



Autism: 10 Lessons for the Course of Life

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What Families Have Taught Me

- **Over 25 years of caring for families as a developmental and behavioral pediatrician**
- It has been an honor to share in the life course of thousands of families who have a child on the autism spectrum
- This talk will summarize what I have learned in 10 fundamental lessons that span the course of life
 - From initial diagnosis to early adulthood
 - To help the child reach their full potential
 - Goal: Happiness & a meaningful life
- Key 'touchpoints' or turning points in the life & educations of the child and family
- Let's set the stage with a discussion of neurodiversity and the developmental urge to grow toward one's potential



What is a Neurodivergent Individual?

- Neurodivergence is the term for **when someone's brain processes, learns, and/or behaves differently from what is considered "typical"**
- 'Person first' or 'Identity first' language?
- The 'Neurodiversity Movement' embraces differences and promotes a path to the potential within each person
- I hope to describe that path common to all children and adolescents





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What It All Starts With...

It all starts
with...
**The
Acceptance
Paradox**

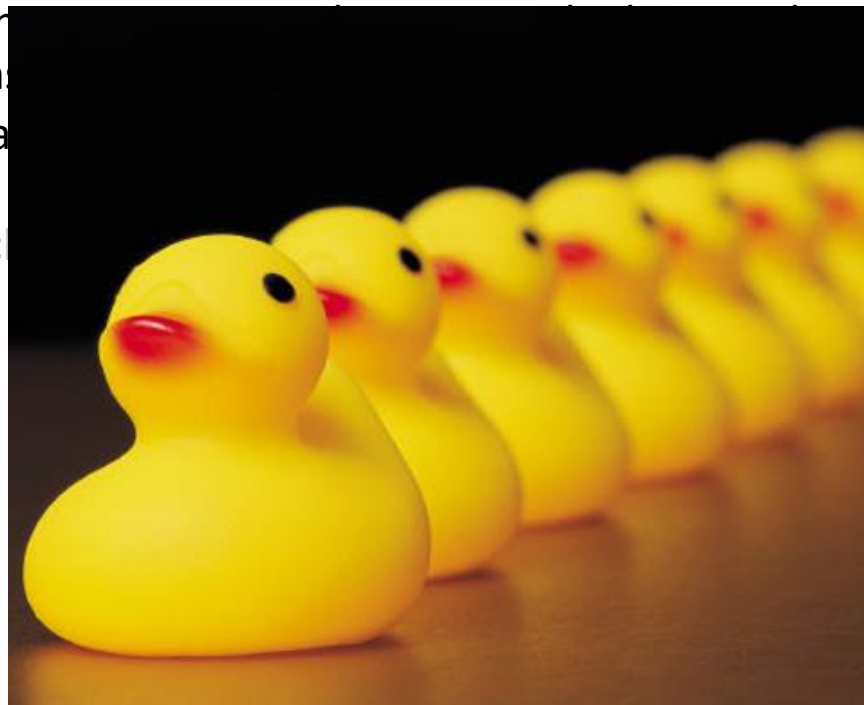
By accepting the child exactly where they're at developmentally, that is the best way to help the child make progress toward their full social potential!





