

Tips For Getting Through To Your Asperger's Child or Teen

By Dr. Cynthia La Brie Norall

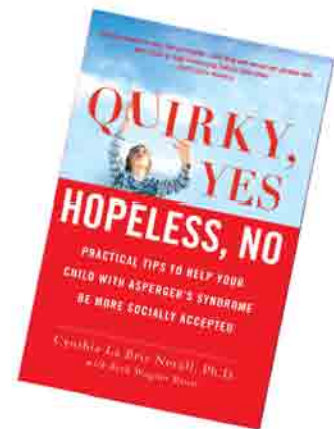


As Hard as it can be to understand someone with Asperger's, it's often even harder to be understood by someone with Asperger's. Taking a conventional approach rarely works because they are unconventional thinkers. They get tripped up by their social blindness and their inability to see another person's point of view. Asperger's kids have a hard time understanding what is upsetting you, why you want them to do something, or how they should behave. Here are some tips that I'd like to share from my years of working with Asperger's children and teens, both at the Friends' Club and elsewhere. In order for you to help them make sense of their world, first you have to reach them. And to do that, you should know the following.

Tip #1- If you see odd behavior, don't assume the worst-Instead, ask them why?

The younger they are, the harder it is to figure out what your Asperger's children are doing and why. That's because they don't always know themselves and often have fewer verbal skills. But know that they do have their own logic. What appears to the rest of us to be odd or quirky or makes no sense does, in fact, make perfect and logical sense to them, coming from their unique perspective.

So it's best to ask calmly, "Why?" or "How come you're doing that?" rather than criticizing or punishing them without asking. Once they've explained what they're up to, then you can understand their logic and let them know why that's inappropriate or impolite or is better done in a less obvious way.



Dr. Norall with Beth Brust is releasing her first published book, "Quirky, Yes-Hopeless, No." Look for it at Barnes and Noble starting August 4, 2009.

Tip #2- You will not be able to discipline Asperger's children the way you discipline other children.

Although some Aspies are very sensitive to being punished, a time-out might be a reward! They love spending time alone in their room, so to be sent there probably will not teach them a lesson or leave much of an impression.

Also, to punish them for being rude by telling them not to do something only leaves them wondering, "What's wrong with being rude?" They honestly don't know. Asperger's kids need to be told, in a calm voice, exactly what they need to do, not what they shouldn't be doing.

They need clear instructions, step-by-step, to achieve the desired behavior. Once spelled out so they know what is expected, they will usually comply because you've made it a rule and they are rule followers.



Tip # 3- Keep your emotions in check or the Asperger's child will shut down.

The best way to deliver any information to a person with Asperger's is in a calm, logical, and very direct manner. If there is any anger or any outburst, the Asperger's brain is wired to shut down. Aspies are very sensitive and can't handle the emotional overload and stress, so nothing is heard or remembered until things calm down.

The good news is that you can get through to someone with Asperger's, as long as you speak as unemotionally as possible. Make your message very clear, very logical, and very calm. Writing it down also works very well. Written words give

Tip # 4- If you want them to learn a new skill, reduce the social stress of their environment as much as possible.

Research done in 2001 by Eric Courchesne, Ph.D. of the University of California at San Diego, revealed that social stress triggers a memory neuronal system to shut off in an Asperger's Brain. This creates memory loss because they are unable to retain information if highly stressed. So if your child is having a tough time in a new social situation, it's not the time to expect him to learn how to handle it. They will need your understanding and guidance, and perhaps need to escape to a calm room until they can regain their footing.

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C.A.S.E., Inc. has four locations, Carlsbad and Napa, California, Oahu, Hawaii and Sunshine Coast, British Columbia. Look for the nearest office on www.casefamily.com

Tip #5- Break everything down into small steps.

Asperger's kids have trouble processing information. Things that seem simple to us, like trying a shoe or making conversation, are baffling to them. They need to have everything broken down into very small, clear parts to follow.

This is especially true for anything social. Interactions with people need explaining, step-by-step, for the Asperger's child to be able to understand what to do and to be able to practice the behavior. Whether it's as simple as greeting someone and shaking hands, or something more complicated like attending a holiday event, Asperger's kids will need coaching. They need to be reminded over and over again of what the desirable behavior will be. They are not being uncooperative or discourteous intentionally. They are just clueless, and need your help to figure out what is expected of them.

Tip #6- They will need your help to express themselves politely.

Since Asperger's kids are purveyors of truth, they can be very blunt and even outright rude and hurtful without realizing it. Part of their disability is a lack of understanding of other people's feelings. They have to be taught a semblance of empathy since it does not come naturally to them.

They also need explanations about why the truth hurts. They don't understand why they can't say what seems so obvious to them. They are not aware of social standards, which deem it best not to say certain truths in order to spare the other person's feelings. They will need to practice such restraint over and over again. You will need to be their constant reality check.



Tip #7- Turning their obsessions into concrete concepts helps make them more manageable.

Being black and white thinkers, Asperger's kids tend to see patterns and form pictures in their minds to help them process what they see around them. It gives them something to hang on to, but unfortunately for them, life doesn't always have a nice, tidy order about it. Consequently, Asperger's kids can tend to become obsessed with things that give them a sense of order like trains, schedules, maps, dinosaurs, outer space, a certain video or computer game, etc.

If your child's obsessions interfere with what he needs to be doing, you could hold up a small box and say, "I'm putting that subject in this box and locking it up. No more talking about it." And make sure he watches as you open the box and pretend to put something in it, then close it.

If he tries to talk about it again, say, "No, that's locked up. End of discussion." Aspies cannot argue with the box because it is a concrete object. Your child sees the closed lid, which ends that option



Excerpts from Dr. Cynthia La Brie Norall's book *Quirky, Yes- Hopeless, No: Practical Tips To Help Your Child With Asperger's Syndrome Be More Socially Accepted*. For more information on where to get a copy, read reviews or to learn more about the authors please visit www.cynthianorall.com.

Tip #8- Appreciate their strengths, creativity, and unique viewpoints as much as possible while also working on reducing their deficits.

While Asperger's kids face daily struggles to navigate the complex, rough seas of the social world, they usually have certain areas where they excel. These assets should be cultivated to encourage them and to boost their sense of self-worth.

Just as Thomas Edison's mother let him loose in the family's basement to do chemistry experiments, after recognizing his love of science, it's best to find out your child's passions and strengths and play to those. It keeps up their excitement and imagination, while you still work on coaching them in the other areas where they struggle.

Courtesy of

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