

Perspective Discussion on Eclectic Hobbies and the Behavioral Modification Strategies Involved in Autism Spectrum Disorder

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ABSTRACT

Six years after writing a reflective paper on the child's development with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), we return once again to consider the patients present interests and how the present eclectic hobbies connect with the early observations. Beyond considering this personal experience, we will also discuss the broader topic of parenting a child with ASD. This analysis includes a four-part parenting strategy that we have found to be successful in the child's behavioral modification.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); ASD parent; Neurotypical child; Behavioral modification

ABOUT THE STUDY

Dr. Shore tells us "When you meet one person with Autism, you've met one person with Autism" [1]. This simplified understanding proposes that no two individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or their characteristics are same. With my experience, I have many positive things to say since I first wrote about him six years ago [2]. In the span of just a few short years my son has emerged as a rather curious savant in electronics, origami, and engineering. He has developed so much in the past several years that it almost makes the younger version of him seem disconnected from who he is now.

Reflecting on his younger years, he lacked the tools to make his invention ideas into reality, which frustrated him and gave him a sense of powerlessness. At that time, he was unprepared to make his ideas into reality yet, he was very invested in idea production. He gave a particular name to these invention ideas he called "sheens" which were short for "machines". He also created hand-drawn diagrams that would explain how these "sheens" would work if he could make them into reality. Now, as a teenager, with STEM tools like his computer, Arduino®, and a 3D printer, he can finally bring some of his ideas to fruition and I feel that this has given him a greater sense of fulfillment in life.

Eclectic hobbies and giftedness

I find my son's hobbies interesting. Some hobbies are things that

I can do, and other times I can only watch. When he works with origami, he offers me step-by-step instructions so that I can participate. Other times, I cannot help him with a complex project such as programming his Arduino® circuit board as I don't quite understand enough about this equipment to help him. My efforts to try and stay up to date with his hobbies and interests help me see the big picture of my child. Dr. Gaudion said stakeholders need to think about the "whole spectrum of autism and the variety of strengths and interests it brings" [3]. With this advice, I think is important for caregivers to consider their ASD child and what hobbies and skills interest them to best guide them.

Four-part parenting strategy

Leaving aside the advantages of an ASD youth, it cannot always be a pleasant experience because of negative behaviors that can be "disrespectful, disobedient or obnoxious" [4]. These negative behaviors are assuaged with firm boundaries, which has helped my son control many of his emotional outbursts. Boundaries may be an unpopular viewpoint on parenting but, I have found that they work with my ASD youth. As a parent, I utilize a systematic approach to my parenting process that has ensured my home is a peaceful place where higher-order thinking can occur. This process can be narrowed down into four key elements which include: Clear boundaries, follow through of consequences, acknowledgment of compliance, and a secure

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relationship. Successfully applying this process has required steady compliance, but the rewards have been remarkable.

The first element of my parenting strategy begins by writing out the boundaries in the house. The boundaries, and the corresponding positive and negative consequences referring to them are simplified to his level. This is an important step that scaffolds my child and provides him with a blueprint for his future independent living. The second element of my process includes 100% follow-through on all negative consequences. As his father, I must follow through on all negative consequences even when I don't want to deal with what he has done. This includes any disrespect for his siblings and their property. Negative situations like stealing a toy are addressed while the offense is small and manageable. If minor offenses are unaddressed, it shows him that there is a weak spot in the walls of the boundaries.

The third element of the process acknowledges absolute compliance with offering positive feedback. Even if it is a small task, I stress the importance of giving due accolades when my child complies with a directive. Receiving an affirmation statement like, "Great job with" or, "I saw you do the right thing when you were with your friend," and, "I'm so proud of you for doing" go a long way in modifying my ASD youth's behavior.

The fourth element is the importance I place on building a lasting and loving relationship with my child. Maslow [5], emphasized love, describing it as a basic need that is necessary for a purpose driven life. With this understanding, the love I provide my child helps him know what a loving relationship feels like; and therefore, grants higher-order proficiencies such as learning and positive behavioral change. Tan and Yasin [6], postulate that parents play an important role in helping children discover the feeling of being loved which gives a sense of belonging and the capacity to love others. Consequently, I must genuinely enjoy my child's company and make certain that he feels loved. To establish this relationship, I spend time with him on an ongoing basis. This often consists of checking in with him and participating with his hobbies. The continual re-involvement with him and his interests reaffirms him and establishes the relationship [7].

CONCLUSION

Far too often I see children being rewarded for their poor behavior which I feel is responsible for the creation of rude,

unproductive, and entitled adults. Lehman espouses that a judge will not consider a person's disability when they see criminal behavior and impose a sentence. Similarly, Greg Stucky says "a rude autistic (person) is a rude person. If they want to succeed, they need to learn manners". As a parent, I must look beyond my child's ASD diagnosis as I attempt to position him for adulthood. I do not pretend to have a neurotypical child, but I also do not overlook the importance of holding him accountable for all of his negative actions. I recommend others to take this approach as well and consider the parenting strategies highlighted in this paper.

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