



From Me To You :
A Guide to Understanding
Me Better.

A Back to School Kit for My Teacher



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A LETTER TO MY TEACHER

FIFTEEN THINGS ABOUT ME

Hi, my name is _____ and I am in your class this year. I want you to know a little about me. I'm nervous to be in your class because it's new and I don't know what to expect. I need some time to adjust and then I will feel comfortable. Please don't judge me on my first few weeks. As time goes by, you will be amazed by the skills you never thought I possessed. I sometimes look like I don't understand. That's just because I don't have the same expressions and reactions as other people. I might not look at you when you talk but that doesn't mean I do't hear you. I do. In fact, I usually hear more than most people. As I become familiar with your classroom I will begin to shine. A great way to speed up this process is letting me know what to expect. Written or picture schedules for the day reduce my anxiety. A five- minute warning before a change of activity can help me greatly too. You are my teacher and I look up to you. I want to succeed this year but I can't do it without your help and most importantly, your belief in me that I can do it!

1. What is my general disposition?

2. What am I really, really good at?

3. What do I absolutely LOVE doing?

4. What do I absolutely HATE doing?

5. What academics are my strong areas?

6. What academics do I need a lot of extra help with?

7. Which skills would my parents really like me to work on this year?

8. How do you know when I'm getting frustrated?

9. What can you do to calm me down before the storm hits?

10. Too late! The storm hit! What can you do to calm me down?

11. What strategies work really well to get me to do something I don't want to do?

12. What typically makes me laugh?

13. What consequences back-fire and don't give the desired results?

14. I don't like consequences, but which consequences work well for me?

15. I would also like you to know...

By Jene Aviram

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Jene is an accomplished author and developer of education materials for children with autism and special needs. She is a co-founder of Natural Learning Concepts, a leading manufacturer for special education materials and autism products. Visit the Natural Learning Concepts website at <http://www.nlconcepts.com> or call (800) 823-3430

My Communication List

Parents with children who are non-verbal or have limited words should make a Communication List of sounds, gestures, actions and what they mean. For example, my son says "TA" for Water (Wata). Some children might behave in a certain way or have a gesture/sign if they want to go to the bathroom. List these behaviors, words and gestures here for the teachers.

Sound/Gesture/Behavior/Sign	Translation

Autism Spectrum Disorder

A Brief Overview for MY Teacher

Autism is a life-long neurodevelopmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to others. Children and adults on the spectrum have difficulties with every day social interaction.

Autism is a spectrum - meaning there are varying levels or degrees. Some persons are referred to as high functioning or level 1, moderate or level 2 or low functioning or level 3. Most people on the spectrum have varying skills and can appear high functioning in some areas and low functioning in others too.

A person on the spectrum looks just like everyone else. He might have certain behaviors that make him or her stand out, though. He/She might spin, flap, play with toys inappropriately, have trouble making eye contact, have issues with noise, touch, smell, taste, etc. Having sensory issues and/or problems expressing him or herself might lead to a meltdown. A meltdown looks like a tantrum but is actually very different.

Children on the spectrum can be diagnosed as early as 18 months. Early intervention, therapy and additional help can go a long way in helping children on the spectrum. Children and adults on the spectrum can learn and improve. The key is to find a learning style that works and to use his or her interests to help teach him or her.

Remember, no two children are alike and autism is a spectrum disorder. So, some may talk; others may be nonverbal. Some will have problems with gross motor and/or fine motor skills while others may not. Many might have problems with imaginative play and be literal thinkers. Some might excel in one area, but struggle with another. People with autism can often have accompanying learning disabilities. Most have difficulty understanding the world. Most have a hard time making friends and some may even have problems understanding and recognizing others' emotions.

The most important thing to remember is that children and adults on the spectrum are persons first. Please take the time to get to know them and to try to understand their struggles, challenges, awesome abilities and interests. If you have questions about particular behaviors, first ask the parents, research, and/ or reach out to Autism Belize for guidance. All behaviors are communication; sometimes it's just harder to figure out what the person is trying to communicate and why.

Teachers, coaches, educators, please also know that it is never easy for any parent to hear that his or her child is not 'perfect' and finding out that his or her child has autism can be absolutely devastating to parents. They often feel all their preconceived dreams for their child fly out the window and they fear for the future. Accepting their child's diagnosis is extremely difficult and can be a slow process. In time, most parents find that although life is filled with many trials and tribulations, it is also filled with many joys. Parents of children on the autism spectrum appreciate all the small milestones that most other parents take for granted.

Please be patient with our special needs parents. Help them recognize and celebrate each milestone. Special needs parents mostly welcome open communication. Try to start with the good before tackling the difficult.

