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THAN EVER!**

# Aukids®

Issue 22  
Winter 2014

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**Positive Parenting for Children with Autism Spectrum Conditions**



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- Therapy?**  
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Oh yes it is!



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Paradise**  
Kids share their  
ideas of heaven



**PLUS**

Our handy **2014 guide** to  
autism events around the UK!





# Letter from the Editors

Debby    Tori



## Happy New Year Readers!

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Well, talk about ringing in the new... welcome to your new look AuKids magazine! As promised, for 2014 our magazine has expanded (just like we all have over Christmas...). There's now 16 pages crammed full of reviews, features and readers' experiences – all full colour. Your feedback is as ever important to us, so let us know what you think. A big thanks to graphic designer Jo Perry for working so hard, still for a fraction of her normal fee, to help us bring AuKids to you in its new improved format.

We responded to requests for more shared stories, and so our 'What a Difference a Year Makes' takes a behind the scenes look at the progress made by a handful of families over the course of the year. We hope that you'll feel inspired enough to make a note of where your child is up to now and chart their progress over the next year. If you want to share it with us, we may be able to write a similar feature next year starring your own little person! Many thanks to those families who contributed to the feature with honesty and humour.

You'll notice a new readers' page with letters and photographs so if you'd like to write to us, don't be shy! We also have a larger review section that includes competitions. It means we can share our reviews of events as well as books and DVDs. All readers are very

welcome to email their reviews to us at [aukidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@gmail.com) Many thanks to our volunteer 'reader panel' who have already agreed to share their views on new titles! You'll see some new names under the reviews as a result.

Your guide to autism events in this issue will help you plan your diary. It's handily positioned in the centre so that you can take it out easily and pin it to your wall. We won't be attending them as exhibitors this year, as our team is now focusing on raising funds for AuKids through speaking events. We will be running some of our own in 2014 as well as attending conferences, so watch this space and our Facebook page for details of your AuKids team on the road.

We wish you all the best for a happy and healthy 2014!

*Tori & Debby*

e-mail: [aukidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@gmail.com)

### COMPETITION WINNERS FROM ISSUE 21:

- Claire Williamson, Sheffield (*tent and sensory toys*)
- Sarah Prightingale, Warwickshire, Fiona Scott, Inverness and Rachel Kaye, Manchester (*Calmer by the Water DVD*)
- Jennifer Turton, Sheffield, Lainey Parkin, Hull and Rebecca Homewood, Hampshire (*The Good and Bad Science of Autism book*).

Whilst the products and services advertised in AuKids are recommended to us by readers, we are not an industry inspector or regulator. We advise readers to seek independent advice from regulatory bodies before signing up with a new service provider and to check that products and equipment meet with industry standards.

The opinions expressed in AuKids magazine are those of the contributor. Please seek medical advice before embarking on any therapy or behaviour intervention. All articles are copyright AuKids.

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# READERS' PAGE

Send your letters and images to [aukidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@gmail.com)

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW READERS' PAGE!

This is the place to share your letters. Tell us about great places you've visited and fantastic resources. Send us photos of your little ones with some information about them and we'll try our best to publish what we can. We also love to hear what you enjoy best about AuKids! But you're not a shy bunch, so this page shouldn't be too difficult.

## Cover Star

### ★ Jayden Cave ★

**Age:** 4 (born Christmas Day)

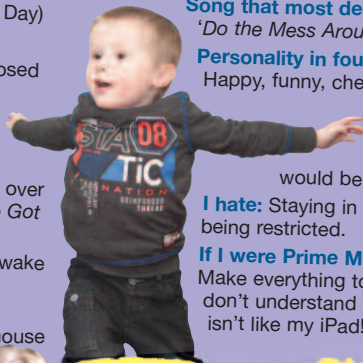
**Star sign:** Capricorn

**Diagnosis:** I was diagnosed with autism in September 2012.

**Best habits:** Wanting hugs and watching Toy Story 2 credits over and over again listening to *You've Got a Friend in Me!*

**Worst habits:** Staying awake as long as possible and wanting to eat paper.

**Hang out at:** My nan's house



- I get to have lots of sweets and to be spoiled rotten. I also spend my time at home on my mini trampoline.

**Popular with:** Everyone I meet!  
**Song that most describes me:** 'Do the Mess Around'

**Personality in four words:** Happy, funny, cheeky, smiley

**I love:** My family, my iPad and my trampoline - I would be lost with out them.

**I hate:** Staying in the house and being restricted.

**If I were Prime Minister I would:** Make everything touch screen - I don't understand why everything isn't like my iPad!

## Celebrity SPOTLIGHT



**Jack Sweeney**

Claire writes 'This is my son Jack Sweeney. He's 7 now, diagnosed with ASC at 2 years of age. He's pre-verbal, at the severe end of spectrum with loads of sensory issues'.

**I live:** In Ickenham, Middlesex.

**My family:** My Mum Claire, my Dad Ciaran and my older sisters, Alice, Meg and Olivia.

**I like:** Swimming, jumping on my trampoline, climbing, running, being outside - generally anything active!

**I don't like:** having my hair cut, brushing my teeth and going to the doctors.

**If I were Prime Minister:** I would ring-fence local governments' budgets for the support of children with disabilities so they couldn't use it elsewhere.

Send your celebrity details to [aukidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@gmail.com)

**Me in four words:** energetic, agile, smiley, cheeky

## The Generation Game

Recently we received this fab letter from Ted Humphrey's nan, Julie Henty. Ted's progress is featured on Page 9. Three generations of Julie's family now receive AuKids magazine. Is great-grandma Betty our oldest reader?



**FAMILY FUN:** Ruth Humphreys (Ted's mum) is behind the camera, whilst great-grandma Betty, Ted and Nanny (Julie Henty), share a copy of AuKids.

Dear AuKids, My mum, Ted's great-grandmother Zena - known as Betty, or Nanna, is 87 years old and very fit! She enjoys Ted's company and loves watching him play for hours at a time. She insists on a daily account of what he has done at school and often attends to events there. She has read every book Ruth and I have managed to get about autism (and that is a lot of reading!). She is always as thrilled as we are when Ted achieves a new target. This is why I want her to have a regular copy of the magazine for herself.

## BROTHERLY LOVE

**Finlay, 8, has a diagnosis of autism and his brother Owen, 4, is undergoing assessment for autism. Their mum wrote to us to say:**

" I like to read the *Ask the Experts* section and I love the information pages of events and activities etc. I have read and re-read the pearls of wisdom section in the Starter's Special issue and keep the magazines I have in my car - I refer to them all the time. When Finlay was diagnosed I was scared - it felt like he was the only one and I worried for his future. Now I feel like a much more relaxed mum and I'm always open to accept advice especially if it's aimed at making daily life more relaxed for my bright little boys - and we embrace their eccentric ways because that's what makes them so lovely. "

Georgina Gannon xx



To find out more please contact us  
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[enquiries@togethertrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@togethertrust.org.uk)

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# Reviews and Prizes



## No Longer A Secret: Unique Common Sense Strategies for Children with Sensory or Motor Challenges

By Doreit S. Bialer and Lucy Jane Miller  
Published by Future Horizons Inc.  
£15.50 • ISBN 9781935567295

No Longer A Secret is an American book which has been written by two authors, one of whom is an Occupational Therapist with extensive experience of working with Sensory Processing Difficulties, in addition to having personal experience of having a child with sensory processing challenges.

The second author additionally has personal experience of shifting sensory boundaries, in addition to 35 years of studying, consulting and running mentorship programmes for experienced therapists at STAR Centre and SPD Foundation in the U.S.

This book contains predominantly written text, with a few useful illustrations primarily to reinforce either useful equipment or beneficial activities.

It's divided into sections that guide the reader through the sensory systems and different types of sensory processing disorders.

It's quite detailed and heavy going at times, but the use of summary charts, tables and mini case studies does reinforce important information and helps to relate the theory to practice.

