

Right Way Rabbit: A Fable

From Autism the Potential Within

Chapter 21

Visit 13

Outings and Eating

Outings: 'Driving' Us Nuts

Dr. Rick: "You are organized!"

Mom: "I feel like I'm a hostage in my own home Dr. Rick. First of all, driving anywhere has become a nightmare."

Dr. Rick: "How's the process of getting *into* the car going?"

Mom: "We've been using some of your transition tricks and they seem to be working okay." (See *Chapter 18 Dr. Rick's 20 Transition Tricks*)

Dad: "We let the boys know what's coming and make it sound like fun. We let them bring a toy. . ."

Dr. Rick: "A transition object."

Dad: ". . . and if they're good we give both boys a little prize—like a superhero sticker—for *getting in* the car without a hassle."

Mom: "We praise and cheerlead a lot."

Dad: "So, actually getting in the car goes pretty well. I had to fight with Jacob a couple of times to put on his seatbelt but when he realized I meant business I haven't had much trouble lately."

Mom: "But sometimes he holds a grudge. Then the problems start on the road when Jim's not with us, which is most of the time. If I don't go the way Jacob thinks I *ought* to go he'll scream and try to get out of his seatbelt. It's like he's got OCD."

Dad: "He even attacked Julie and pulled her hair. We don't let him sit behind her while she's driving anymore."

Dr. Rick: "Putting the child in the right seat is important."

Dad: "He knows better when I'm in the car. That burns me; that's just downright dangerous."

Mom: "Or if Jacob wants Charlie's toy or game, he tries to get out of his seat belt to get it. Then the boys start fighting. And I'm driving!"

Dr. Rick: "OK. Let's start there with driving hassles. I have a wonderful tactic for you but the first principle for dealing with outings of all types is '*You must have a plan*'. You have to expect the best and set things up for success but be ready for the worst behaviors."

Mom: "Well I need a plan. Driving is driving me nuts." (See *Driving Us Nuts* below).

Dr. Rick: "So once you're in the car and going somewhere and the boys or Jacob start acting up, what have you been doing so far?"

Mom (half-joking): "Praying."

Dr. Rick: "My dad use to say that God helps them that helps themselves."

Mom: "I've tried 'telling Jacob how he feels'."

Dr. Rick: "You mean like 'Jacob you don't want mommy to go this way; you want mommy to go that way.'"

Mom: "Exactly but when he's upset about the direction I'm going (the boy could make maps for Rand McNally) it seems like he's beyond help."

Dr. Rick: "I have one more variation on 'telling him how he feels' that might be helpful here. I want you to *actually act like Jacob and get really mad* at going the wrong way."

Mom: "Like what?"

Dr. Rick (demonstrating loudly): “No! No! No! Mommy. I don’t want to go this way!!” (I mock cry out loud.)

Driving Us Nuts: The Plan

- Join him in his feeling. Be dramatic.
- Use a social story/fable (Right-Way Rabbit).
- Plan for 20-30 minutes of extra time to your trips initially for one to two weeks.
- Use the same phrases, i.e., I can’t drive with crying and hitting, I’m *pulling over*!
- For car misbehavior, pull over quickly (but safely) for 15 minutes and read a big novel.
- In the future threaten to *pull over*.
- Give praise & rewards for successful trips

This gets the attention of the boys who look at me with concern because they think I’m really crying.

Dr. Rick: “See how fast that works.”

Mom: “That’s a good one. I haven’t tried that.”

Dr. Rick: “But the timing has to be right and you have to be dramatic.”

Dad: “Oh she can be dramatic.”

Jacob: “No crying Docker Rick.”

Dr. Rick: “I’m sad when mommy goes the wrong way.”

Jacob: “I like my way.”

Dr. Rick: “You want mommy to go the right way.”

Jacob: “The right way. 96. Yes.”

Mom: “That’s I-96. He knows all the highways between home and here and can list them. We have to go exactly the right way. Where do we go after 96 Jacob?”

Jacob: “23.”

Dr. Rick: “That’s right! You go 96 to 23. Amazing map cognition. That’s one way to keep the world the same.”

Dad: “He knows exactly—and I mean exactly—how he wants to go and if he doesn’t go that way, it’s all over. He just loses it.”

Mom: “Like last week, our usual ramp was closed so we had to use another exit. He got so upset, crying, then screaming, he got out of his seat belt and started hitting me and pulling my hair.”

Dr. Rick: “We can’t have that. So the question is *how do we help Jacob become a better emotional thinker—more flexible, more in control of upset—by using these types of daily conflicts?* Right now he’s rigid and not thinking flexibly. And he sounds to be a bit obsessive compulsive/OCDish. Remember our discussion on the *impulse sandwich?*” (See *Chapter 17, Visit 10: The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly*)

Dad: “There’s no meat in this impulse sandwich, Dr. Rick.”

Dr. Rick: “Good memory, dad. We want to put more meat and cheese and tomatoes in his impulse sandwich by *reasoning* with him and connecting ideas. So what’s the basic idea here?”

Dad: “Sometimes we can’t go the way Jacob wants us to.”

Dr. Rick: “Right, dad. That is the social story.”

Mom: “And you can’t always get what you want.”

Dr. Rick: “That too, but ‘if you try sometimes you just might find. . .’”

Dad: “. . .you get what you need’. Rolling Stones.”