Teaching Tips

for Children and Adults with Autism

By: Temple Grandin, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Colorado State University Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA

Good teachers helped me to achieve success. I was able to overcome autism because I had good teachers. At age 2 1/2 I was placed in a structured nursery school with experienced teachers. From an early age I was taught to have good manners and to behave at the dinner table. Children with autism need to have a structured day and teachers who know how to be firm but gentle.

Between the ages of 2 1/2 and 5 my day was structured, and I was not allowed to tune out. I had 45 minutes of one-to-one speech therapy five days a week, and my mother hired a nanny who spent three to four hours a day playing games with me and my sister. She taught 'turn taking' during play activities. When we made a snowman, she had me roll the bottom ball; and then my sister had to make the next part. At mealtimes, everybody ate together; and I was not allowed to do any "stims." The only time I was allowed to revert back to autistic behavior was during a one-hour rest period after lunch. The combination of the nursery school, speech therapy, play activities, and "miss manners" meals added up to 40 hours a week, where my brain was kept connected to the world.

1. Many people with autism are visual thinkers. I think in pictures. I do not think in language. All my thoughts are like videotapes running in my imagination. Pictures are my first language and words are my second language. Nouns were the easiest words to learn because I could make a picture in my mind of the word.
2. Avoid long strings of verbal instructions. People with autism have problems remembering the sequence. Directions with more than three steps have to be written down.
3. Many children with autism are good at drawing, art and computer programming. These talented areas should be encouraged. Talents can turn into skills that can be used for future employment.
4. Many autistic children get fixated on one subject such as trains or maps. The best way to deal with fixations is to use them to motivate school work. If the child likes trains, then use trains to teach reading and math.
5. Use concrete visual methods to teach number concepts. To learn fractions my teacher had a wooden apple that was cut up into four pieces. From this I learned the concept of quarters and halves.

6. Many autistic children have problems with motor control in their hands. Neat handwriting is sometimes very hard. To reduce frustration, let the child type on the computer. Typing is often much easier.

7. Some autistic children will learn reading more easily with phonics, and others will learn best memorizing whole words. Children with lots of echolalia will often learn best if flash cards and picture books are used so that the whole words are associated with pictures.

8. When I was a child, loud sounds like the school bell hurt my ears like a dentist drill hitting a nerve. Children with autism need to be protected from sounds that hurt their ears. The fear of a dreaded sound can cause bad behavior. Sometimes sound sensitivity to a particular sound can be desensitized by recording the sound on a tape recorder. The child must have control of playback of the sound.

9. Some autistic people are bothered by visual distractions and fluorescent lights. They can see the flicker. Use the newest bulbs you can get.

10. Some hyperactive autistic children who fidget all the time will often be calmer if they are given a padded weighted vest to wear. I was greatly calmed by pressure. For best results, the vest should be worn for twenty minutes and then taken off. This prevents the nervous system from adapting to it.

11. Some individuals with autism will respond better and have improved eye contact and speech if the teacher interacts with them while they are swinging on a swing or a rolled up mat. Swinging should always be done as a fun game. It must NEVER be forced.

12. Some children and adults can sing better than they speak. They may respond better if words and sentences are sung to them. Some children with extreme sound sensitivity will respond better if the teacher talks to them in a low whisper.

13. Some nonverbal children and adults cannot process visual and auditory input at the same time. They should not be asked to look and listen at the same time.

14. In older nonverbal children and adults, touch is often their most reliable sense. For example, fifteen minutes before lunch give the person a spoon to hold.

15. Some children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder will learn more easily if the computer key-board is placed close to the screen. This enables the individual to simultaneously see the keyboard and screen.

16. Nonverbal children and adults will find it easier to associate words with pictures if they see the printed word and picture on a flashcard.

