

Experience Speaks

Autism Speaks Facebook Group Members Share Ideas to Help with Socialization

My son with autism is 25, so I have tried many things. What works best is for me to explain, in detail, every glance, every smile, every touch, every sigh, and every social skill that we come in contact with. I found that he slowly began to ask, "Why?" Within a few years of this social therapy game, I reversed the positions and began to ask him, "Why?" He caught on slowly. At age 17 he asked me if he could stay with his friends at a get-together. He doesn't always participate, but he certainly follows the conversations and he definitely has an opinion on everyone's interactions. Lots of explaining, over and over. Patience is a must!

I try to put my son in social situations as often as possible. When my son was first diagnosed I took him to the park and assisted him with cooperative play. His way of introducing himself was to grab someone else's toy or growl in their face, like a lion, and run away. I interrupted and intervened constantly, even with a newborn strapped to my chest. It was hard, hard, hard. I purposely went to parks where I didn't know too many people so I wouldn't be uncomfortable doing what needed to be done and so I wouldn't be distracted with chatting.

I always make my son pay and talk to the cashier. It is always a forced conversation for him but he has to talk to a stranger almost every day.

I have a six-year-old son with Asperger's and what really works with him is role play. He can intellectually tell you what he's supposed to do in a situation, but can't really implement it until he "rehearses" it. He also belongs to cub scouts, which has really boosted his social confidence. He used to belong to a soccer team, but has challenges with his coordination and used to get down on himself when he didn't score goals. Cub Scouts really focuses on the positive and he has a lot in common with the other boys.

Stay consistent. Take them into a social situation everyday, maybe it has to be the same time of day each day, but then gradually make small changes (bigger social group, different time, longer, etc...) These children need to be 'stretched' out of their comfort zone slowly.

Start out very small. I would take my boys into Wal-Mart, and start with the greeter. I would have them say "Hello, how are you?" and make eye contact. Restaurants are good also, giving them practice talking back and forth with a waiter or waitress. Church has been a wonderful social environment for them as well. I have found my church family more forgiving and they have helped a great deal with social skills and situations--if a child feels comfortable and protected, the social skills become easier.

I expose my six-year-old son, who has Asperger's, to as many children as possible. We go to the park EVERY day the weather permits. Last night, we went and he started crying. He had a long struggle with a boy he had been playing with who took his light saber away. I was able to jump in and figure out what the problem was. My son hadn't communicated that he didn't want the boy to take away his sword. During the struggle for the light saber, the boy thought they were still playing and was enjoying the struggle (to my son's chagrin) for the coveted sword. Because my son hadn't communicated his anger properly, his playmate didn't realize that my son didn't want him to have the sword. So, on the way home, my son and I discussed what he could say next time to let a child know he isn't playing anymore, and that HE WANTS TO KEEP HIS LIGHT SABER! Also, we discussed the notion of sharing. We discussed what he will do the next time he is in the situation and how he really needs to share. He can share if he has been prepared ahead of time that this is what's expected of him. I've found daily exposure REALLY helps! I suppose it gives you, the parent, and a way to navigate through social situations with your child.