Additionally, it offers a combination of activities and strategies that can be adopted with relatively little cost or preparation.

This is aimed to appeal to an audience of both parents and teachers.

Although it's an interesting and engaging read, which is full of really useful tips and activity suggestions, I feel that the theoretical aspect of the book may prove a challenging read for busy parents and teachers, with a greater appreciation acknowledged by readers with good foundation knowledge of Sensory Processing Disorders.

Breanne Natasha Black  
Children's Occupational Therapist



## I Hate to Write!

By Cheryl Boucher and Kathy Oehler  
Published by AAPC  
£20.50  
ISBN 9781937473112

If you're wondering why your child is bright at school but falls behind every time they're asked to pick up a pen, this is for you. Although it's more of a manual for teachers than a guide for long-suffering parents caught in the aftermath of a homework battle, it will still give you the answers you're looking for.

Why is writing particularly difficult for those who have autism? In their introduction, the authors state that the advent of brain imaging has given us new information about how the autistic brain works. It has highlighted that poor communication between various parts of the brain has a dramatic impact on the ability to write, as it's a process that requires a very high level of coordination inside the brain. Writing is a process that involves language, organisation, motor

skills and sensory processing, four areas that are problematic for many students on the spectrum. Is it any wonder that they struggle?

Written by an American Occupational Therapist and Speech and Language Pathologist\* with many decades of experience behind them, the user-friendly approach of I Hate To Write includes a visual key so that you can see at a glance a teacher's concern, explanation of why a difficulty arises, teaching strategies and 'take it and use it' printable pages of activities.

Having read it, I feel like I've been ignoring the obvious for a long time. Despite references to U.S. education, the underlying ideas here and the readable style make it relevant for any schooling system. I'd recommend having a read and making notes before delivering it safely into the hands of your child's teacher, who should be very grateful if they know what's good for them!

Debby Elley  
Co-editor

\*Speech and Language Pathologist is the American term for Speech and Language Therapist.



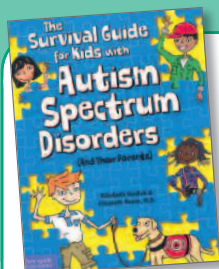
## Plan B: Empowering the Single Parent! ...to Benefit Their Child with Autism

By Karra Barber-Wada  
Published by Future Horizons Inc.  
£11.95  
ISBN 9781935274797

Written by Karra Barber-Wada, who was a single parent to her son with Asperger Syndrome for 13 years, this book is American, but can be easily translated for use in the UK. It contains well thought out chapters and is incredibly easy to read.

In the early stages of separation, this book may be very useful to you. It breaks down the things that need to be considered for your family. The end of a relationship is incredibly emotional, so to have a book that lists the things you need to think about may help. However, I was put off by most of the book implying that you should be 'co-parenting effectively' - separations aren't always amicable and therefore it isn't always possible. I do still think it's worth reading. If you are recently separated this book may be what you need to help you get through the 'what now?'

Susan McKechnie  
AuKids readers' panel



## The Survival Guide for Kids with Autism Spectrum Disorders (And Their Parents)

By Elizabeth Verdick and Elizabeth Reeve, M.D.  
Published by Free Spirit Publishing  
£14.50 • ISBN 9781575423852

This book isn't a new release, it came out in 2012. But having come across it by chance, I've become a fan. It's written by two mums of kids on the spectrum, one of whom (Reeve) is a child psychiatrist whose clinical work focuses on developmental disabilities. What they both bring to the party is a desire to help autistic kids between the ages of 8-13 to acquaint

themselves fully with what their autism is, why they might feel and act the way they do, and what to do about behaviour that they find troublesome. In other words, it's a life coach in words.

Don't be put off by the fact that it's American, this is very accessible to the UK market. Its technicolour pages, cartoons and pull-out quotes from famous people on the spectrum, combined with a practical yet comforting tone, all make it a super-friendly and exciting read. I really like the visual ideas too - encouraging kids to think of flexibility in terms of a rubber band, for instance. The images will thoroughly appeal to visual thinkers and stay with them.

All this is interspersed with real life stories, helping kids to realise that they aren't alone in

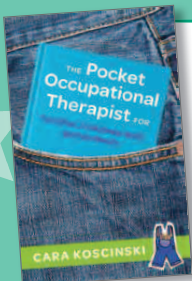
how they think and feel. Covering everything from social skills to dealing with unstructured time at school, it's great reading for a child in mainstream education who has already asked some questions about their autism.

This is a big read and I don't know many kids are disciplined enough to sit and read it the entire way through. One tip from the authors is to keep it with you and dip into various parts of it together when you need to. That way it becomes an extension of your advice, rather than something a child needs to navigate on their own.

Debby Elley







### The Pocket Occupational Therapist

By Cara Koscinski  
Published by Jessica Kingsley  
£12.99  
ISBN 9781849059329

Many children with autism also have Sensory Processing Disorder, or SPD. This affects people very differently, and it is hard to understand how it impacts on your child and even harder to know how to help them.

Consequently, I was excited to get my hands on this book, and it is amazing. Written by an experienced Occupational Therapist and mum of two children with autism, it's the sort of book you will constantly come back to and gives you the practical steps you need to actually help your child.

Its common sense approach begins with an overview of an Occupational Therapist's role. This book enables you

to identify and understand difficulties your child has, understand what it is like to have SPD and most importantly gives ideas of things you can do with your child to help. Each section has an 'Out of Pocket' activity, usually a bullet point list of practical, easy things to do to assist your child in any given area. It deals with common areas of difficulty including eating, dressing, core strength, over-sensitive hearing, hair washing/cutting, behaviour and many more. There are also great ideas for developing muscles necessary for handwriting and scissor skills that would benefit all children, with or without SPD.

For me personally, this book has been a revelation and I am enjoying being able to put things in place to further my son's successes. If you are concerned your child has SPD, this is the book for you!

Alison Palmer  
AuKids readers' panel



### The Little Book of the Autism Spectrum

By Dr Samantha Todd  
Published by Independent Thinking Press  
£9.99  
ISBN 9781781350898

Samantha Todd is a clinical psychologist who works with children and adolescents with learning disabilities. She also provides regular training for teachers and children's services, and has co-developed a programme for behavioural difficulties.

This little gem of a book aims to give a general overview of autism, and the impact it has on the person and their family's life. The reader will find useful information, advice and evidence-based support aimed at anybody who supports or lives with children on the autism

spectrum. It aims to give insight through an 'autism lens', helping us to understand autism and how it impacts on the individuals themselves, looking at areas such as education, health, society and family life. It highlights the importance of the child's emotional well-being and mental health. The author shares advice and strategies on issues such as aggression and self injury, communication, sleep, eating and repetitive behaviour.

Recommended reading for people new to autism who would like a general overview including parents, teachers or newly qualified professionals. This book approaches the topic systematically while written in an accessible, concise and readable way. This is certainly a book that I'll be keeping as part of my tool kit.

Tara King  
Manager, Time Specialist Support Ltd



### This is Gabriel Making Sense of School

By Hartley Steiner  
Published by Future Horizons Inc.  
£15.05  
ISBN 9781935567349

This is a lovely book designed for children aged seven to 12 to explain Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). The author is a mum of three boys, one of whom is Gabriel. As well as writing, she is the founder of the SPD Blogger Network. The book works through our eight senses, (yes we have eight!) including: Vestibular, Proprioception and Interoception (sensitivity to stimuli outside the body).

The format is simple and very child friendly; a page is devoted to each of our senses. Firstly, an

explanation is given of the sense being covered. This is followed by some information about the difficulties in processing that this sense can pose, and finally a brief outline of how you can help.

Although it is a book for children, I thought it was great at giving information quickly. It is a short book, and would be an asset to any classroom to make teachers aware of the impact SPD has and is a super way of explaining to peers why a child might find ordinary things in school, for example the noise of a grass cutter, so distressing. Great illustrations make it appealing. There are also practical suggestions on how to help your child, along with recommended websites for further reading. A great little read.