17. Some autistic individuals do not know that speech is used for communication. Language learning can be facilitated if language exercises promote communication. The individual needs to learn that when he says words, concrete things happen.
18. Many individuals with autism have difficulty using a computer mouse. Try a roller ball pointing device that has a separate button for clicking. Autistics with motor control problems in their hands find it very difficult to hold the mouse still during clicking.
19. Children who have difficulty understanding speech have a hard time differentiating between hard consonant sounds such as 'D' in dog and 'L' in log. Even though a child may have passed a pure tone hearing test, he may still have difficulty hearing hard consonants. Children who talk in vowel sounds are not hearing consonants.
20. Several parents have informed me that using the closed captions on the television helped their children to read. Recording a favorite program with captions would be helpful because the program can be played over and over and stopped.
21. Some autistic individuals do not understand that a computer mouse moves the arrow on the screen. They may learn more easily if a paper arrow that looks EXACTLY like the arrow on the screen is taped to the mouse.
22. Children and adults with visual processing problems can see flicker on TV type computer monitors. They can sometimes see better on laptops and flat panel displays which have less flicker.
23. Children and adults who fear escalators often have visual processing problems. They fear escalators because they cannot determine when to get on or off.
24. Individuals with visual processing problems often find it easier to read if black print is printed on colored paper to reduce contrast. Experiment with different colors.
25. Teaching generalization is often a problem for children with autism. To teach a child to generalize the principle of not running across the street, it must be taught in many different locations. If he is taught in only one location, the child will think that the rule only applies to one specific place.
26. A common problem is that a child may be able to use the toilet correctly at home but refuses to use it at school. This may be due to a failure to recognize the toilet. Hilde de Clereq from Belgium discovered that an autistic child may use a small, non-relevant detail to recognize an object such as a toilet. It takes detective work to find that detail.
27. Sequencing is very difficult for individuals with severe autism. Sometimes they do not understand when a task is presented as a series of steps. It must be taught by touch and motor rather than showing him visually.

28. Fussy eating is a common problem. In some cases, the child may be fixated on a detail that identifies a certain food. Try putting different but similar foods in the cereal box or another package of favorite food.

Sometimes the frustrations of trying to teach an Autism Spectrum Disorder child can be daunting. Dr. Grandin's tips are a real eye-opener to the thought process of the Autism Spectrum Disorder child or adult. I highly recommend considering these tips or offering them to your loved one's teacher or instructor.

Dr. Temple Grandin is autistic. She was diagnosed in 1950. She was first labeled and diagnosed with brain damage at age two and was placed in a structured nursery school where she considers to have had good teachers. On recommendations from a doctor, Grandin's mom ensured she got speech therapy and hired a nanny who spent hours playing turn-based games with Grandin and her sister.

At age four, Grandin began talking and making progress. She considers herself lucky to have had good supporting mentors in primary school. However, Grandin has said that middle school and high school were the worst parts of her life. She was the 'nerdy kid' that everyone teased and picked on. She would walk down the street and people would say, "tape recorder", because she would repeat things over and over again. Grandin states, "I could laugh about it now, but back then it really hurt."

Several years later her condition was recognized and she was diagnosed with Aspergers syndrome (mild/high functioning/level 1 on the autism spectrum). Dr. Grandin regularly takes antidepressants and uses a squeeze box (hug machine) she invented at the age of 18 as a form of therapy.

Grandin received her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Franklin Pierce University in 1970. In 1975 she got her Master's Degree in Animal Science from Arizona State University and in 1989 she got her PHD in Animal Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Campaign.

Dr. Grandin became a prominent author and speaker on both autism and animal behavior. Today she is a professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University. She also has a successful career consulting on both livestock handling equipment design and animal welfare. She has been featured on [NPR \(National Public Radio\)](#) and a BBC Special – "[The Woman Who Thinks Like a Cow](#)". She has also appeared on National TV shows such as Larry King Live, 20/20, Sixty Minutes, Fox and Friends, and she has a 2010 TED talk. Articles about Dr. Grandin have appeared in Time Magazine, New York Times, Discover Magazine, Forbes and USA Today. HBO made an Emmy Award winning movie about her life and she was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2016.

Understanding Behaviors

Not all children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder have behavioral problems. Those that do are often reacting to a world that is unpredictable and confusing. All behaviors have a purpose or function that produces a result. For people with autism, the desired result may be to reduce stress.

Children and adults with ASD:

- Can get very frustrated when they cannot do something on their own. They may not understand other people can help so they don't ask for help. Instead they may cry or act out.
- Have difficulty anticipating future events. When their needs are not met immediately, they might think they will never get what they want/need. So they might lash out.
- Can be hyper sensitive to sensory stimuli such as particular sounds, flickering lights, or even smells. These can all increase anxiety and stress and trigger a meltdown or aggression.
- Have higher than average rates of epilepsy. Short intense bouts of rage or aggression might be associated with epileptic seizures.
- Might lash out or destroy things as a means of communication. This behavior may be their way of saying, "I'm bored" or "I'm frustrated" or "It's too noisy".
- Have a hard time understanding and controlling their own mental state and that of others. They don't understand how their behavior may affect others either.
- Might laugh or cry inappropriately when highly anxious or excited.
- Experience severe stress far more frequently than most people do. They are less able to deal with it effectively too. They don't often recognize signs of stress in its early stages and then can't handle it as the level of stress increases.
- Have even more difficulty understanding language and expressing themselves when they are stressed. Their ability to control inappropriate behavior decreases and their sensory systems can become overstimulated. So they do not cope as well with noise, visual stimuli and other sensory inputs.
- Often have fears and phobias. Fears can be based on a single frightening experience.
- Some develop anxiety disorder or become obsessive compulsive because they cannot cope with stress. This can also lead to panic attacks and/or self- injurious behaviors.
- Often display repetitive behaviors such as humming or finger flicking., This can be a way of controlling an unpredictable world and helping them reduce anxiety. Self-

stimulatory and repetitive behaviors (called stimming) may also be a kind of hobby. They enjoy the sensation.