Dr. Rick (high fiving dad): “You are so cool dad! *So how can we teach Jacob to think more flexibly?*”

Mom: “Talk about it?”

A Fable: The Right Way Rabbit.

Dr. Rick: “Yes, but *not when he’s in the heat of the moment*. And of course it has to be in terms he can understand. . .I think it’s time for a fable.”

I quickly get a little toy car and put a mommy doll in the front seat and, among my toys, I find a miniature Piglet and Rabbit from Winnie the Pooh for the back seat. I talk into my audio recorder and start recording a fable. I speak loudly and dramatically.

Dr. Rick: “Once up a time there was a rabbit called ‘The Right Way Rabbit’. (I push the re-play button, which totally attracts Charlie and Jacob to my table.) You know why he was called Right Way Rabbit? Because he only wanted to go the *right way* in the car.”

“One day his mommy was *blocked* (I put some large Legos in the way of the car) and she had to go the *wrong* way. Uh oh, watch out!! You know what Right Way Rabbit did?”

Jacob: “Cry?”

Dr. Rick (my voice rising in a crescendo of upset): “Right, Jacob. He was so mad. He was so sad. He *cried*, he **screamed**, he **HIT his mommy!** Oh no! He said, ‘I’m the Right Way Rabbit and I have to go the *right way in the car!* And if you don’t go the right way I’m going to scream and cry and hit, hit, hit!”

At the word ‘hit’ Jacob, Charlie and I exchange wide-eyed looks at how bad Right Way Rabbit was being.

Dr. Rick (talking to the character): “Right Way Rabbit no hitting!”

Charlie: “No hitting.”

Right Way (I role play Right Way Rabbit and sound very self righteous): “If I don’t go the way I want then I *will* hit because I am Right Way Rabbit and I have to go the right way in the car.”

Dr. Rick (to the boys): “What is the mommy going to do with Right Way Rabbit? Uh, oh. Uh, oh! Look what’s happening. Mommy is pulling over and stopping the car. Screeeeeeeeeeech.”

Mommy Doll (I hold the mommy doll and speak for her): “Right Way Rabbit, I can’t drive when you scream and yell and hit. It’s *dangerous!* I’M PULLING OVER. I’M PULLING OVER.”

Dr. Rick: “And you know what she did?! She PULLED OVER. Screeeeeeeeeeech! She stopped the car and they didn’t go *anywhere*.”

Piglet (I wiggle Piglet): “Go mommy go.”

Right Way Rabbit: “Go mommy go.”

Jacob: “Go mommy go.”

Dr. Rick: “But mommy did *not* go. You know what she did? (Long dramatic pause. The boys are totally into the story and hanging on every word.) *She sang a song!* And here is what she sang (to the tune of London Bridge):

Mommy Doll: “Some of the time *the road gets blocked*, the road gets blocked, the road gets *blocked*. Some of the time *the road gets blocked*, and I ***can’t go the right way.***”

Dr. Rick (summarizing the social story): ‘Sometimes the road is blocked and the mommy can’t go the right way.’ *If Right Way Rabbit screams and hits, the mommy can’t drive. It’s dangerous.*”

I rewind the tape recorder and play the song again which the boys love.

Dr. Rick: “And then (my voice gets very sad sounding) the mommy sang a sad, sad song to Right Way Rabbit” (again to the tune of London Bridge):

Mommy Doll: “*I can’t drive* when you scream and hit, scream and hit, scream and hit. *I can’t drive* when you scream and hit, my dear children.”

Dr. Rick: “So, they sat on the side of the road and sat and sat and sat. . .and *sat*. And Rabbit and Piglet said ‘Come on mommy let’s go!’ And you know what the mommy did? Nothing! And Piglet and Rabbit were sad. They wanted to go to the store but mommy wouldn’t go until. . .Rabbit and Piglet (I wiggle the characters) said together: ‘Mommy even if you go the wrong way, we won’t scream and hit. We will be good. Please go go go.’”

“So mommy got back on the road to go to the store and, you know what? They had to go the wrong way *again*. You know why? You know *why* they went the wrong way again? Because the road was. . .”

Jacob: “. . .blocked.”

Dr. Rick (I could tell that he was getting this): “Right, Jacob, the right way was *blocked* so mommy had to go to the store in a different way, not the right way and Right Way Rabbit got very upset.”

Right Way Rabbit (I speak in an internal monologue while wiggling Rabbit): “I don’t *want* to go a different way; I want to go the *right* way. I’m mad. I want to *cry* and *hit* but then mommy will *pull over*. Besides if *I hit I won’t get* what I want. The road is *blocked*. We have to go a *different way* to get to the store’.”

Dr. Rick: “He was so sad not to go the right way but he wanted to go to the store and have fun. And guess what? Good news! Even though they went a *different way* to the store, Piglet and Right Way Rabbit had fun and got toys. (I play the happy ending again.) The end!”

Charlie: “Play it again!”

Jacob: “Play it again, Docker Rick!”

So I replay the moral of the story one more time.

Dr. Rick: “Sometimes you can’t go the right way because the road is *blocked* and you have to go a different way.”

Dad: “That was amazing. I think they really got it.”

Dr. Rick: “The point is to help Jacob *understand why*! We are connecting two ideas logically. We are helping him become a more mature social thinker. This will help him cope!”