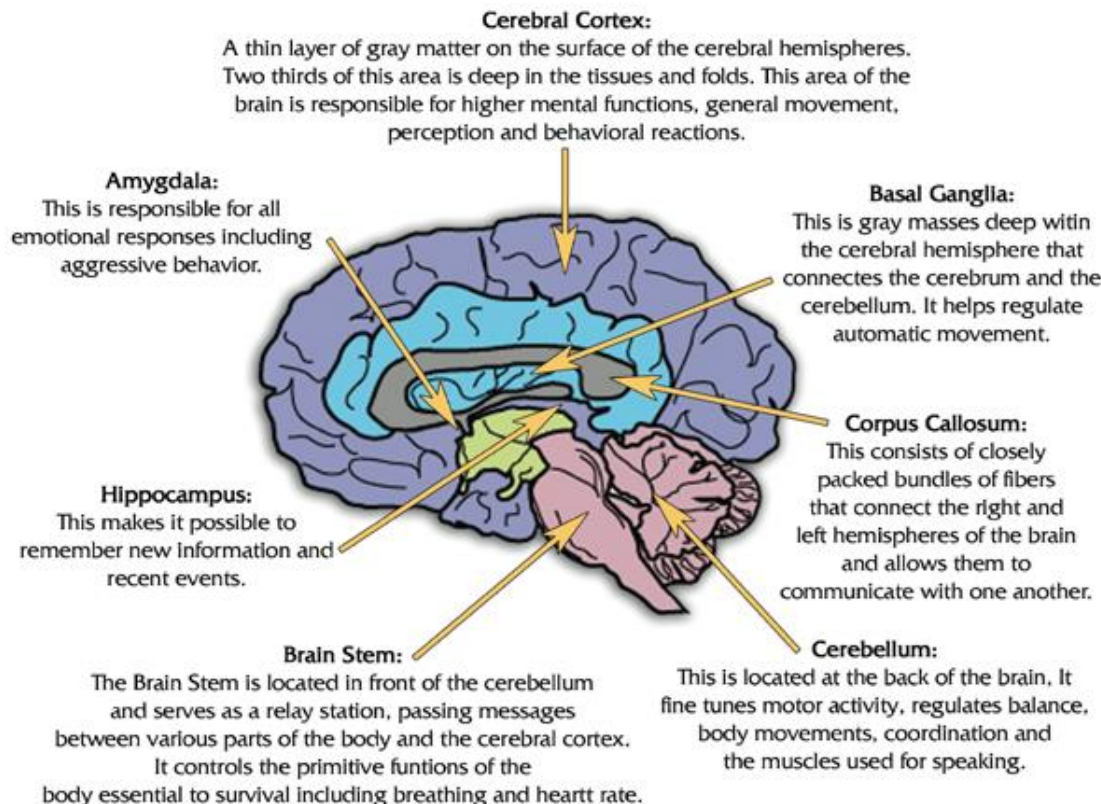
What makes autism autism?

- Genetic condition influenced by the 'under or over connected' neurons.
- Like a loose network of nerves that (especially the social world).
- This creates the tendency of the child to be 'the same'.
- The child with autism tends toward social self absorption and repetition.





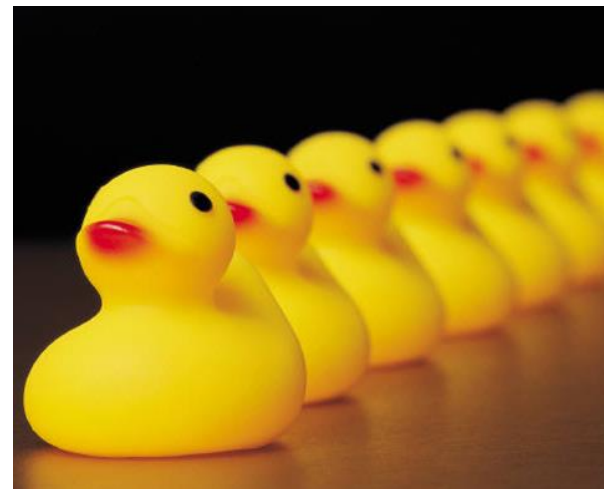
Parts of the Brain Affected by Autism





What makes autism autism?

- Genetic condition influenced by the environment that causes the brain to have 'under or over connected' neurons.
- Like a loose network of nerves that can't capture the complexity of the world (especially the social world).
- This creates the tendency of the child toward repetition and the need to 'keep the world the same'.
- The child with autism tends toward social self absorption and repetition.





What makes autism autism?

Difficulties & Strengths

Difficulties

- Dominated by sensations
- Trouble with transitions: Keep the world the same
- Difficulties with social interactions
- Anxious easily overwhelmed by demands

Strengths/Potential

- Neuroplasticity
- Experts
- Great memories
- Learn facts
- Mechanically inclined



The Course of Life Is A Path





10 Lessons: The Framework

- Playfulness
- Developmental
- Relationships
- Types of progress
- Touchpoints/turning points in the course of life



What is a Neurodivergent Individual?



The 5
Characteristics
of Play?



Joyful

Engaging

Social

Meaningful

Iterative



The Nature of Development



- Functional social development follows a natural course described by Greenspan and Weider regardless of age
- The affect diathesis hypothesis
 - **Like a growing flower**
- We should embrace the child's unique profile
- It's all about relationship



Relationships

- Drive development
- Individualize interaction
- Lead to engagement and interaction

When you do what the child loves
the child will love
to be with you and others!