- Have different sensory thresholds. Those with high thresholds will seek out stimulation while those with low sensory thresholds avoid sensory input by withdrawing.
- Might injure themselves when they are frustrated or in physical pain, for example, when they have a headache or stomach ache.

Tips for Managing Behaviors

1. Remain calm. Remind yourself that behavior is an attempt at communication. Don't immediately assume it is misbehavior. There is a difference between a tantrum and a meltdown
2. Only try to stop behaviors that affect well-being, interfere with others, or are socially inappropriate. While the behavior may seem odd, it does serve a purpose. It might be what is keeping the child calm. If you tell the child to stop, he or she is likely to become even more anxious and upset. He or she will then have to control the compulsive behavior and cope with his/her stress at the same time.
3. Attempts to stop self-stimulatory (stimming) behavior are unlikely to succeed. You can try to modify the behavior. The behavior serves a purpose so it is important to replace it with something more acceptable. You must first identify the cause of stress and make changes to help avoid that stress or alleviate it in some way.
4. Lecturing will not stop the behavior. Avoid using threats.
5. Try to restrict repetitive behaviors to a certain place, or only at certain times.
6. Give an alternative. Some people with ASD don't know what to do when you tell them to stop doing something inappropriate.
7. Clearly state the consequences of aggressive behavior before it occurs. Talk to the parents or caregiver about dealing with aggressive behavior. Have a consistent plan of action.
8. Make a note of activities that cause difficulty. Encourage him or her to ask for help before he or she reaches the point of frustration. However, try to avoid doing things that the child or adult can do for themselves.
9. Be aware of signs of stress. People with ASD may not show their stress the way other people do. Look for triggers such as body posture, change in tone of voice, more or less talkative, becoming teary or restless.
10. Help the child or adult develop self-awareness of their own mental state, to recognize feelings of stress or discomfort, to communicate these feelings and act on them appropriately. This helps the child to match feelings/sensations to situations. Talk through his or her feelings and give the child prompts, such as "You look worried, do you need help?" When the child becomes more aware of his or her mental state, he or she can start using strategies to cope with anxiety.
11. Physical exercise is a good way of letting go of accumulated stress. Try bike riding, running, or jumping on the trampoline. Stress balls may also be useful.

Understanding Sensory Issues

Sensory Issues

People with Autism Spectrum Disorder:

- Have sensory processing difficulties. They may be over or under sensitive to touch, smell, sight, taste, hearing, as well as body movements and positions. Those who are under sensitive in certain areas will seek out input. Those who are over sensitive will avoid sensory stimulations.
- Can suffer from noise overload. This might be too much noise or just some noise in particular such as sounds at certain pitches or sudden and unexpected sounds.
- Have difficulty coping with large amounts of visual stimuli and often don't know where to focus, for example, the colors and lights in a shopping mall. Some are unable to tolerate bright sunlight.
- Often have a heightened sense of touch. To some, touch can be painful while others need deep pressure and compression. They may prefer physical affection to be on their terms.
- Sometimes have a strong reaction to certain smells like perfumes or deodorant, leading to avoidance of physical contact.

Managing Sensory Issues

1. Familiarize yourself with each person's particular sensory issues.
2. Ask parents what smells, sounds, etc. may cause problems.
3. Remember common calming techniques such as cuddling will not have the desired effect. Have a discussion with parents about recommended calming techniques and what the child may need to do to help with his or her sensory issues. If there are many needs, a sensory diet might need to be put in place.

