

Fall 2023 Horizons Newsletter



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14 Words to Consider When You Befriend My Son with Autism

By Kathy Hoven

Darn social media. I have such a love-hate relationship with it. I love that we can meet in this little community huddled in our very safe, comfortable corner in the internet universe and share our common concerns, triumphs and general bitch sessions. But I hate that social media is a regular reminder of how alone my son is, both in the real world and the social media one. And I hate that I am reminded of that while on the elliptical machine at the gym because that stupid machine is so boring I have to check Facebook.

I know that sometimes my son makes a conscious decision to be alone. Alone, after all, is easier. However, sometimes I believe he is alone because people, especially teenage people, don't know what to do with "different" and rather than do the "wrong" thing, they choose not to do anything at all.

Most of my son's fellow classmates adore him. They are kind, caring and genuine. But they legitimately don't know what to do after, "Hey Ryan" and neither does he. I don't fault them, but I can educate them so that one day they may see that if they try, if they make an effort, then there is no "wrong" thing.

So, for you, teens out there who might want to be friends with my son, or maybe another teen with autism, here are 14 words you need to know to get it "right."

1. Ask.

Ask if he wants to go to the movies. Ask if he likes “Star Wars.” Ask if he loves pizza. Ask if he eats frozen yogurt. You need to ask in order to know.

2. Accept.

Accept him just like he is. There may be some things he does or says that may not make sense to you, but they make sense to him. Accept it. Accept him. And maybe, once again, ask. Ask him why he does what he does, so then it will make sense to you.

3. Consider.

Consider him. Include him. Think of him. If after school or rehearsal or the football game you are all going for pizza or frozen yogurt, even if it seems he prefers to be alone, we all like to be included, we all like to think, “Wow, they considered me!” “They included me!” “They thought of me!” Even if he chooses not to go, he will remember that you considered him.

4. Educate.

Educate yourself about autism but educate yourself about him. Inquire why he is so particular about food. Find out why routines are so important to him. Learn why “new” is hard for him. Discover why he loves Hollister t-shirts in gray and blue only.

5. Forgive.

Like any friend, my son might make a mistake. He might be brutally honest because he doesn’t know any other way to be. If your hair stylist went a little overboard with your latest “do” and it looks... um... bad, he might tell you. It’s not a personal attack, and although it may hurt your feelings, he is just being honest because being honest comes naturally to him. The truth might hurt a little, but honesty is a great quality in a friend (and your hair will grow back).

6. Ask (again).

He may have said no every single time you asked him to join you, but keep asking. One time he might just say yes.

7. Space.

If you do ask him, if you do consider him, if you do include him and if he says yes, he may need a little space after a period of time. He will know when he needs that space and when he is ready to join you again.

8. Time.

It takes time for him to connect, to trust, so you need to give him some time. If you give him his time, I promise he is so worth yours.

9. Remind.

He may need you to remind him about practice, rehearsal or where you are sitting at the football game (repeatedly). If he forgets, again, it’s not personal, it’s not that he doesn’t value your friendship, he just needs another reminder that will help him see that you considered him.

10. Scripting.

He loves memes. He loves to say lines from memes, movies and television shows and use them at just the right time, in just the right way. He was basically memeing and GIFing long before it was cool. He might show *you* a thing or two. But, you have to ask in order to understand.

11. Literal.

He is very literal with language, so sometimes slang, sarcasm and abstract language will “go over his head.” If he looks confused or doesn’t respond when you ask him, “What’s up dude?” explain what you mean in a literal way, “Hey Ryan, what are you doing?” then he will get it — and you.

12. Individual.

Remember that he is an individual not a collective disorder. He is Ryan, not autism.

13. Respect.

Even after you ask, educate and consider, you still might not get him, but please still respect him. Chances are really good that he doesn’t quite get you either, but, he will always, always respect you.

14. Kindness.

Just be kind. Period. The end.

OK fine, it wasn’t the end. Here is one last tip: just try to be his friend, even if you don’t get something right, you will never, ever be wrong.

Reprinted from: www.themighty.com

RECIPE FOR INCLUSION



1. Take one child.
2. Reflect on their abilities & strengths.
3. Remove artificial additives such as barriers to participation.
4. Season with self reflection.
5. Sprinkle some I and Us.
6. Blend with parent collaboration.
7. Add resources and supportive environments.
8. Stir gently until ingredients combine well.
9. Serve with good practice.
10. Enjoy!

DIVERSITY KIDS

6 Mistakes Autism Teachers and Paraprofessionals Make

Fix #1: Stop Talking So Much!

I see this teacher mistake in special education classrooms over and over again. We want to explain things to a student, so we do just that... we use a whole lot of words to explain.