9 Functional Developmental Levels*

1. Self regulation and shared attention (FDL 1)
2. Engagement (FDL 2)
3. Two-way Communication (FDL 3)
4. Complex two-way Communication (FDL 4) (18m)
5. Shared Meanings & Symbolic Play (FDL 5—2y)
6. **Emotional Thinking (FDL 6—4 year old)**
7. Multi-causal Thinking (FDL 7—5-7 years old)
8. Shades of Gray Thinking (FDL 8—8-12 year old)
9. Thinking off an Internal Standard (FDL 9—13+ year old)

*Greenspan and Weider



The All Important FDL 6!

- Talking in short to long sentences
- 'Why' and 'when' questions.
 - Understands cause and effect; Builds bridges between ideas
 - Two ideas connected logically
 - Lives in time. Can recall the immediate past (what did you eat for breakfast?)
- Identifies own and others' feelings
- Recognizes relationship between feeling, behavior, and consequences
- Two thematic play
- Can carry on simple conversations
- Can play with peers
- Misbehavior as developmental accomplishment



FDL 6 Levels

6. Emotional Thinking

Builds bridges between ideas
Why, When, & How

5. Symbolic

Leads simple game – dramatizes feelings
pretend play sequences. Who, what, & Where

4. Behavioral Organization & Problem Solving

Continuous flow of engagement
Child leads and adds variations to play. 1 Step commands.

3. Two-way Communication

6 to 10 back-and-forth circles
Does the child initiate when you WANT?
Work of keeping child engaged no longer all on play partner

2. Engagement

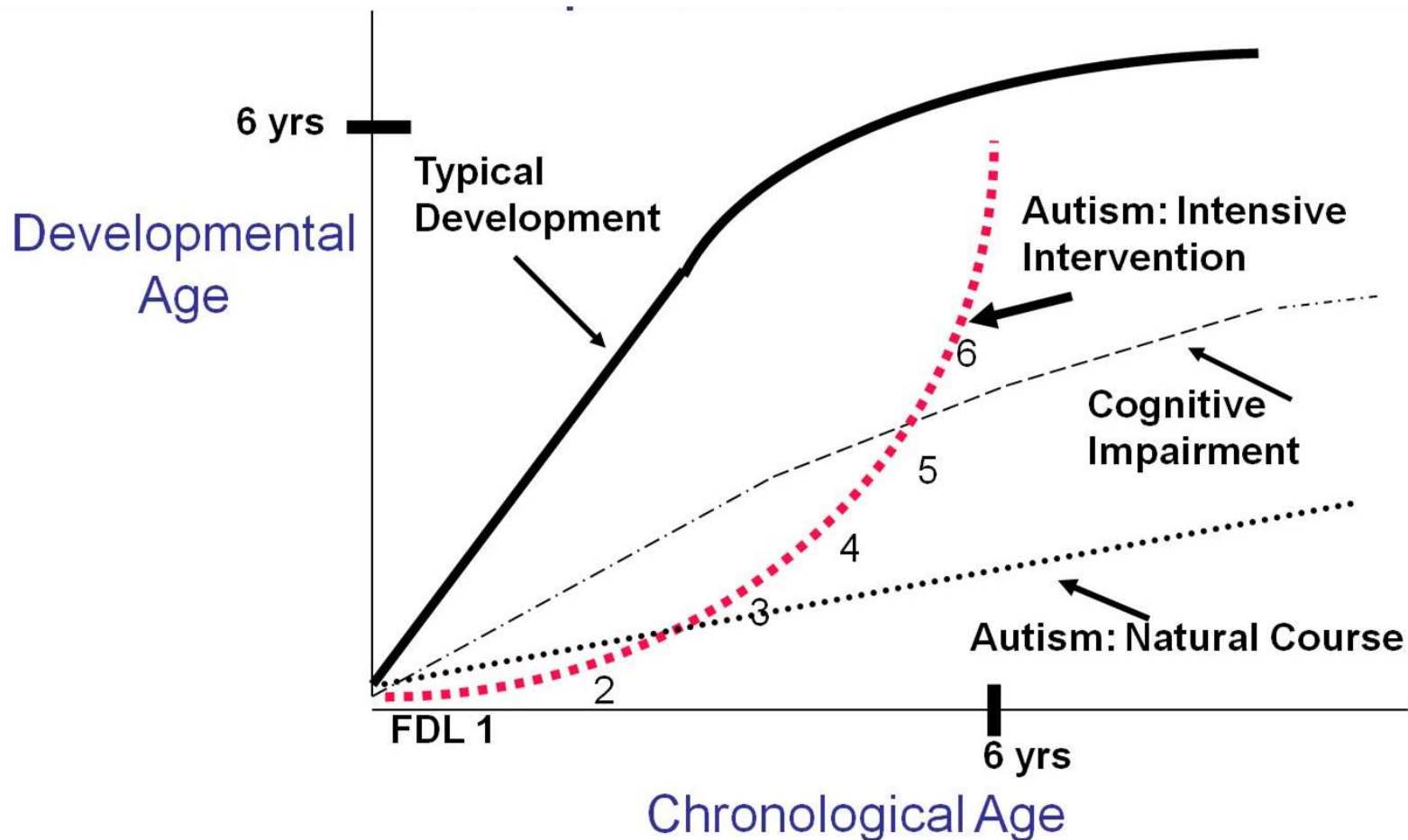
How easy is it to engage child?
Is child having fun, smiling?
SWEAT LEVEL – Play partner doing most work to keep child engaged