Alison Palmer  
AuKids readers' panel

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# What A Difference A Year Makes!

When you experience every day with a child, small steps forward can seem almost imperceptible. Sometimes it's only when you look back that you realise how far they've come. Last year, we asked a group of parents what they'd like their kids to achieve over the following year. Twelve months on, how have they got on?



## Harry Palmer, age 6

### JANUARY 2013

'I would like Harry to be dry in the day. I'd like him to use colours to comment with PECS\* and to use a few more words. He is excellent at removing clothes, so I would like him to put his socks and T-shirts on. Plus I'd love him to drink something other than diluted apple juice!' Mum – Ali Palmer.



### JANUARY 2014

'One of the amazing things about autism is you might have a plan of what you think you want to improve, but they can suddenly make progress in other areas. On reflection Harry has made massive progress.

'We wanted him to be dry by day. Turns out I was a bit optimistic... he has made huge strides forward and he is dry quite a lot of nights. He now indicates in the day he needs a change, or wants the loo, but we are not there yet! We have found Tom's Toilet Triumph DVD brilliant and he loves having pictures of Tom next to the toilet.

'He will now drink blackcurrant when very thirsty and accepts a straw - a major breakthrough. This was achieved simply by us squealing and clapping like mad people every time he used the straw or tried the new juice!

'I did want to broaden his PECS use and wasn't sure about how useful colours would be, so instead I followed his interests. As soon as he likes or shows an interest in something, it is in his PECS book. He is now able to request multiple things in one go. We have developed his PECS further. For example, if he requests TV, he has to choose a PECS card for the programme, then I have an A4 sheet with an image for each episode. He then points to that board to narrow his choice further. *You can use your own pictures, photos or images at home as visuals, if you haven't been introduced to PECS yet - editors.*

'Our biggest success this year is his vocalisation. He is using a few words regularly and appropriately. He will now use the initial sound of the thing he wants to request. We found talking tins and a voice changer brilliant in developing his use of his voice. The Talking Ben toy and app has also been useful.

'Harry is doing well with self-help skills. He still needs assistance dressing, but can put tops on, coats, shoes etc. He is superb at undressing! Again, letting him do what he can himself and praising him helps.

'We couldn't be prouder of him!'

## Alec Elley, age 10

### JANUARY 2013

At the beginning of 2013, mum Debby (co-editor of AuKids) said: 'I'd love AI to be dry overnight, he is currently dry during the day. I'd like him to vocalise words more clearly. He uses PECS cards to request but it would be nice if he could expand that use to comment on things. I'd like him to clearly use signs for 'help' 'no' and 'poorly'. Currently he gets himself dressed with minimum help but I'd like him to progress further. I'd like him to clean his own teeth'. Mum – Debby Elley



Bobby left, and Alec, during his 'Liam Gallagher' phase.

### JANUARY 2014

'Alec is finally dry during the night. The patience this required would have challenged your average saint. Perseverance is everything. We equipped ourselves with some waterproof sheeting from Brolly Sheets plus some Bed Mats from Huggies Dry Nites.

'We gave him a chocolate button every time he took himself to the toilet before bed, we danced around making a fuss if he was successful and we reduced the amount he drank after tea.

'Alec still vocalises purposefully and the change here is that he does more of it. He can't say words very clearly but now says 'hewoh' for 'hello' and 'alf' for 'help'. Since two years ago he wasn't vocalising purposefully at all, this is great. We're now working on initial sounds.

'He can comment using a 'yes' sign – for instance when his dad went out and said 'You'll be good for mum won't you?' he signed 'Yes' and burst out laughing (i.e. 'No'.) He can sign 'help' 'no' and 'poorly'. I did this by modelling the signs for him when I knew that he meant that word.

'Getting dressed has improved to the point where he can hold his own trousers and pull them up. It's a work in progress and if it takes five more years then so be it, as long as he gets there in the end.

'He does clean his own teeth now. It surprised me how easily he took to this with an electric toothbrush but I think he enjoys the sensation. I had to show him how to do them and with 'hand over hand' he has learnt to be more thorough. He also understands the instruction 'rinse and spit' which means we have been able to use mouthwash. I could have sworn he'd swallow it, so that's a great surprise!'



## Ted Humphreys, age 5



### JANUARY 2013

'I'd like him to accept a food that isn't a Cheerio or piece of dry toast! He can currently say numbers 1-12 in order and say 'squirrel!' - I'd love him to be able to say a word that he can use to his advantage. To improve on PECS – he's just at the first stage. To put his own shoes on; he attempts to now and as getting shoes is his way of saying 'I fancy a walk outside now,' I'm sure he'll master that one. I'd also like him to appreciate the benefits of sleep more, although that's purely for selfish reasons!' – Mum Ruth Humphreys

### JANUARY 2014

'Ted will now eat toast with butter and Marmite, but has made no progress with any other foods. He does like to explore my food with his fingers!

'He can now say HELP (pronounced 'Elf'). He will seek out my hand and take me to what he needs. I also get full eye contact at these moments.

'He has also developed the ability to point - he did that at 5 years and 1 month. Pointing is hugely beneficial because he can now share what he sees and he can follow a point. I think that came from PECS where he had to point to the words/pictures.

'I'm pleased to report that he flew through all the stages and is now a PECS master with school certificates to prove it. Although he doesn't use the PECS religiously, it has opened up a way for Ted to communicate when he really wants something. It has also got him to verbalise the words 'I WANT...' (plus pointing to the image of whatever he wants). The school has been tremendous with this and I follow up at home. The first "I WANT" was when he wanted biscuits and that was his first real word.

'He cannot put shoes on himself, one of my targets, but he can undress in seconds! He knows where to stand when getting dressed or undressed (we always do this in the same place).

'He knows to take off his indoor clothes and put on outdoor ones when going out. He has enjoyed experimenting with other people's shoes and if there is a hat around he must try it on!

'He still doesn't sleep for long but he goes to bed like a dream! He has just started saying 'Thank you' and 'Bye bye' to wish us goodnight'.

## Extra Information

\*PECS – Picture Exchange Communication System commonly used in autism as a visual tool to aid communication. It is a method by which children initiate communication by handing a picture card to an adult. Eventually sentences can be formed using PECS.  
[www.pecs.com](http://www.pecs.com)

Tom's Toilet Triumph can be viewed on You Tube at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mg0CzasskWA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mg0CzasskWA)  
Voice changer and talking tins: [www.tts-group.co.uk](http://www.tts-group.co.uk)  
Comfy waterproof sheets: [www.brollysheets.co.uk](http://www.brollysheets.co.uk)



## Tom Worgan, age 5

### JANUARY 2013

'I'd like him to be out of nappies in the daytime, to dress himself, use a spoon, do more mark making and to read simple books.'  
– Mum Jo Worgan



### JANUARY 2014

'Tom is now not using nappies when at home. He still wears a nappy when outside and at school, but school are working with us on this. I am just so happy that he is clean and dry. He has also done this himself, as one day he just took his nappy off and asked for his pyjamas, so all my worrying was for nothing!

'Tom still needs help with dressing but we are slowly getting there and he can undress himself. Using a spoon is still very difficult and Tom only uses hands to eat at the moment.

'His mark making skills are improving, I try and sit with Tom to encourage him and school is fantastic. He can now write his name and simple letters. This is very much due to him being in a specialist ASD school, I feel.

'I am very proud of Tom as he is now bringing phonics books home. He will sit and read to me something that I never imagined was possible. Again, this is mainly due to the school and by using apps on his iPad. I also try and read to him as does his brother Stephen - we have books everywhere at home and Tom will sit and look at books'.

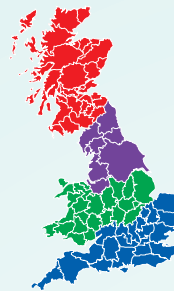
## 10 Tips for Success This Time Next Year!

