

60 SOCIAL
SITUATIONS &
DISCUSSION
STARTERS to Help
Teens on the Autism Spectrum Deal with
Friendships, Feelings, Conflict and More

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

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Introduction

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) see the world very differently than the average person. Individuals with ASD think very literally. They have a hard time understanding sarcasm and idioms. If someone with ASD asks you if you would like to go see a movie you really want to see and you sarcastically answer “I do not want to see *that* movie” the individual with ASD will think you really do not want to see that movie and suggest a different movie. When you tell them you were kidding they may look at you like you are lying to them. If you tell someone with ASD “Let’s go out and paint the town red!” that individual may think they need to go to the store and buy red paint and paint brushes to prepare for your evening out. Almost everything is black or white; they have a difficult time seeing the “grey area” in anything. Individuals with ASD also have a hard time “putting themselves in someone else’s shoes.” They find it very difficult to see something from someone else’s point of view. The situations included in this book help these individuals (especially teens) work through different situations they may encounter. It gives them the opportunity to try to see someone else’s point of view. It gives them a safe time to honestly discuss how they would approach different situations. This gives the person working with them the opportunity to explain why others may find their response inappropriate and help them reach a socially acceptable response.

How to use this book

This book was designed with both the teen and the parent in mind. The sections are not in any specific order. Feel free to skip around and pick the topic your teen might be having issues with. I suggest

you read the situation with your teen and do the discussion questions together. You could write your responses down and compare them with your teen's responses. Even if your teen gives you a seemingly incorrect response please do not tell them they are wrong. Ask them why they responded to the question the way they did. The majority of the time your teen will have a legitimate reason for their response. It will give you insight into how your teen processes information and how they think about different situations. You may be surprised!

The parent homework is designed to help you generalize the skill into the "real world." The best way to gain insight into your teen is through communication. Each parent homework assignment involves communicating with your teen in some way and relating the skill to a time when the teen has experienced the topic in real life. Nothing generalizes a skill more than putting it into perspective with something your teen has gone through. Try to keep it light and related to the topic. I hope these situations help your teen as much as they have helped my students. Enjoy!

Self-Esteem

Why are we talking about this?

Individuals with ASD sometimes struggle with self-esteem issues. This is due to them not completely understanding why others do not act or say things the same way they do. They know they are different and sometimes this is hard for them to accept. This chapter helps them work through various self-esteem issues.

What is Encouragement? This is Too Hard!

Joey has been watching the science fiction series *Comet Battle* for as long as he can remember. He is a huge fan. He owns every movie and can recite most of the dialogue by heart. His parents decided to get him the Ultimate Collectors Cosmos kit for his birthday. When Joey opened it he was so excited! It was the biggest collector's kit ever made with over 5000 pieces! He could not wait to get started! He immediately opened the box and looked at the directions. There were a lot of directions, over 100 pages. Joey carefully sorted out the pieces and started at Step 1.

Joey did well until Step 25. He was supposed to connect two larger pieces but he just could not figure out how to do it. He looked at the picture over and over. Was he missing something? Joey became very discouraged. He threw the directions down and went to his room. His older brother Sid came up to see what was wrong. Sid was in college and Joey thought he was very intelligent. Joey explained how he felt

stupid because he could not get past Step 25. Sid asked him if he would like some help. Joey said "yes."

Joey and Sid went back downstairs and looked over the directions again. As far as Sid could tell, Joey had done everything right so far and he could not figure out why the parts were not going together. They both worked on the project for about 20 minutes. Finally, Sid looked at Joey and said "You know, this is not an easy thing to put together. You did a great job so far! I do not know if I would have finished this much as fast as you did. You are really good at building! We should wait until Dad has time and ask him if he could help us out."

Discussion questions

- Do you think Joey actually read the directions carefully or do you think he just glanced at them and tried to put the kit together?
- When Joey started having problems at Step 25, do you think he went back over the directions to make sure he did not make a mistake?
- Why did Joey go to his room when he got upset?
- How do you think Joey felt when Sid offered to help him?
- How do you think Joey felt when Sid could not put it together either?
- Do you think what Sid said to Joey made him feel better?
- Do you think Joey ever went back and tried to put the kit together again?

Are these people being encouraging?

- "I noticed you received a D on your paper. You really messed that one up!"
- "It is OK if you did not make the cheerleading squad this year. There is always next year."
- "You are going to try that trick again? Why would you want to do that? You are only going to fall again and this time you might really hurt yourself!"

- I know you have been trying to land that trick. Keep practicing. You will get it.”
- “You have been working so hard on your project. I know it has been difficult. You are already half way done! Way to go!”