The problem is that students with multiple disabilities need more time to process language. Adding more and more words can actually slow down the processing time and make what you are saying more confusing. Simplify what you are saying, please.

Fix #2: Wait a Minute Please!

We just talked about needing more time to process language. So, right after we verbally bomb a student and ask them a question, we offer them no time to process and produce a response.

Wait a minute... literally.

After you ask a question, wait just one minute (and this feels like forever). Allowing that extra processing time will give a student a chance at answering!

Fix #3: Stop Doing It for Me!

So, we asked a really wordy question, gave no wait time, and then when the student didn't respond right away, we answered for them/picked the one we thought they wanted/ just did it for them.

All the student learned was that if they wait long enough (or don't say anything) people will do it all for them. It is the opposite of independence- it is learned helplessness.

What is worse is that we become conditioned into doing for our students. Eventually, that leads to us not offering the chance for them to even try it on their own.

Stop making this teacher mistake in special education. Start helping students by allowing them the opportunity to try it themselves.

Fix #4: Stop Treating Me Like I Can't Learn

A student who happens to need extra time to process language, wait time to think about it and respond, and then a chance to try it themselves. Moreover, the inability to talk does not mean the inability to think or to feel.

Presume competence. Please.

We have no idea what is happening inside the heads of nonverbal students. Stories like that of Carly prove that inside the students we label as 'disabled', are feeling, thinking, normal people.

Fix #5: Stop the Meaningless Activities

If I had to sit and do folder games for 8 hours a day, 187 days a school year, for 22 years... well I can think of better things.

Having a folder game that has no purpose but to keep a student mentally sedated is not helping them gain a useful skill or practice something meaningful.

I am a proponent of building independence into a classroom. You must have activities a student can do independently. Just make sure there is some purpose, variation, and room for growth embedded in it. Otherwise, it is meaningless.

Fix #6: Stop Sitting Me All Alone!

No one puts baby in a corner... but all day we have students isolated from the herd and that is somebody's baby.

Social interactions are so important, and practicing is the only way to improve on that skill. Some of our students, however, only ever talk to grown-ups all day at school.

Build in social interactions into the school day- building that skill is so important and needs to be practiced!

Reprinted from: www.noodlenook.net



Autism – Etiquette and Proper Behaviors

Learning Etiquette

The fact of the matter is that no one is born with good manners. All children have to be taught what is considered a good behavior and what isn't... as well as etiquette. Saying please and thank you is a good start.

But more so than that, children learn how to eat with their mouth closed, to not slurp their drinks, to respect their elders and so on and so forth.

Autism Etiquette

Is there any reason that a person with Autism should not be taught etiquette or what is considered bad behavior? Of course not.

Temple Grandin often explains how her mother put a lot of emphasis on proper etiquette and how much that helped her later in life.

Children need to learn these things early with or without Autism as behaviors are difficult to change, especially if there is some lack of understanding as to the differences between various similar behaviors. That is to say, for an Autistic, one behavior could be considered acceptable, another not acceptable and yet be very similar in nature. This could confuse them.

So who doesn't have good behaviors?

The fact is, there's only two times that someone has bad behaviors...

1. The child is not taught. The parents, for whatever reason, do not teach a child proper manners, etiquette and behaviors
2. The child, or person later in life, makes a conscious choice to have bad behaviors

We've all said something wrong or done the wrong thing from time to time, but we usually learn from those mistakes. We usually adjust our behaviors along the way.

That applies to those with Autism as well. When you feel bad for what you've said, you don't do it again.

It's not ok to just be rude or to continue bad manners and use Autism as an excuse. It's not an excuse. I may lead to some confusion but it's not an excuse to live a life of bad manners.

Dear Parents

Teach your children good manners. Don't presume that they won't "get it", don't presume that they aren't absorbing what you say and certainly don't presume that it will just never apply to them because they have Autism.

















If you want your child to "fit in" with society, you're going to have to teach them what society will expect of them.

Some people will dismiss the bad behaviors your children exhibit later in life but no everyone will. You would be much better off instilling good manners in them early. It will serve them well in life.

Chocolate Peanut Butter Oatmeal Bars

You will need:



Ingredients:	Directions:
 3/4 cup Butter	1. Melt butter  in large saucepan  on medium heat.
 1/2 cup Brown Sugar	2. Add brown sugar  and vanilla 
 1 tsp. Vanilla	3. Add oatmeal  stir for 4 minutes
 3 cups Oatmeal	4. Pour half the mixture in pan 
 1 cup Chocolate Chips	4. Pour chocolate chips  and peanut butter  into bowl 
 1/2 cup Peanut Butter	5. Microwave  30 seconds, stir. Continue microwaving in 15 second increments until melted. 6. Pour chocolate mix into pan, top with remaining oatmeal mixture. 7. Cover and refrigerate 3 hours 

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