

[MAIN THEME]

**This is Autism Points of View by Autism Speaks
I'm Felipe Maya**

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Before we get to our episode, I want to take a moment to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us in unprecedented ways, but many autistic people and their families are among some of the hardest hit. But I want you to know that Autism Speaks is here for you. The easiest way to contact us is by reaching out to our Autism Response Team by emailing help@autismspeaks.org or by phone at 1-888-Autism2, para llamar en español, marca 1-888-772-9050. You can also visit AutismSpeaks.org/Coronavirus to get a list of information and resources broken down by your specific needs. We hope you are staying safe and healthy during this difficult time. And now, back to the episode.

In this episode, we'll talk about a very important phase of life for young people with autism – the transition into adulthood. It's recommended that families start planning for this important transition when their children are 14 years old. We'll speak to an expert to bring you more important tips and information. You'll also learn about an incredible young man who is nearing adulthood and working hard to prepare. 16-year-old Jack Ursitti has autism and is mostly nonverbal – he communicates with his iPad.

We're also excited to tell you about a new partnership between Autism Speaks and [Gillette TREO](#), the first razor designed with caregivers in mind. But first, let's learn a bit more about Jack. Here's his mom, Judith.

Judith Ursitti:

Jack, he has done things I never thought he would do. He is a strong, capable person. He does act differently, but he ya know is very much a typical teen. Jack didn't develop normally, but we didn't really notice it. When we went in for his checkup on his second birthday – it was literally on his birthday – the pediatrician did a routine developmental screening with Jack; she said to me, and he was sitting on my lap at the time, kind of sucking his thumb, and she said something's going on. She referred him for an MRI to a pediatric neurologist. And within a couple of weeks, he was diagnosed with autism. My response was really selfish, like I was worried about how I was going to handle it, and I wasn't thinking about how Jack was going to handle it. He showed me, you know, you can be strong. So we ended up learning together.

Jack receives services at the Nashoba Learning Group. The therapists and teachers there use customized teaching procedures to guide him through various activities of daily living and life skills, physical and occupational therapies, desk work and other services to

improve his transition into adulthood. Clinical director and research assistant Christina Caruso has worked with Jack for many years now.

Christina Caruso:

Well, Jack is one of the most fun-loving students I've ever worked with. He loves to joke around; he's always laughing at other people; he loves jumping around; he's very active. He's just an all-around like big teddy bear.

I've been working with Jack for nine years. So him and I have a pretty strong relationship, and I've seen him grow and develop. He was a very aggressive student. We finally found a comprehensive behavior plan that worked really well for him.

Here's lead therapist Elizabeth Gavriel.

Elizabeth Gavriel:

His schedule throughout the day is packed. He has his breaks at the end so to earn more of a break in getting things done he needs to get through activities of daily living – so tooth brushing, flossing, and then there's desk work where we're working on everything from math to comprehension. Its packed to the brim with everything you can think of. He likes to show off.

Arianna Esposito:

Jack's transition story is shared by many families with teens on the spectrum. Every year, 50,000 young people with autism become adults.

Arianna Esposito, Autism Speaks Director of lifespan services and supports

Arianna Esposito:

I recommend starting as early as possible but no later than 14 years old, which is usually when most states require transition planning to begin. But you don't have to wait until 14 to begin preparing for transition. You can do so by incorporating life skills into chores and responsibilities at home. This can be as simple as having your child make the bed, wash dishes or do their laundry. Encouraging choice-making and self-advocating for needs can start at a young age and build over childhood into adolescence.

Preparing to become an adult is difficult for everyone. It is difficult for teens with autism because they often need specialized supports to meet their goals, like living independently, getting a job or attending college. In order to get the supports they need to achieve their goals. The teen's transition plan needs to be individualized around their unique strengths and needs. In addition, at age 21, school-funded services stop, so there is extra pressure on this time to find additional sources of funding that will support the teen after 21.

Parents and caregivers can learn more about the transition to adulthood by checking out the Autism Speaks web site. There are a variety of resources to help plan and navigate transitioning to adulthood, including a toolkit dedicated to the transition process.

Autism Speaks is dedicated to helping young people with autism successfully transition into adulthood. And we have a new partner to support this mission area – [Gillette TREO](#) – the world's first razor designed to shave someone else. We've partnered with Gillette TREO to tell more stories about transition to adulthood and offer resources to families. And teaching hygiene skills is an important part of the transition process.

I recently spoke with Peter Ries, Procter & Gamble product research engineer and co-founder of the Gillette TREO, about why the company was inspired to create a razor to assist individuals who are not able to shave themselves and rely on a caregiver.