Parent homework

I “encourage” you to talk to your teen about a time when you were completely discouraged and someone consoled you and made you feel better. Your teen will realize that even parents felt better from a kind word at one time. You will be amazed at the impact that can have. When you encourage your teen, use the word “encourage” to help them clearly understand the word and the actions behind it.

The Importance of Having a Sense of Humor: The Haircut

Jett was staying at Mike’s house for the evening. His other friend Steve stopped by. Steve had just purchased a new set of clippers and he was dying to try them out on someone. Jett needed a haircut and decided to let Steve trim his hair. Steve decided to get a little creative and clipped some designs into Jett’s hair. Steve trimmed a star, a swirl, and some diamonds into Jett’s hair. Before Steve had a chance to actually trim Jett’s hair to a normal style his mom called and told him he had to go home. Steve packed up his clippers and went home. Jett was left with all the different designs cut into his hair. It was late in the evening and there was nowhere he could get his hair fixed so he was stuck with the designs until the next day.

Mike got invited to a party and asked Jett to go with him. Jett really wanted to go to the party. A lot of his friends would be there. He decided to put on a hat and go to the party.

When he got to the party Mike decided to tell Jett’s friends why he was wearing a hat. Ella walked up to Jett, took the hat off his head, and started to laugh so loudly that she got the attention of most of the people at the party. Now everyone was looking at Jett’s head! He tried to explain what had happened but everyone at the party started laughing at him and he could not get a word in to explain. Jett got mad, left the party, and went home.

When he walked into his house his mother saw his hair and started yelling at him. She asked him why he would do something like that to his hair. Then she told him that he had to get it fixed the next day because he looked ridiculous. Jett went to his room and slammed the door.

Discussion questions

- Should Jett have let Steve experiment on his hair?
- Do you think Steve intentionally gave Jett a bad haircut?
- What could Jett have done when everyone at the party started laughing at him?
- Do you think if Jett made jokes about his haircut he still would have felt the need to leave the party?
- Do you think if Jett would have explained to his mother what happened that she still would have been angry?

Are these people showing their sense of humor?

- Lisa dropped her ice cream all over the sidewalk. Cody started laughing. Lisa smiled and went back and got another ice cream.
- Lisa dropped her ice cream all over the sidewalk. Cody started laughing. Lisa turned and yelled at Cody "It is not funny!"
- Judy was walking with Alison and fell into mud. Judy sat up and the front of her shirt and pants were completely covered in mud. Alison started to giggle while she was helping Judy up. Judy started laughing and pulled Alison into the mud.
- Judy was walking with Alison and fell into mud. Judy sat up and the front of her shirt and pants were completely covered in mud. Alison started to giggle while she was helping Judy up. Judy stood up and harshly told Alison she wished Alison had fallen into the mud instead of her.

Parent homework

Having a sense of humor about stressful things in everyday life can make the difference between having a good day and a horrible day. Talk to your teen about a time when something embarrassing happened to you and you managed to laugh it off. Some examples could be wearing a horrible bridesmaid dress or wearing two different colored socks to work. Explain how it changed the dynamic of your day. Your mindset can truly make the difference to whether you decide to enjoy the day or sit in your room and remain upset. Try to maintain a good sense of humor with your teen so you can model the skill. Also try to find humor in everyday occurrences.

Common Sense: My Computer Died!

Jesse had a desktop computer that he used all the time. He was online playing games, charging his music player, doing research for school, chatting with friends, looking at cars, or just surfing the web. If he was not out with his friends he was on the computer.

One day Jesse needed to go online to look for parts for his bike. His crank had snapped yesterday while he was riding and he wanted to see if he could find a new one online cheaper than the store price. He tried to log on to his computer but nothing was coming up on the screen. Jessie wiggled the mouse and hit the power button a few times and still nothing happened.

Jesse decided to call the computer manufacturer to see if they could help. He really needed to research the price for the crank so he could get his bike fixed. When he was connected to technical support the technician started to ask Jesse a question but before he had a chance to get the question out Jesse started complaining that he had tried everything and nothing was working. He said how lousy the computer was and just started yelling at the technician. Once Jesse stopped complaining the technician started asking him questions. The first question the technician asked Jesse was if the computer was plugged in. Jesse replied "What, do you think I am stupid or something?! Of course I checked to see if the computer was plugged in!" Next the technician asked Jesse if the computer was plugged into an outlet or a power strip. Jesse told him it was plugged into a power strip. Then the technician asked Jesse if the power strip was turned on. Jesse looked and the