1. Regulation & Shared Attention

How much time is child tuning out/spending time in comfort zone?
What sensory supports does child need to stay regulated?



Developmental Course of Autism





Three Types of Progress

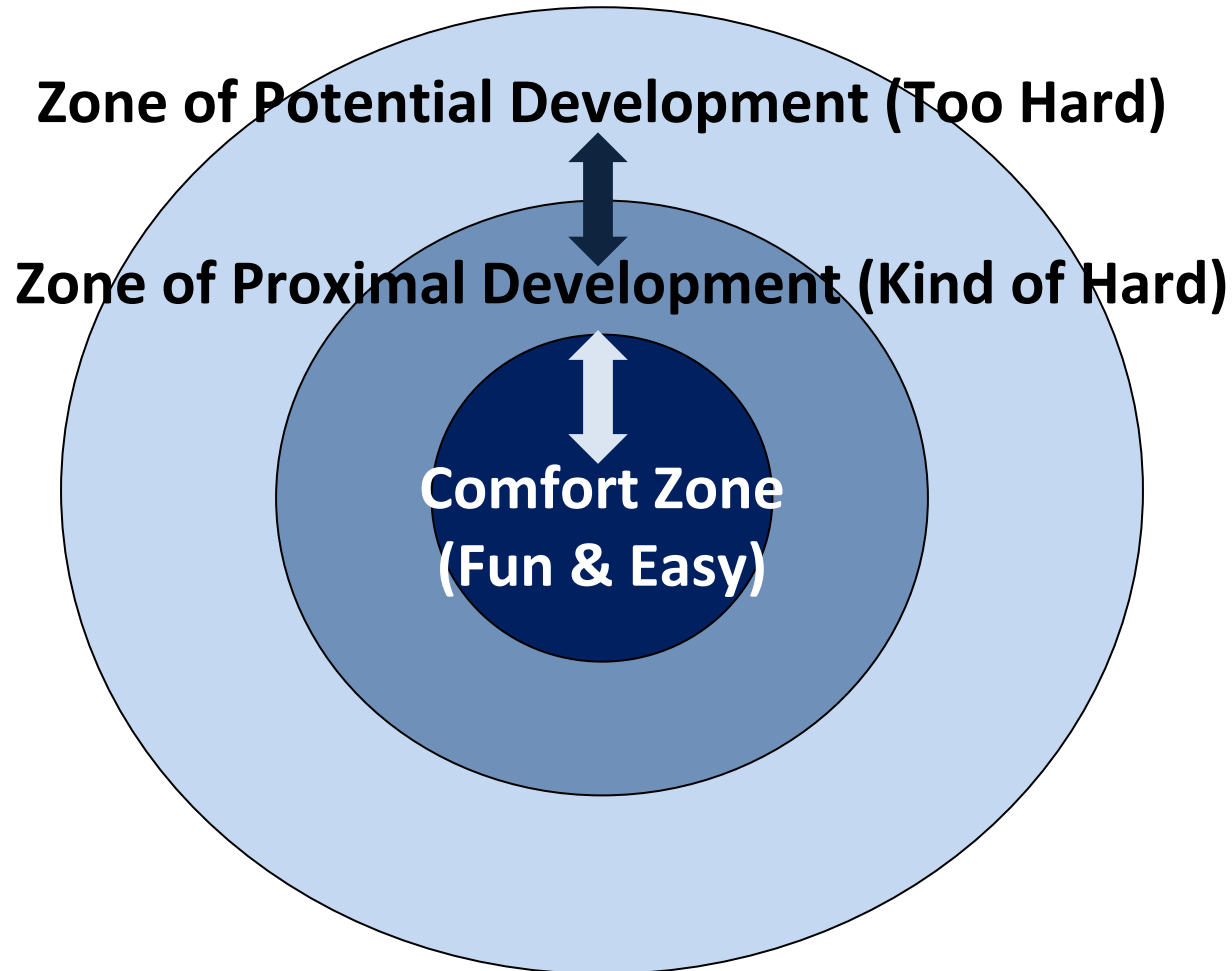
Slow

Medium

Fast



'Setting the Bar' at the Right Level





The Values Families Hold Dear

- For faster movers, the path leads to high school diploma and a college education.
- For middle movers, the path leads to self sufficiency with or without a full time work (work is over-rated!)
- For slower movers, the path leads to reaching for one's fullest potential along the lines that I will describe:
 - Marked by continuous developmental progress
 - Improved social connectedness
 - A life that is playful, fun, meaningful, happy and growth oriented,
 - All families want a better relationship with their child and they want their child to reach their full potential



Principle #1: Fun With People

“When you do what the child loves, the child will love to be with you.”

—Dr. Rick

Lesson #1

*Intensive Early
Intervention Matters!*





Autism: 10 Lessons

**Early
Diagnosis &
Intensive
Early
Intervention**

Pre-school
and
Kindergarten
Readiness

Early
Elementary
School