- 1 Choose a small amount of things you want to focus on.
- 2 Choose targets that are meaningful and functional for the child.
- 3 Seek advice from professionals where appropriate.
- 4 Plan how you and your child are going to tackle these goals with a consistent approach – resources and rewards.
- 5 Prepare to be flexible and to change tack if your goal turns out to be a little too much of a stretch for now.
- 6 Reward small steps and tell your child how proud of them you are when they are willing to try.
- 7 Be patient with yourself as well as your child. Be prepared for occasional setbacks, especially when they're feeling under the weather.
- 8 Remember that your child wants to please you, honest they do!
- 9 Treat yourself and your child when they achieve that goal.
- 10 Share your goals with your child's other carers.



# 2014 HIGHLIGHTS

Get the Diary Out!



## VENUE KEY:

- Scotland
- North England
- Midlands & Wales
- South England

## JANUARY



**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup>:** The Autism Spectrum, Challenging Behaviour, Communication & Sensory Issues - Phoebe Caldwell,

hosted by Autism Oxford at Thames Hall, The Kings Centre, Osney Mead, **Oxford**, OX2 0ES. 9.45am for 10.30am-4.30pm. Also featuring Autism Oxford's highly acclaimed Autistic Training Team. Booking Rates: Professionals: £60 incl VAT. ASC & Family members: £36 incl VAT. Discounts available if needed. Tel 01844 353292 or email [info@autismoxford.org.uk](mailto:info@autismoxford.org.uk)



**Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup>:** The National Autistic Society's Understanding Autism family seminar at

**Bangor**. Supports families to develop an understanding of autism and explore practical ideas for communication strategies and other support you may be entitled to. 10am-2.30pm. £30 per family (max 2). Application form from [familyseminars@nas.org.uk](mailto:familyseminars@nas.org.uk)

**Friday 31<sup>st</sup>:** The National Autistic Society's Understanding Behaviour family seminar at **Chepstow**, South Wales, 10am-2.30pm. £30 per family (max 2). Application form from [familyseminars@nas.org.uk](mailto:familyseminars@nas.org.uk)

## FEBRUARY

**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup>:** The National Autistic Society's Sensory Needs seminar, **Birmingham**, supporting you with practical strategies. 10am-2.30pm. £30 per family (max 2). Application form from [familyseminars@nas.org.uk](mailto:familyseminars@nas.org.uk)

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup>:** The NAS's Sensory Needs seminar, **Cardiff**. 10am - 2.30pm. £30 per family (max 2). Application form from [familyseminars@nas.org.uk](mailto:familyseminars@nas.org.uk)

**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup>:** The Autism Networks Winter Conference 2014, **Crewe** Alexandra Football Stadium,

9.30am-5pm. Main speakers: Paul Shattock OBE (Director of World Autism Organisation) - Living in a Parallel Universe; Dr Olga Bogdashina (Leading sensory researcher) - Whose Reality is More Real?; Dr Luke Beardon (Senior Lecturer and Author) - Perceived Offending Conduct; Alison Douglas (Autism Networks Volunteer) - Autism: In The Driver's Seat. Series of workshops plus exhibitors. Tickets £25 for non-professionals or £50 professionals. Look up [www.anconference.co.uk](http://www.anconference.co.uk) for details.

**Friday 14<sup>th</sup>-Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>:** Inclusion Independence Choice (IIC) Show, Manchester Central (GMEX), **Manchester**. Aims to be the largest exhibition in the north of the UK committed to presenting the most complete and comprehensive resource, educational and shopping event on every aspect of mixed abilities/disabilities. Register free at [www.iicshow.co.uk](http://www.iicshow.co.uk)

**Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup>:** The NAS's Sensory Needs seminar, **Gloucester**. 10am-2.30pm. £30 per family (max 2). Application form from [familyseminars@nas.org.uk](mailto:familyseminars@nas.org.uk)

## MARCH

**Saturday 1<sup>st</sup>:** North Lancashire Directions Group FREE fun and information day for families with children with additional needs. 11am-4pm Salt Ayre Sports centre, **Lancaster**, LA1 5JS. Seminars on Challenging Behaviour & Sexual Health and Growing Up. More than 30 exhibitors. Go to [www.nldg2014.eventbrite.com](http://www.nldg2014.eventbrite.com) to pre-register or look up [www.northlancsdirectionsgroup.com](http://www.northlancsdirectionsgroup.com)

**Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup>:** National Autistic Society's professional conference, **Harrogate** International Centre, Harrogate, North Yorkshire. Look up [www.nas.org.uk](http://www.nas.org.uk) for details.

**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup>:** The Research Autism Lorna Wing series of conferences and seminars present Autism in Women and Girls: reassessing the landscape at Senate House, Malet Street, **London WC1E 7HU**.

Speakers will include Professor Marie

Harder, an adult with Asperger Syndrome and author of 'Illustrated Glimpses of Asperger's for Friends and Colleagues', and Sarah Wild, head teacher of Limpsfield Grange, a Surrey day and residential school for girls with autism. The conference will draw together a mix of researchers, including from the 'Autism in Pink' project, clinicians and practitioners, as well as women on the autism spectrum. Early Bird: £145, (discount for Friends of Research Autism). Limited subsidised places are available for carers for £10 - one per household. After subsidised places are used, families or those with autism can book for £115 (£10 discount for Friends of Research Autism). Book at [www.researchautism.net](http://www.researchautism.net)

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup>:** The National Autistic Society's Understanding Autism family seminar at **Cambridge**.

Supports families to develop an understanding of autism, how autism can affect families, explore practical ideas for communication strategies and other support families may be entitled to.

10am-2.30pm. £30 per family (max 2). Book at [familyseminars@nas.org.uk](mailto:familyseminars@nas.org.uk)

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup>:** Cheshire Autism Practical Support Ltd (ChAPS) conference, The Holiday Inn, **Runcorn**, Cheshire, WA7 3HA, 9am-4.15pm. Main speaker Dean Beadle. Choice of two afternoon presentations from Shine Therapy Services, Cheshire Autism Diagnostic Services, Simply Misunderstood and Springboard. Topics covered are sensory processing, pathological demand avoidance (PDA) and challenging behaviour. £50 for parents/carers/people with ASC; £90 for couples and professionals; Parents on low income will receive a discount. Application form at [www.asparents.org.uk](http://www.asparents.org.uk) or ring 07462 887815.

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup> (Birmingham):** The



Big Autism Play Day. Offers parents and professionals ideas on how you can support each child's social, emotional and communication development by building on their

interests and sensory profile - while having fun! Look up [www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk](http://www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk)

**Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup>:** The National Autistic Society's Understanding Behaviour family seminar on the **Wirral**, 10am-2.30pm. £30 per family (max 2). Book via application form from [familyseminars@nas.org.uk](mailto:familyseminars@nas.org.uk)

**Friday 21<sup>st</sup>:** (London) The Big Autism Play Day (see above details on 17<sup>th</sup>)

**Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup>:** The National Autistic Society's Managing Anger seminar in **Cambridge**. With support strategies. 10am-2.30pm. £30 per family (max 2). Application form from [familyseminars@nas.org.uk](mailto:familyseminars@nas.org.uk)

**Thursday 27<sup>th</sup>:** Kidz in the Middle, Ricoh Arena, **Coventry**. Run by Disabled Living ([www.disabledliving.co.uk/kidz/middle](http://www.disabledliving.co.uk/kidz/middle)), this is a great exhibition if you want to keep in touch with the latest resources for kids with autism - over 100 exhibitors and free entry.

**Friday 28<sup>th</sup>:** Autism conference for professionals at Leigh Sports Village, **Wigan**; Guest speakers include Tori Houghton, Debby Elley and Tim Tuff from AuKids magazine. Details TBA. Watch AuKids News page and Facebook for details.