Sensory Challenge

Take the Sensory Challenge. Are you ready? Good. Imagine this:

1. You are in a room with a group of people. You are trying to listen to the speaker but there is a buzz in your ears. It is so loud you wonder if there is a fly in your head. The lights in the room are continually flickering. You keep blinking to avoid the flashes. Now you have a headache. Can you even remember what the speaker was talking about? [This is the effect fluorescent lights have on some people with autism.](#)
2. You're watching a puppet show. There are people all around you. The noise level is loud. People are laughing. One of the puppets has a shrill voice. It echoes in your head and you can barely understand what the puppets are saying. You try to filter out all the noise, but it's impossible. You get startled when the audience breaks into applause, clapping and cheering wildly, for no apparent reason. In desperation you cover your ears and squeeze your eyes shut, hoping it will all go away. Did you enjoy the show? [This is the effect typical levels of noise might have on some people with autism.](#)
3. You are at a BBQ. The sun is hot. The heat makes your skin prickle and the light is blinding. Your friends call you to play ball but there is a haze in front of your eyes. You try and push it away with your hands. Why can't anyone else see it? The sounds of insects are all around. You see them wherever you turn. They are on the leaves, in the grass, and in the sky. You should be eating but you feel nauseated. The air is permeated with the smell of food, drinks, lotion, and smoke from the grill. It's overpowering and all you can do is nibble on some chips. How do you feel? [This is how a summer day event can feel to someone who has autism.](#)
4. You enjoy playing basketball but today you have to wear your team clothes. The socks are rough and they hurt your feet. With each step, the seam slides across your toes and it's awfully painful. You're on the court and you miss the ball. You didn't see it because you were trying to reposition your shirt. The label on the inside feels like a jagged piece of paper that constantly grazes your skin. You can't shoot the ball in the hoop because you're rooted to the spot. Your shoes are so uncomfortable, you're afraid to jump in fear of the painful landing that is bound to happen. Your team is really mad at you. How do you feel? Did you enjoy the game? [This is the effect that some clothing can have on a person with autism.](#)

5. You like eating cereal. It is crunchy and tastes good. You like eating yogurt. It's smooth and creamy. Oh no! Somebody wants you to combine them. They think you should mix it up and eat them together. The very thought of lumpy and smooth swirling around in your mouth makes you physically gag. At your request they leave it separate but they still put them on the same plate! How could you possibly eat? You feel physically ill looking at the lumpy and smooth on your plate. It reminds you of...of..Oatmeal! The King of lumpy and smooth mixtures. Your stomach is churning and you need to throw up. You close your eyes and pray that the plate in front of you will magically disappear. Did you enjoy your breakfast? [This is the effect some foods can have on a person with autism.](#)
6. You're at the mall. It's a large wide open space where everything echoes. Your skin begins to tingle. There are sights and sounds everywhere. You don't know where to look first, Your mind is reeling. You're afraid and you feel exposed. You long for protection. You want to swaddle in a blanket and pretend you are in a cocoon. People whiz by. Their footsteps and chatter reverberate in your head. You lose sense of yourself and the space around you. You wonder if your feet are on the floor or if you have merged with the mall. In sheer terror, you retreat in the far corners of you mind - a safe place that never fails you. How does that feel? Was the mall fun? [This is the effect busy places might have on people with autism.](#)

~by Jene Aviram

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“It’s lonely. But when you meet someone who gets it, it’s transforming.”

~Melody Cameron

Autism Belize is working to build a strong and vibrant community of Autism and other Special Needs Families, Professionals working in the field, and Autism Champions and Supporters to help Teach Autism, Promote Awareness, Show Acceptance and Provide Support. A Belize that is educated and accepting of differences will be a stronger, kinder, transformed Belize.

Our Goals

Teach Autism - Autism Belize hosts regular LIVE Guest Speaker Presentations for parents, caregivers, educators and the general public. We also host free online parent and teacher trainings and do sensitization and educational workshops for schools, businesses and organizations and groups.

Promote Awareness - Autism Belize launched in April 2020. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 most of our planned public activities like our Run Blue for Autism and Paddle boarding for Autism had to be postponed. Currently, we are working on several other events to help families with children with autism and other special needs and to help build public awareness. Autism Belize has also been in the media and has been working with other organizations like the Mental Health Association, the Welcome Resource Center and Mind Health Connect to build awareness and assist families.

Show Acceptance - Autism Belize also launched a weekly blog, A Parent’s Perspective, on our website in April. The aim of the blog is to share our experiences of living with Autism in the hopes of giving a glimpse into our very colorful world- our challenges and struggles, our triumphs and joy. Though sharing our stories we hope to educate and build through acceptance. Different is not less.

Provide Support- Autism Belize hosts monthly Parent Support Group Meeting at the YWCA on the last Saturday of every month. Special Needs Parents and Caregivers are welcome to attend. For more information contact us through Facebook, Instagram or Twitter or through our website: <https://autismbelize.org/>



If you know of a family who can use assistance or if you would like to get involved or simply need more information about autism and/or autism upcoming awareness activities, please do not hesitate to contact us.



AUTISM BELIZE | LET'S TALK

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Teach Autism | Promote Awareness | Show Acceptance | Provide Support



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