

MISTAKES AS THERAPY

Every parent has a tendency to be protective of his or her children, but as parents of a special needs child we probably have a tendency to be over-protective. This may be a disservice to him because we hope that he will be as independent as possible when he leaves the safety of our home. How can we know when to intervene on his behalf and when to just let him make the mistakes he will make and possibly suffer the consequences?

My husband and I have learned over the years that if we can predict somehow what the consequences will be then we can decide if we can live with them. Of course we have the responsibility to prevent disasters but if it is a matter of some minor discomfort then maybe it is better to allow him to experience it. Additionally, we can easily forget that our Aspergers son often experiences discomfort differently from us because his tactile sense is so different from ours.

Our family makes a yearly hiking trip to Minnewaska State Park in Upstate New York. The trails are mountainous and there are a number of sheer gorges on either side. Our Aspergers son was one who had a very poor sense of where he fit physically in the world and as a result frequently walked into walls and fell off ledges in his own neighborhood. We had to make sure one of us was holding his hand very tightly while on the trails or I am sure we would have lost him. About four years ago we found ourselves on a low trail, very safe, no sheer drops. We came to a wide, shallow lake, no more than a foot deep. Our son was five years old at the time and driven to walk on the ledge next to the water. We thought about it. The lake was very shallow, it was a warm day and it seemed that the worst that would happen if he fell in was that he would be wet. So we let him go his merry way and sure enough, he fell in. So, he got wet. Nothing terrible happened. And, because of his particular sensory make-up, the fact that he was wet did not bother him at all the way it would have bothered my husband or me.

This experience went a long way toward reducing our general stress level as we continue to accompany our son on his neural journey. He has, by now, responded so well to occupational therapy, he can decide whether he wants to fall into the lake and sometimes he does, just because he wants to be wet.

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