

1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism or Asperger's

Ellen Notbohm and Veronica Zysk

More than 600 fresh ideas join tried and true tactics from the award-winning original edition... over 1800 ideas in all!

Respond to "I can't" with "Yes, you can."

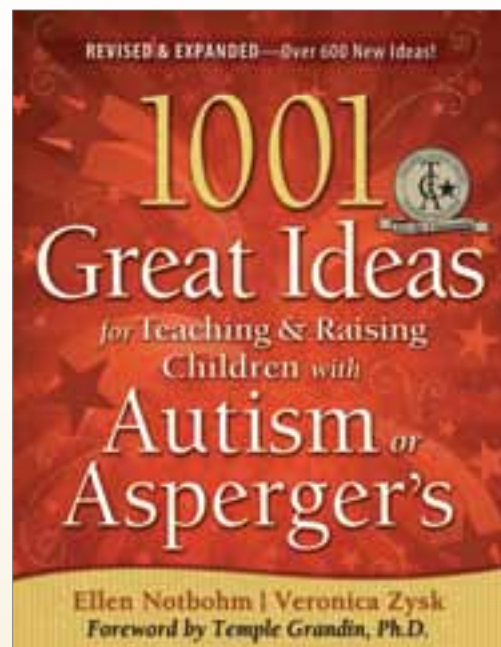
I am here to help. I have lots of ideas. We will try until we find one that works."

—1001 Quick Idea

Chapter 2. Communication and Language Raise a reader: What parents can do at home

Many, many teachers tell us that reading to your child at home is the single most important element in developing literacy. One teacher even told us that it is more important than anything they do at school. If you aren't currently reading to your child on a regular basis, start now.

- If reading every day seems overwhelming, start with two days a week and work up from there.
- It's common for children with autism to have as much as four grade levels discrepancy between their decoding skills (ability to read single words in isolation) and their comprehension skills (ascertaining meaning). Decoding is an essential element of reading, but decoding without comprehension is merely a recitation of syllables. When reading to your child at home, emphasize content and comprehension more than error-free recital of words. Correcting every little error discourages enjoyment in reading by turning it into work. So:
 - Overlook errors. Teachers say, let us deal with that at school.
 - If you must correct, do it in a way that doesn't sound like criticism. Just repeat the word the correct way in a positive tone of voice as if you didn't even notice it was wrong, and move along quickly.
 - Probe for comprehension by asking questions. "How do you think the Little Engine feels? Have you ever felt like that?" But keep interruptions infrequent so the child doesn't lose the story line.



- If your child's teacher requires twenty or thirty minutes of home reading each night, remember that it doesn't have to be all at once. Two ten-minute sessions or several five-minute sessions may be infinitely more manageable. The cumulative effort is no less valuable than at a sustained sitting.
- Reading doesn't have to be in a chair or a bed. If you like reading in the bathtub, your child might, too.

Chapter 3. Behavior

I hear ya—and this argument is over

Here's a strategy from the baseball field that transfers beautifully to home. Ellen's son Connor is an umpire, a venue in which coaches often elevate arguing to a science. Connor circumvents lengthy disputes by establishing

a twenty-second rule at the pre-game meeting. Connor explains:

“If you have a legitimate concern, I will listen for as long as it takes to resolve it. But if you merely disagree with my decision and want to vent, you get twenty seconds. After twenty seconds, I will say ‘I hear you, Coach’ and I will expect you to return to the dugout.”

Ellen wishes she had known this technique all those years before Connor became an umpire!

Chapter 4. Daily Living Cuts, scrapes, and bruises

Kids’ boo-boos are inevitable. Scraped knees or elbows, cuts, falls, and bug bites can be particularly distressing for the child with tactile sensitivities. In addition to the healing power of your love, use these extra hints for dispensing minor medical attention at home or at school.

- Stay calm at all times. Keep your voice steady and offer assurance that you know what to do.
- Keep your language simple and brief. Use picture cards if needed. At times like these your child’s language processing fades.
- Explain each step of what you need to do. Show the child the materials you will use. “I have to wash the cut to remove any dirt or germs.” “I need to press down on the cut with my fingers to stop the blood.”
- If there is blood, use a dark washcloth or towel to clean up. The sight of their own blood sparks panic in many children.
- If something might hurt (many children with autism have a high threshold to pain—don’t assume discomfort that may not occur), let the child know ahead of time. If it’s temporary, say so. “I’m going to put ointment on the cut with this cotton swab. It might sting for a few seconds and then it will be over. One, two, three—done.”
- If bandaging is needed, explain its use to the child and tell him to let you know if it is or becomes too tight, too sticky, wet, smelly, or otherwise uncomfortable. “This dressing must

stay on your arm for two days or until I replace it. Leave it on, but tell me if it’s bothering you.”

Chapter 5. Thinking Social, Being Social

Relating to the outside world

Many children with autism prefer to remain within a physical realm that feels safe, whether it be their bedroom, home, or classroom. Feeling comfortable in the big, big world beyond the home may not come easily. As a first step, you can heighten her awareness of the larger world by starting a Window on the World journal with her. At random times of the day and throughout the weeks, have her look through one same window and communicate what she sees and hears. She can dictate to you, write it herself, or express it in drawings. Over time she will familiarize herself with temporal concepts (light in the morning, dark at night), weather conditions (sunny in the summer, windy in the fall, grayer in winter), sounds (garbage trucks, sprinklers, mail carrier), animals (birds, squirrels, cats, insects). It’s a safe way to become comfortable, and maybe even excited, about the fact that the world is an ever-changing place.

Chapter 6. Teachers and Learners

Partnership skills

Teaching children to work as partners involves more than putting two kids at a table together. For your student with autism, it takes a lot more. The social thinking skills inherent in reciprocal communication do not come naturally to him. Help your student become a stronger communication partner by breaking down this complex skill into its basic elements. Review these elements and teach or practice as needed until they become more natural to the child. Once he has been taught these skills, give him a visual support in the form of a small card or bookmark-shaped reminder list. This is a

“I was amazed
at the number
and quality of ideas,
and strongly recommend
that parents read and
apply the advice.

I learned some
really good
ideas!”

– Tony Attwood, Ph.D., author of
*The Complete Guide to
Asperger’s Syndrome*

good whole-class activity; most students will benefit from extra coaching on how to be a good partner.

- Read the directions together. If we have questions, we can ask the teacher.
- Look at your partner when she is speaking to you.
- Listen to your partner.
- Think about your partner’s ideas about the assignment.
- Tell your partner your ideas about the assignment.
- Take turns talking. We are each quiet when the other is talking.
- We stay on task. We do not talk about other things and we do not talk to other kids while we are working on our assignment. If we need help, we can ask the teacher. ■

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