## APRIL

**Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> and Friday 25<sup>th</sup>:** Autism Oxford presents Prof Tony Attwood & Dr Michelle Garnett on Asperger's & Autism (two-day Seminar) at Thames Hall, The Kings Centre, Osney Mead, **Oxford** OX2 0ES. 9am-5pm. **Day 1:** Diagnostic Issues - Differentiating from other disorders incl. example diagnostic interview (AS & Co-morbid) LIVE on stage. **Day 2:** Mental Health & Wellbeing - common issues, effective strategies & adapting therapy - also featuring Autism Oxford's acclaimed Autistic Training Team. Contact [www.autismoxford.org.uk](http://www.autismoxford.org.uk) Enquiries: [info@autismoxford.org.uk](mailto:info@autismoxford.org.uk) /01844 353 292. Price per person - for both days, including refreshments & lunch: Professionals £200 plus VAT; People with ASC/Family members £150 plus VAT. For one day, including refreshments & lunch: Professionals £180 plus VAT; People with

If you would like your events to appear in this calendar in January 2015, please contact us at [auidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:auidsmag@gmail.com)



Have you heard an inspiring speaker? Send us a review on who, where and why to [auidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:auidsmag@gmail.com). No more than 300 words please.

ASC/Family members £130 plus VAT. Concession rate for the unwaged: £50 plus VAT per day. Group concession available. The organisers say: 'Our hope is that all who want to attend can afford to: if not, please contact us!'

## MAY

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup>-Friday 16<sup>th</sup>:** Training for Autism Trainers, Farncombe Conference Centre, **Cotswolds** WR12 7LJ, run by Positive About Autism ([www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk](http://www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk))

Exciting two-day course aims to provide a solid platform of training skills and training ideas for new or existing trainers to enable them to deliver autism training that is engaging, imaginative, positive, good adult learning and evidence based.

**Friday 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Autistic Intelligence holds the Glasgow Autism Conference, Beardmore Conference Centre, **Clydebank**, G81 4SA, with Tony Attwood, Michelle Garnett from the Minds and Hearts Autism Clinic, Brisbane, and Wendy Lawson. [www.autisticintelligence.org/11conferences](http://www.autisticintelligence.org/11conferences)

## JUNE

**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup>:** Kidz South exhibition, 9.30am-4.30pm, Rivermead Leisure Complex, Richfield Avenue, **Reading**, RG1 8EQ. Go to [www.disabledliving.co.uk/kidz](http://www.disabledliving.co.uk/kidz) for details. Free entry.

**Friday 13<sup>th</sup> - Saturday 14<sup>th</sup>:** The Autism Show, ExCel, **London**. Huge show dedicated to families living with autism. Has a sensory and quiet room. Look up [www.autismshow.co.uk](http://www.autismshow.co.uk) for details.

**Friday 27<sup>th</sup> - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup>:** The Autism Show, **Manchester**. The second year that the show has come to Manchester. [www.autismshow.co.uk](http://www.autismshow.co.uk)

## AUGUST

**Monday 4<sup>th</sup> - Thursday 7<sup>th</sup>:** Autscope conference, Belsey Bridge Conference Centre, **Ditchingham**, East Anglia.

Conference organised by and for autistic people. Non-autistic people are also welcome, but the environment and content are centred on autistic people's needs, interests and sensitivities.

Autscope includes workshops, leisure activities, social opportunities, and more. Look up [www.autscope.org](http://www.autscope.org)

## SEPTEMBER

**Thursday 11<sup>th</sup>:** Kidz Scotland, Royal Highland Exhibition Centre, **Edinburgh** EH28 8NB. Free disability event heads to Scotland for the first time. Go to [www.disabledliving.co.uk/kidz](http://www.disabledliving.co.uk/kidz) for details or for tickets e-mail [info@disabledliving.co.uk](mailto:info@disabledliving.co.uk)



## OCTOBER

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup>:** Autism Central exhibition, 10am-4pm, The Clarendon Suites, Stirling Road, **Birmingham**, B16 9SB. Exhibition plus programme of seminars and workshops for individuals, professionals and families. ALL FREE. visit [www.qac.ac.uk/autism-central](http://www.qac.ac.uk/autism-central), e-mail [autismcentral@qac.ac.uk](mailto:autismcentral@qac.ac.uk) or call Karen Easthope on: 0121 428 5041

## NOVEMBER



**Thursday 20<sup>th</sup>:** Kidz up North free exhibition, Event City, Barton Dock Road, **Manchester**, M17 8AS. Another freebie run by [www.disabledliving.co.uk](http://www.disabledliving.co.uk), the largest they do.

**Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup>:** 11<sup>th</sup> National Autism Hands-on Approach conference, Stepping Hill Hospital, **Stockport, Cheshire**. Follow on @autism\_handson (Twitter) or contact Tanya Farley 0966 399709. Top flight professionals give talks and host workshops.



Our list isn't exhaustive, so keep checking our News page at [www.aukids.co.uk](http://www.aukids.co.uk) or our Facebook page for details of events as we get them and also for news on where the AuKids team is appearing.

For Autism Oxford events, which take place throughout the year, go to [www.autismoxford.org.uk/index.php/events](http://www.autismoxford.org.uk/index.php/events). If you would like one of their events to take place in your area, email your details and location to: [info@autismoxford.org.uk](mailto:info@autismoxford.org.uk)



## Cygnets Health Care

Autism and Asperger's Syndrome Services



Specialised services exclusively designed to meet the needs of young people with autistic spectrum conditions and their families.

**OUTREACH SUPPORT:** For individuals aged 5-64.

**FULL TIME AND SHORT BREAK RESIDENTIAL SERVICES:** For young people aged 5-17.

**PARENT SUPPORT FORUMS:** Providing advice, resources and the chance to meet other parents/carers.

CYGNET'S OTHER AUTISM SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Springside South West, Exeter: Outreach support services.
- The Springs Community, Kent: Residential care for individuals aged 16-64.
- The Springs Unit, Harrow: Secure inpatient care for adult males with autism & Asperger's.

For more information on any of our services please visit [www.cygnethealth.co.uk](http://www.cygnethealth.co.uk) or call Cygnets Central: 0845 070 4170

For more information contact Saskia Little, Administrator  
Tel: 0161 443 4060 Email: [peterlawson@cygnethealth.co.uk](mailto:peterlawson@cygnethealth.co.uk)



## Protect a smile for a lifetime

Autistic children can be more at risk of suffering from dental conditions like tooth decay and gum disease. Now, there's a **new, easy to use**, dental device **designed to help carers** with brushing children's teeth.

The **Bedi Shield** fits over the carers finger, keeping the child's mouth open in a safe and comfortable manner while you clean their teeth. With the Bedi Shield dental care becomes a whole lot easier.

To find out more, visit [bedi-oralcare.co.uk](http://bedi-oralcare.co.uk)





# Make 'Em Laugh!

By Debby Elley, journalist and mum to 10 year-old twins sons with autism.  
With Tori Houghton, specialist speech and language therapist and director of Time Specialist Support Ltd. Debby and Tori are co-editors of AuKids magazine.

To my twins Bobby and Alec, larking around (on different levels) has become a very enjoyable part of daily life. Recently, though, when Tori and I were talking about how she bonds with the children she cares for – both in her professional capacity as a speech and language therapist and in running her own autism support agency – we found some common ground.

Tori really enjoys working with children who can be difficult to reach and has had some great successes when it comes to relating to them. I often think of her as a gate keeper with a heavy bunch of keys that she uses to 'unlock' each child. But, as it turns out, humour can actually be the real key.

"I notice what they find funny, even if I see a hint of a smile. Then I capitalise on that," says Tori.

"When working at school as a specialist speech and language therapist, one of our young boys, David, who was about 14, gave out every signal that he didn't want to engage with us. He had his fingers in his ears and curled himself up in a ball in the corner. When you tried to go near him, or to put demands on him, he'd reject you and go into a tighter ball.

"We noticed that David looked up if there was any drama, like a child being told off, or someone falling over. Slapstick seemed to make him laugh.

