

Raising a Son with Autism: Lessons Learned So Far

- Saving receipts (income tax, SSAH/ACSD, etc.)
- Saving letters (funding, services, etc.)
- Saving incident reports, and other documents where your child exhibits challenging behaviours (funding, services)
- School: do not start school or meet a new teacher with your fists up. Be open-minded and give them a chance to get to know your child.
- Do not expect to get everything you want for your child on day one. School, funding and services are all processes that will take time. Amass knowledge from education and other parents to decide what your child needs, but be firm when it comes to your child's needs; you can do this in a respectful and pleasant manner.
- Keep your child busy. Behavioural Therapy, Community Integration, games, walks, trips or sports. Challenging behaviours lessen when our days are full.
- Give yourself a much-needed break by hiring someone to do things with your child.
- If money is tight, try the following tips:
 - Go to your neighborhood high school to see if their students can help you by using their community (volunteer) hours.
 - Use Google images for pictures in communication binders, social stories and schedules.
 - Find therapy items, toys, clothes, etc. at Value Village. My son loves that place; he gets his videos there for \$2-3 each.
 - Tuesday movies at Rainbow Cinemas are only \$5 each. If we have had to leave part way through, our local Rainbow has reimbursed us with passes.
 - Join your local Autism Ontario chapter. For a nominal yearly fee, you will not only get support and information, but in many locations a lending library so you don't have to spend a fortune on ASD books. Many chapters also offer great educational opportunities at reduced rates for members.
- Offer an alternative (to speech) means of communication. I've found PECS the best for us. Although ASL is excellent, more people understand the pictures of PECS than they will sign language.
- During puberty, your child may experience emotions they do not understand. This could result in some new behaviours, some aggressive. We are still working on this, but are having success with the following:
 - Consult a pediatrician, neurologist, psychiatrist to check your child out physically/mentally to determine there is not something else going on and to discuss medication changes
 - Consult with Behaviour Management Services
 - Use a communication binder with PECS – even if your child can communicate verbally, this is a very challenging time and they may be struggling with verbal communication
 - Use picture schedules – our kids can feel a loss of control if they don't know what is coming next. Even if they appear to understand when you verbally explain their day to them, please provide them with a written schedule (using words and/or pictures). It does make a difference.
 - Use social stories – this method really works. My friend Cenza gave me a series of books called *Autism and PDD Social Skills Lessons* by Pam Britton Reese and Nena C. Challenger which have helped so much. Another good manual is *The New Social Story Book* by Carol Gray. You can alter these stories to suit your own needs. ■

Liz Cohen (mother of Joey)