise mundane jobs that you work in. Albert Einstein was once a lowly patents clerk, and Thomas Edison a newsboy. Do not look down on others for the same reason, because you may work for them one day. Do not think too highly of yourself. Even if you are talented, but there are probably millions who are smarter and more skillful than yourself.

Value other people's time. Remember that other people have their own life. They have their own demanding bosses, tight deadlines, nasty family issues, jealous spouses and utility bills to think about. If you expect them to drop everything in their life to help you, tough luck!

Make room for compromise. Strong religious or personal beliefs make life difficult for everyone. There is no need to convert others to our views or to defend our views from others. Accept that we will always disagree, and move on to something more productive. If we do not respect and accept others first, how could we expect them to respect and accept us?

Earn respect, not demand it. People expect you to accomplish something before they acknowledge your greatness. You will not make US\$1 million per year right out of high school. You will have to climb your way to the top, if that is what you seek.

Expect failure, accept regret. When we play computer games, we get as many chances as we need to solve the puzzle and pass. If you character dies, you can always start a new game. Unfortunately, games are not real life. In real life, you may not even get a second chance to get things right. Even if you are not at fault, the mistakes you make will stick with you. Failure is a necessary part of Life, and regret is inevitable. You will have to learn carefully from the past and move on bravely toward the future.

Live in the Real World. People do not spend their waking time battling mystical forces, time-travelling or solving ancient mysteries. They either go to work, or they go hungry. Likewise, finish your homework, clean your room and pay your bills. Facebook, Second Life and Wii can wait.

Live Meaningfully. The greatest challenge for us is to find meaning in this world of suffering and pain. Some turn to religion, others to charity, philosophy, arts and mathematics. Find your path towards inspiration, and be like a lotus flower rising above the muddy waters to bloom beautifully.

What is your general advice to parents of CWAs?

Two children with the same syndromes from two similar backgrounds can get the same therapy at the same age but have totally different outcomes. The **attitude of both the child and the parent** can make a big difference.

You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. If the CWA seeks to improve himself and learn from other people, he can achieve many goals even with little parental support. Likewise, parents' heroic efforts are futile if their CWA actively resists and rejects their help.

I have seen CWAs demand a new toy every day and throw temper tantrums until they get what they want. When eating out, they order dishes on a whim, take a small bite and then refuse to eat the rest. These CWAs will grow up thinking that they are entitled to the world and expecting their parents (or governments) to spoon-feed them as long as they live.

Successful people accept **personal responsibility** for their own lives. If they want something that they don't have, they will have to work to acquire it. If they make a mistake, they will have to suffer the consequences. If they promised something, they must keep their promise. If they are not good enough, they will find a way to improve themselves.

If parents want their children to be successful, discipline is essential. Autism is not an excuse for sparing the rod and wealth is not an excuse for over-indulgence. The child, no matter special needs or not, must develop an attitude of personal responsibility with a pinch of humility and courtesy.

Some possible house rules that could instill responsibility include:

- If a child wants a toy or some other luxury, he earns it by doing housework, running errands or getting good grades.
- If he does not finish his meal, he will skip the next meal and watch a documentary about starving children in third world countries.
- If he steals, he must not only return what he took and then give away something of equal value to charity.
- If he physically hurts other people or throws a temper tantrum, he will lose his privileges until he makes amends by doing charity work worth about twice the value of his transgression.
- If he does not pay up his debts on time, he will have to pay interest and forfeit any outstanding rewards. All these will go to his favorite charity.

What resources would you recommend for PWAs?

Self Improvement: Learning about personal responsibility, goal setting and other executive functions is essential for success.

- “*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*” by Stephen Covey
- “*Getting Things Done*” by David Allen

Inner Spirituality: Accepting Life on Planet Earth is a key part of our Inner Journey. There is more to Life than meaningless suffering and pain.

- “*Jonathan Livingston Seagull*” by Richard Bach
- “*The Little Prince*” by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
- “*Conversations with God*” series by Neale Donald Walsch
- “*I Need Your Love - Is That True?*” by Byron Katie

Evolutionary Psychology: This explained “Human Irrationality” and helped me accept the social norms and prejudices that I encounter.

- “*The Mating Mind*” by Geoffrey Niller
- “*Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind*” by David Buss

Finance: Money is a major limitation to our lives in this modern era, hence it is very important to learn about how it works and how to use it properly.

- “*Rich Dad Poor Dad*” series by Robert T. Kiyosaki
- “*Foiled by Randomness*” by Nassim Nicholas Taleb

Nutrition: There is much we can gain by gaining a proper understanding of how our body works.

- “*You: Staying Young*” by Michael F. Roizen and Mehmet C. Oz
- “*New Optimum Nutrition for the Mind*” by Patrick Holford

Autism: There are many useful books on that can help PWAs. It is definitely worthwhile to spend time to study them closely.

- “*The Complete Guide to Asperger’s Syndrome*” by Tony Attwood
- “*The Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships*” by Temple Grandin and Sean Barron

Skeptics: Last but not least, it is important to countercheck our knowledge and assumptions to avoid falling prey to quarks and scams.

- “*Bad Science*” by Ben Goldacre

A full list of books is available at <http://astore.amazon.com/iautistic-20>

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*”, “*Autism & Self Improvement*” and “*Star Child on Earth*” to unveil the mystery of autism. Eric knows that it is difficult to care for CWAs. May this booklet help relieve the pain of caretakers, parents and CWAs.

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

Autism Resource Centre

5, Ang Mo Kio Ave 10, Singapore 569739
<http://autism.org.sg> || (65) 6323 3258

Heep Hong Society

G1, Tung Yu House, Tai Hang Tung Estate,
Kowloon, Hong Kong
<http://www.heephong.org> || (852) 2776 3111

Autism Society Philippines

Rm 307 M&L Bldg, Kamias Road,
Quezon City, Philippines
<http://autismsocietyph.org> || (63) 2926 6941

National Autistic Society

393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG, U.K.
<http://autism.org.uk> || (44) 0845 070 4004

Autism Society of America

4340 East-West Hwy, Suite 350
Bethesda, Maryland 20814, U.S.A.
<http://autism-society.org> || (1) 301 657 0881

National Autism Society of Malaysia

4 Jalan Chan Chin Mooi,
53200 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
<http://nasom.com.my> || (60) 377 104098