"We used that as a way of engaging him. So we'd prance around the room, falling over, jumping off chairs, just being really silly. He found that really funny. We'd make comments about each other that he started to copy: 'Silly Tori, Tori's soooo silly!'

"We worked with him for a long period - over four years. But by then we could sit and have a basic conversation with him. It

turned out that he was really clever. We only knew that once we could enter his world."

Humour worked because it was such an undemanding form of shared interaction. When it comes to autism, humour isn't just preferable, it's essential.

## Your Double Act

Using humour on any level, however daft or simple, serves to develop joint attention skills. When we laugh at the same thing, that's a fabulous shared interaction. It gives us an opportunity to make eye contact, experience bonding and develop communication. The key thing here is to find what your child finds funny and go from there. This can be as simple as tickles, when you prompt them to suggest 'more?' or 'tickles?' or 'where shall I tickle you?', or shout their request louder – the list goes on.

I find being an idiot comes quite naturally (so does my husband), and when I'm tired, a bit of mucking around is all the energy I'm prepared to spend. I was encouraged to witness that Alec was willing to copy me when I put a beaker on my head and went 'Da-nahhh!' He then started doing it spontaneously to get his own laughs. That was quite a big deal for him.

There's a serious reason why this seems to work with Alec, who is pre-verbal. Tori says: "Humour is an emotional response. If we connect with a child's sense of fun for learning, they are more likely to remember. When they are laughing, they are learning".

## Spot the 'Silly'

'Sabotage' – the art of missing an important element of a known routine deliberately (or getting it wrong) to elicit communication,

can sometimes sound a bit cruel. It's commonly used in speech and language therapy to help motivate a passive child to ask for what they want, either vocally or visually by pointing to a conveniently placed image. For instance, serving a cereal without a spoon or placing an empty glass in front of them with no juice in it. 'Aw what a shame,' you think. I certainly used to.

Add humour though, and sabotage becomes a game. Tori suggested that whilst getting Alec dressed I put a sock on his hand and waited for a reaction. At first, he just looked a bit forlorn, so I didn't pursue it. A year on, however, he responds with laughter to 'Silly mummy!' and tries to say 'Foot!'. The key here is to reinforce the idea that you are being clueless and they need to help you out.



Len Hewart  
and grandson  
Rhys Perrin

## Slapstick Routine

Simple rough and tumble, chase and tickle games help children to communicate spontaneously and to learn social anticipation. What does a person's face look like when they're about to chase or tickle you? They have to watch, look for and predict it! Since repetition is normal in humour and often forms part of the joke, it can be immensely attractive to people on the spectrum as the joke builds and builds.



Beccy Wade  
and her son  
Oliver





↓ Debby's son Bob



## Laughter for Theory of Mind Training

Last night my son Bobby asked us: 'Do penguins have homework?' The sane answer is 'no'. As usual, however, it was a jumping off point for a surreal conversation involving what sort of homework penguins would need. These sorts of discussions, whilst leaving Bobby in absolute hysterics, have served to develop his imagination in a really effective way.

Anthropomorphism (we needed the spell-checker on that one) is an unnecessarily long word meaning 'to assign human attributes to an object or animal'. For a laugh, we've always done it at home and at first Bobby didn't really get it. But now that he does, he thinks it's a hoot. A popular car game that we played during autumn evenings involved

the sun having a right strop with the moon about whose turn it was to appear in the sky. This was because we'd often spot both at the same time. Bobby not only loved listening, he started to join in, adding to the argument.

We never intended it, of course, but over the years our deeply stupid sense of humour has helped Bobby's flexibility of thought. When you imagine you're the moon being cross at the sun, you're developing theory of mind skills. The ability to 'put yourself in someone else's shoes' (or theory of mind - knowing that someone else's thoughts differ to your own) is a key difficulty in autism. No doubt it's easier to strengthen this skill by pretending you are something that never had any human thoughts in the first place, than trying to predict what a real person may be thinking. Add funny voices, and you've got a show that can run and run.

## Sarcastic? Never!

Sarcasm, notoriously difficult for autistic people to spot, has been explained to Bobby and is used a lot at home. At first he didn't get it. Then he started asking: 'Are you joking? You're joking aren't you?' and after a while he started to spot sarcasm when it was used in other contexts, although he isn't yet quite confident enough to use it himself.

Is it possible that we generally deprive our kids of surreal or



← High five! Mohan and Tori

Tori with Debby's son Bob →



sarcastic humour because we feel they won't get it? Yet if they're not ever exposed to that humour in a safe environment where it can be explained in quite a blatant way, they won't ever recognise it. We just need to make absolutely sure that they realise it's a joke - why it's used - and explain it a bit more than we usually might.

Learning to recognise a joke is, after all, as important as learning any other social skill. I'd argue further than that, that humour is a key social skill which can compensate for an awful lot of other social difficulties.

## Laugh Away the Blues

Laughter is powerful in other ways, too. It can't be used to diffuse anxiety mid-meltdown, but at any point beforehand it is always worth a try. Teaching a child to be able to laugh at themselves is a powerful tool for relieving stress.

Tori recalls: "I was about to travel on a train with one young man, Steven, when we were asked to change platforms, then change platforms again, then change trains. I could see Steven was starting to get stressed by it, but I started to joke and laugh, saying 'Oh, which platform are they going to put us on now?' and somehow tried to see the silliness in the situation.

"Soon he started to relax and we got through it fine. Not only that, but if we ever find ourselves in a similar situation again, we can

look back on that time and laugh. I can ask him to remember how funny it was, when really what I'm saying is: 'See how well you coped, then?' Because we were laughing at the time, he'll remember it".

Autistic children are emotional sponges. If you're anxious when they are, they'll match you in emotion and then raise you one. If you're humorous about something, they may just learn to see the funny side.

That doesn't mean that we make light of some very real stresses that are caused by a need for routine. However, autistic kids, just like their parents, do need to learn to pick their battles. To do this they need to decipher what's absolutely essential to them for their wellbeing and the smaller issues where more flexibility is ok. Laughter is just another way of saying 'It's ok, we can stay calm here'. It can become a part of their internal armoury to deal with difficult situations.

"We talk so much about adapting the environment to suit autistic children," says Tori. "Parents should realise that they ARE the environment. They're a big part of it. So their emotional responses to a situation can really have an overwhelmingly positive effect on a child."



## Humour can:

1. Develop imagination
2. Teach flexibility of language and of thought
3. Help us to recognise facial expressions and body language
4. Give us a new coping strategy
5. Enable trust and bonding
6. Build communication skills and opportunities for communication
7. Develop joint attention skills
8. Help with social interaction
9. Make us less vulnerable, as we can spot it being used against us
10. Help us to learn

# The End



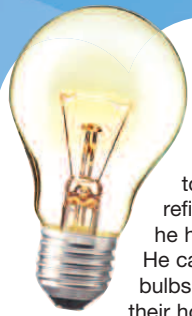
# INSIDE CLOUD 9

## Our kids' idea of heaven

A little while ago, we asked our readers to post a photograph on FaceBook that summed up their child's idea of heaven. The images we received were diverse but share one thing in common – an absolute passion. We decided we'd love to share them, so here they are. It shows how unique and unusual our children can be. And oh, how we love them for it!



**Lisa Tomb**  
My son Jaxx Gibbon's idea of heaven is jumping up and down in muddy puddles.



**Kathryn Smith** says that her son Sam loves light bulbs. 'He knows all makes and types. When we need to replace one, he has to choose the new one from the shop. We recently refitted the bathroom and he was beside himself when he heard we were having spotlights! He can also tell you what light bulbs other people have in their home or what lights certain shops have, regardless of how long it was since he was last there. Heaven to him is rooting through the plastic tub of replacement bulbs we have!'



