

Some Extremely Reasonable Suggestions for “Typical” Parents, Family and Teachers on Behalf of Kids with Asperger Syndrome

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Aspie-at-Large

1. PLEASE don't try to make us “normal”. We'd much rather be functional. It's hard to be functional when you have to spend all your time and energy focusing on making eye contact and not tapping your feet.
2. PLEASE don't overprotect, indulge, or cosset us. We already have enough social problems without additionally learning to be spoiled and self-indulgent.
3. DON'T teach us social skills according to how you wish the world was, or even how you think it is. Look carefully at what is really going on and teach us real world rules.
4. DON'T talk and/or act as if your life would be perfect or soooo much easier if you had a “normal” child. We don't thrive on knowing that we are the children you didn't want.
5. DON'T make the mistake of thinking that teaching us typical behaviors and successful masking means we are “cured”. Please remember that the more typical our behavior seems, the harder we are working. What is natural, simple behavior to you is a constant intense effort for us.
6. PLEASE don't punish us with rewards or reward us with punishments. For those of us who find recess to be the most stressful part of school, any action that will keep us in from recess is one we will learn to repeat ad infinitum. Getting rewarded for good behavior with fashionable but really itchy clothing will train us to NOT behave too well!
7. If you assiduously train us to imitate and conform to other children's behavior, don't be shocked if we learn to curse, whine for popular toys, dress in ways you don't like, and eventually drink, smoke, and attempt to seek out sex as teenagers. Those “nice kids” you think so highly of do a lot of things you don't know about or don't you remember high school?
8. Please DO give us information about autism/Asperger Syndrome early on at a level we can digest. We need to know what's going on and we will figure out that something is “wrong” with us whether you tell us or not.
9. DON'T avoid a diagnosis or help for us because you are scared of us being labeled. Without that diagnosis and appropriate support, our teachers, family, and fellow students will give us plenty of labels and we might just believe them if we hear them often enough.
10. DON'T force us to do things we can't do. A forced social situation won't teach us social skills any more than dumping us in the middle of the Pacific Ocean will teach us to swim.
11. DON'T punish us for what other kids do. The fact that other kids tease and torture us for benign “autistic” behaviors doesn't mean we need to change, it means they do. Needing to bounce or swing for the whole recess is not morally wrong; tormenting someone for having a neurological disability is.
12. DON'T attempt to use humiliation or public embarrassment to “teach us a lesson”. We get way too much of that from other people, and the only lesson learned is that we can't trust you either.
13. DO punish us (or give us “consequences”, heaven help us) when it is necessary to do so — but make the connection between cause and effect very, very clear. We often need visual aids to understand how our behavior can cause an unwanted result for us!!!!

14. DON'T cut us too much slack when our behavior is potentially dangerous to us. For example, adolescent pre-stalking behavior should result in serious consequences — because not treating such behavior seriously when we are young can lead to problems involving law enforcement when we're older!
15. DON'T trust untrained camp counselors, “typical” peers, or youth pastors to be able to deal with Asperger Syndrome. Often their answers to our problems involve highly destructive phrases like “try harder”, “you could do it if you really wanted to”, and “snap out of it”.
16. DON'T model one thing and teach another. If you yell or hit when you're mad, we will too. If you rage at us, don't be shocked at our “autistic rages”. DON'T lecture us about our stims while you smoke, tap your foot, pick at your manicure and down your third double-latte today.
17. DON'T require us to be wildly successful at something because your ego has been wounded by having a “flawed” child. We can't all be Temple Grandin. Remember, all honest work is noble, even if you can't brag about us to your friends.
18. DO spend time with our siblings, even if you need to arrange for respite care to do so. Schedule something special for them without us along, even if it's just lunch at a fast-food joint once a week or so.
19. DO ask for help for yourself as needed. Take advantage of respite care when you can. Get cognitive-behavioral counseling and/or medication when you are depressed. Don't try to do it all alone. Remember it is much more important that you get a nap and a nourishing meal than that we have a tidy house.
20. Most important: please, please, please DON'T wait until we're “cured” or “recovered” to love and accept us. You could miss our whole lives that way.