Peter Ries:

We kind of happened across a conversation that was happening on social media where caregivers were talking about the challenges that they face with their daily caregiving tasks. And we realized quickly that Gillette plays a role there in the grooming/shaving space – and that we didn't currently have a product that could help them out easily.

Once we once we saw this problem that existed in the market, we as engineers, the first thing we want to do is solve the problem. Right? So, at P&G, what we do is we go and talk to people in their homes. In the case of TREO, where the caregivers are involved, we knew the first place to go to was nursing homes because there's people that are being taken care of. And as we spoke with the nurses and the aides there, we found that the biggest concerns they had were safety, control and convenience. Safety associated with the nicks and cuts that they might accidentally cause while shaving someone; control because the razors aren't designed to shave someone else, they're designed to shave yourself.

Judith and Jack were actually one of the first families that inspired Gillette TREO to focus on caregivers in the autism community.

Peter Ries:

Judith was one of the people we actually met with very early on kind of by happenstance because she had purchased one of the products and so she invited us to go to her house and just talk about the product, her experience, her and Jack's experience. And quite frankly, it was incredibly inspirational for the design team, myself and some of my colleagues. And it really helped to shape a lot of the decisions we made in how we decided to bring this product to market and talk about it and provide information to the public about it.

Jack is transitioning into adulthood and naturally what happens with adult males is they start to grow facial hair and so it's just generally accepted in society that, you know, you want people to look well-groomed, and Jack is no different. And for Judith and her husband, it's important to them that he faces the world with dignity and that he deserves that. So, we gave them the opportunity to try Gillette TREO and it was an amazing experience. We explained to Judith the different features. From a safety perspective, you have the safety comb, which is there to help protect the skin but still allow the hairs to pass through and get cut by the blade. And there is

enough space there that allows a lot of flow so that you don't get a lot of clogs while you're shaving. The second piece is around comfort. So really having a handle that's uniquely designed for shaving someone else. The four thousand razors that have been designed today, up until today, have been designed to shave yourself. This is the first razor designed to shave someone else. And finally convenience. I mentioned about the situation where you're having to bring people into the bathroom in order to get them shaved and that can really be a lot of stress and difficult. And so what TREO has is a special non-foaming, built-in shave gel, and that hydrates the hair and it lubricates the skin for a comfortable, mess-free shave. And it's clear, so you can see what you're doing while you're doing it. And this means that shaving can be done wherever is most convenient for the caregiver and their loved one. And when you're done, you can just towel it off and they can go about their day.

Judith told me she was honored that the Gillette TREO team spent so much time in understanding Jack's unique shaving needs, and the Gillette TREO has helped make shaving a better experience for Jack.

While Jack isn't inspiring large companies like Gillette to better support autistic people, he's making an impact in his very own home. Jack's sister Amy says that growing up with Jack has taught her so much. And it's even inspired her future career.

Amy Ursitti:

I go to Emory, and I'm pre-med there. I'm a neuroscience major and my hope is to become a developmental pediatrician. The reason why I'm thinking in that direction is like 100 percent because of my brother. I want to use the life experience that I have to help other people who are like him because I think it's helpful when you can say like 'hey look, I've been through this.'

Part of Judith's transition plan for Jack is to get him used to working together with his peers. And since he was young, Jack has always been a very physical child – he loves being in motion. So Judith wanted to find a way for him to channel that energy while also learning to be part of a team.

Judith Ursitti:

I asked that we put 30 minutes of cardiovascular activity in a school day every day. Once he got high school age, we reached out to the cross-country coaches and said, 'What do you think? Do you think he could do this with the team?' And they were more than willing to try it. And he's run two seasons now. And my goal is for him to get a varsity letter.

And now that goal is well in sight thanks to the amazing young people on the Dover -Sherborn High School Cross Country team. This is Oliver, Jack's running partner.

Oliver:

He's a great guy to know. And I have a lot of fun with him. And also, you know, getting to know him better makes him more part of the team and that makes the team even better. He has the same type of spirit that I do. You know, he's jumping around having fun. I think we're very similar.

Judith Ursitti:

People are different. You know, we have such a diverse community. And I think kindness means recognizing that looking for the good and all those things. Really listening to each other and supporting our diverse population.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Autism Points of View*. To get resources related to this episode like Autism Speaks transition resources and information about Gillette TREO, visit our website at AutismSpeaks.org/Podcast. And make sure to subscribe to *Autism Points of View* wherever you listen to podcasts to get new episodes as soon as they're available. This episode was produced by James Fitzpatrick, written by me and edited by Chris Skiles. I'm Felipe Maya, thanks for listening.