**Freddie Winter** has this washing machine DVD: *Washing Machine Impressions, £5.99, available from Amazon. Bit like a roaring fire DVD, but less interesting for yourself. However, at least it's portable...unlike the real thing.*



**Sara Basma on hot air balloons and Orcun**  
"How' air balloons are my five year-old's main obsession. This company flies by regularly when the weather is fine. We go to a three-day festival every year and he watches festivals on YouTube every day. We all have to sit and watch his own hot air balloon festival (using all sorts of balloon-shaped toys) and clap and cheer when they take off! He has the different sounds they make off to a tee."



**Ruth Humphreys** says that her son Ted's heaven would be a house on a beach, 'so that he could throw stones in the sea whenever he wants. Preferably with a bouncy castle, iPad and marshmallows'.



**Tracy Winter** on Freddie's washing machine heaven: 'Since the age of two, he has got through two toy washing machines, has a washing machine DVD and I managed to toilet train by having lots of decal stickers from Cafe Press stuck on my toilet wall to make it enjoyable. Our downstairs toilet is a shrine to washing machines. Freddie's ideal day out is a trip to Curry's and I think his dream would be to visit an American Laundromat too!'

**Freddie Winter and Owen Gannon LOVE washing machines**

**Georgina Gannon** added 'I've also discovered a salad spinner is just as interesting to Owen'



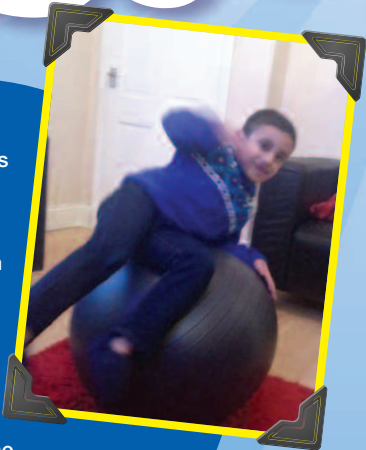
Mario is **Finlay Gannon's** idea of heaven



**Jo Worgan** says: 'This is my Tom's idea of heaven (he is five). He will lie on the floor surrounded by his cars for hours if he could'.



**My Autistic son Rayhan** loves the big exercising ball.. Which is kept in the living room.. When he's agitated he jumps on it, sits on it, rolls on it, he loves it! It's like having a trampoline inside for him. It's stopped him from destroying my sofas or him wanting to jump on my bed. He's receiving the stimulation from this ball. I also take it with me when I go to visit family/ friends. It's a super hit.... Love it myself too. **Sadi Ashraf**





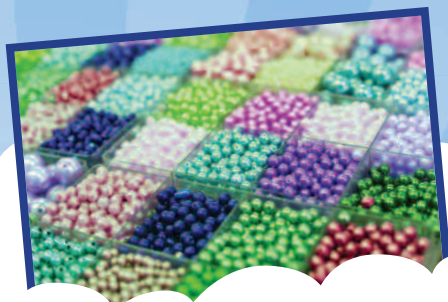
Co-editor **Debby Elley** says her son Alec's idea of heaven is a glass of ice. 'Perhaps he was an Eskimo in a previous life, I don't know. But he can't get enough of crunching ice, which is cold but healthy and cheap, so I don't complain.'



**'Ned loves Lego and penguins, so a Lego penguin is ideal' - from Gareth Child**



**Sarah Williams** says: 'Matthew's idea of heaven - a fence with both slots AND square gaps for slotting things in. Who needs swings in a playground or animals in a zoo when they have fences?!'



**Neal Howard** says: 'When the confusion of the mainstream world brings stress to Luke, he gets his beads and drifts off into his happy place or heaven'.

**Ali Palmer** says: 'For Harry, nothing beats flapping with a nappy sack! Especially if out for a walk and it inflates in the wind! We spend a lot of time shouting 'Bag!' and running to retrieve it as it blows away!'



**Phoebe Sweeney**  
Water = Heaven



**Rachael Rodgers**  
- Carson's idea of heaven



'This is our little girl Ciara's idea of heaven. Surrounded by pens, pens and more pens!'  
- **Mick Knaggs**



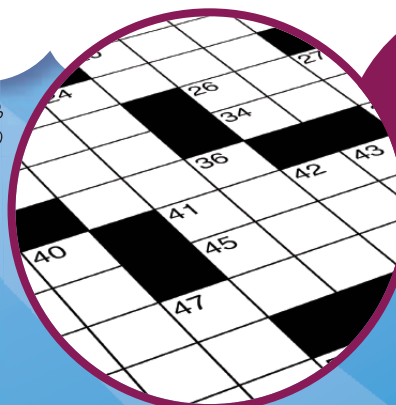
'Alex's new obsession, zombies and Minecraft, has made him use his huge Lego™ collection to create battles and landscapes' - **Lucy Ellis.**



**Lucy Ellis** says: 'My youngest spends hours watching Max and Ruby.'



**Lorraine Scott Young** - my daughter Jamie's idea of heaven is the Sims 3. Jamie loves it because she can create people and their houses exactly how she wants them and she can play them as she wants them. She spends ages making her Sims and I swear if it was real she would rather live in their world than in this one (she just read this and said "of course I would!").



'Heaven for my son Charlie is crosswords and more crosswords! He even creates his own and tests me! He's seven.'  
- **Liz Green**





“My son thinks he has to do everything 100% right otherwise it's a total failure and he gets in a state about it. What do I do?”

WHERE DID I GO WRONG?



**Alis Rowe**  
Creator of the Curly Hair Project

*Alis is 25 and has Asperger's Syndrome. She created The Curly Hair Project to help women and girls with Asperger's Syndrome and their neurotypical loved ones communicate and understand each other through a stick cartoon figure, which appears on Facebook and in her books, posters and other visuals.*

[www.thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk](http://www.thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk)  
[www.facebook.com/thegirlwiththecurlyhair](http://www.facebook.com/thegirlwiththecurlyhair)

I completely get this! I am a black and white thinker. In my mind, things can only ever be this way or that, not in-between or 'it depends'. I have always struggled with things such as, *Is my work good enough? or How do I know when my work is good enough? Why play a game unless you win?* I can only see good or bad; winning or losing. 'Good enough' or 'it's just nice to play,' is too vague.

The best way that a teacher could help me with my work is

to be very clear on what 'good enough' means. Is it 100%? Or just 70%? A teacher needs to explain to me that, for example, 50% would achieve a grade D, 60% a grade C etc. They need to tell me specifically what I have to do to get each mark. I need my teacher to explain the pass mark as well.

These percentages are very important because they teach me that work does not have to be 100% in order to be 'perfect' because I now know how to get an A.

Having all this explained means that I know how to try and get the grade I want. I can break the work into specific tasks each with a clear outcome. It also means that when the work is marked, I can clearly see how to improve.

Learning about life is difficult because if things are not black and white, they seem changeable and vague. This makes me extremely anxious. I don't know what to do or what to expect. Also, if I have not done well then I equate this with everything being wrong.

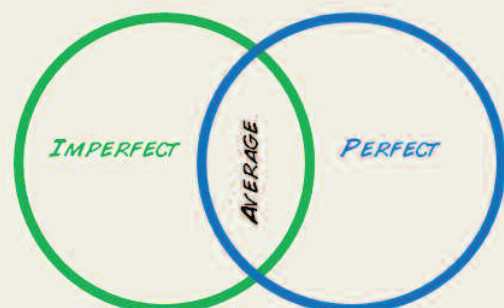
Having someone supportive to explain and help me feel safe is making me become more accustomed to managing those uncertain shades of grey. It's still hard. As I get older I try to see the grey as a rainbow, which is a much better image!

A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new.

Albert Einstein, developed the theory of relativity.

**THE GIRL WITH THE CURLY HAIR ALWAYS WANTS THINGS TO BE "PERFECT" BECAUSE THAT "GOOD ENOUGH" THRESHOLD IS JUST TOO VAGUE...**

**...WHERE EXACTLY DOES "GOOD ENOUGH" FIT?**



ALIS ROWE © 2013



**Jennifer Cook O'Toole**

Author Jennifer O'Toole is the winner of the 2012 Temple Grandin Award, a recipient of GRASP's 2012 Distinguished Spectrumite Medal, a nominee of the 2012 Autism Society Book Award and Godiva's Woman of the Year. [www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com)

She has Asperger's and is the mother to three young Aspie children.

Besides, it turns out that in our quest to be perfect and avoid public humiliation, we end up being incredibly irritating as well. Perfect.

Don't get me wrong - it's good to want to be excellent. It's the whole how you handle yourself bit that's tough, especially if you're not really thinking about how you come off to the people around you. Perfectionism is really just a nicer-sounding word for arrogance. It's the belief or expectation that we should be above making mistakes. And that, I tell you from personal experience, is not going to make people invite you to sit at their lunch tables.

Being smart, or kind, or fast, or creative is something people admire. Being annoyingly perfect is, well, annoying.

Really, no one else cares about your success or failure as much as you think they do - it's your reaction they will notice. Do you freak out? Will you take yourself too seriously (which translates as: I am sooo much better than you)? Or will you just be happily, humbly human like everyone else? If you would congratulate a friend had he accomplished what you have, then congratulate yourself.

Imagine putting any mistakes into a shoebox and putting it in a high closet shelf. Now, find a specific thing you did well - own it, and move on. You'll like yourself a lot more for it, and so will the people around you.

Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes.

Oscar Wilde, author.





**Heather MacKenzie**  
PhD

Speech and Language Pathologist and Founder of the SPARK\* programme (Self Regulation Program of Awareness and Resilience in Kids)

I've seen this too many times. Somehow your son has a 'vision' of how he should do something and if his performance doesn't match that, he is either devastated or refuses to try again. Since learning takes time and practice, this type of response is counter-productive to say the least. We need him to understand that learning takes time and practice and that mistakes or errors are simply an indication that he needs more practice.

As with everything that has emotion tied to it, you have to start in a situation where (1) one of the child's tasks is not involved and (2) you and your son are calm and alert. With your child present, attempt a task (not one of his) and make a small but obvious mistake. Start to express frustration (whatever way your child would). Then stop yourself and say, "Just stop, think and take a deep breath." In a slightly exaggerated way, stop yourself and calmly take a deep breath. This is the first phase (self-calming) which needs to be followed by a 'mantra': "Okay, we need to remember to keep trying. My hands and my brain need to practice. Then they can get better and better at doing things." I find that making body parts responsible for performance takes a lot of the emotion out of performance - it's the hands and brain that need help, not the child himself.

Model the self-calming again and tell your hands and brain, "You need to practice more. Then you can do better and better." Take another deep breath and try the task again. Show how staying calm helped you do the task a little better.

Ask your child to remind you next time you make a little mistake to remind you to stop, think, take a deep breath and remind yourself that your brain and your hands need to practice.

Take a little break, then try a task. Make a mistake. Start to become frustrated, then stop yourself and ask your child what you should

do. Prompt him to tell you, "Stop, think, take a deep breath. Remember, your brain and hands need to practice before it's perfect."

Model this approach for a few days. Don't expect your child to use the approach. He should just help you from becoming frustrated.

Then, it's time to test how much he's learned from this. Make sure both of you are calm and alert. Give him a task that not too challenging for him but one where he could make a mistake. Calmly watch him. Let him make an error. If he remains calm, praise him for helping his brain and his hands stay calm. If he shows signs of escalating into frustration, gently ask him, "What are we supposed to do if we make a mistake?" See if he remembers to use the approach you modelled. If he does, let him know how clever he is. If he has difficulty, just prompt him through the approach.

This all will take time but the approach lays a good foundation for the future. It's well worth spending time to practice it over and over. I developed a DVD (Coach's Playbook - Dealing with Frustration) that models these behaviours for 3 to 8 year-olds. By having children view a DVD like this repeatedly, they have many chances to learn the approach. Another thing that can be used is to develop a Social Story™ that outlines the approach discussed above.

*Some terrific short videos on dealing with frustrations and getting along with others, designed for youngsters on the spectrum, have been produced by Dr Heather MacKenzie.*

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**Luke Beardon**

BA (Hons) PG Cert (Autism)

Luke is a senior lecturer in autism at The Autism Centre, Sheffield Hallam University, speaker and author.

mistake means the entire story is 'wrong', which is no 'little mistake' at all. Another reason for perfectionism is related to self-esteem, and the absolute need to be right (as the child may feel they are so 'wrong' in other ways). Working globally on self-esteem is essential, but not the whole story...

One possible way forward is to fully accept that the child needs to be perfect but to manipulate what the concept of 'perfect' is. Suppose they make one mistake in a homework task of 20 spellings...this could lead them to think that they've been hopeless at the entire test. If instead you give them

four groups of five spellings instead, then the one wrong spelling won't count for nearly so much. They can think that they got 3 tests perfect, and just one small test wrong. Smaller chunks to tackle = less chance of failure and despair on a grand scale.

Some children really need to be perfect; absolutely logically, at a conceptual level all matter is inter-related - therefore, any single error means that the entire piece is 'wrong'. This is possibly why it is so infuriating for the child when they are told 'it's only a little mistake' (e.g. one spelling error in a story) - all the words relate to one another, so one

The greatest mistake you can make in life is continually fearing you'll make one.  
Elbert Hubbard, American Writer.

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# The Last Word

By Debby Elley, journalist and mum of twins with autism.

## Grow Your Own Little Winners

There is a saying you'll be familiar with – 'You reap what you sew'. This is the polar opposite of 'What goes around comes around'. That reminds me, I must explain both to my Catchphrase fanatic, Bobby, whose idioms occasionally get muddled, leading to puzzled expressions all round.

'What goes around comes around' is essentially a secular way of saying *do the right thing by others or else you'll be sorry*. 'Reaping what you sew' seems to suggest that the more effort you make, the more rewards you'll scoop.

I have some loving and thoughtful friends and family who are convinced that Bobby and Alec's progress is a prime example of 'you reap what you sew'. They say that this is not coincidence and it's to do with lots of things that I've done over the years.

Of course I'm happy to bask in their praise and if they want to tell all their friends that I basically had two potential reprobates and turned their lives around, then great! How do I know that I actually reaped what I sewed, though? Who knows, those 'flowers' may have been growing there anyway.

This phrase also suggests that it's only hard work that gains reward. I have a slight issue with that. Planning, knowledge, love and understanding reap rewards. None of those are necessarily hard work.

When the twins were younger, I felt that I needed to read everything on autism, attend every lecture, got every referral going. My sons had 'impairments'? Let's fix them! These included some dubious solutions to Alec's mental health needs. Sometimes even intelligent people withhold all natural scepticism when it comes to that sentiment of 'hope'.

When I stopped trying so hard some years later and relaxed, this was when I started to reap rewards. This notion of hours put in = certain success. It isn't so. For a start, you may have decided to dedicate those hours, but no one asked junior if they wanted to be a project. That's why we loved telling you about the power of laughter in this issue. You needn't feel guilty about having fun instead of doing 'therapy' – they can honestly be one and the same. Kids sense tension and a relaxed household definitely made a difference.

Autism is a bit like a country. You feel a bit homesick for what you know at first. You start to unpack, learn the language, even get a job there where I was concerned. Gradually you settle into autism as a way of life. Little by little you stop wanting to catch a train 'home'. Sometimes, as happens on the occasions when I'm surrounded by 15 noisy neurotypical tweens, you even feel that you prefer your adopted country.

I haven't stopped reading literature and I always bear in mind that this country, Autism, is not an island. My sons take the train to the mainland every day and they need to know how to speak the language there. So yes, practical measures are constantly put in place to make life easier. When you become used to those practical adaptations which seem so strange at first, when your PECS book is set up, your countdown clock is on the shelf, your routines put in place, it doesn't feel like something you work at anymore. It's just something you do.

So whilst I'm happy that I'm reaping rewards, it's only because I've adapted to my own family. And happily, so will you.



I can't grow lupins for toffee, but stop trying hard and put them in the right environment and bingo!

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