Late
Elementary
Middle and
High School
(Adolescence)

Post High
School and
Transition to
Adulthood



Lesson #1

Start as early as possible

- 14 months
- 6 months? 'Red flags' will do

New research on early identification is growing

- Genes
- Blood markers
- Eye tracking
- Siblings at risk



6 Month-old Babies with Autism Prefer Objects to People





Screening and Early Diagnosis

- Symptoms can manifest as early as 6 months
- Can be reliably diagnosed by 14 months in most children
- Pediatricians are screening for ASD at 18 and 24 months
- The M-Chat is the best screening tool
- Gold Standard Diagnosis: An experienced clinician
- ADOS (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule) + Clinical evaluation
- Early dx leads to early intervention
 - Time is ticking





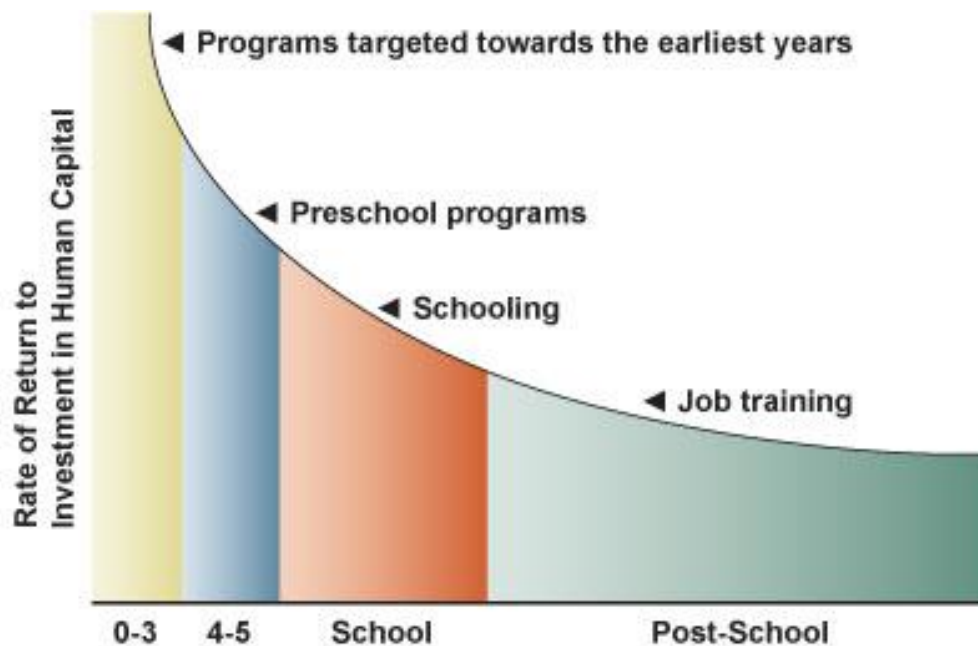
The Paradox and Red Flags

The Diagnosis Paradox

- But you don't need an official diagnosis!
- **Red flags** are enough
- Problems with responding, sustaining engagement, being in their own world, doing their own thing. . .are enough
- To get insurance coverage you need a diagnosis
- But to begin early intervention you don't
- Start with play!



Programs by Age



Lesson #1



The Definition of '*Intensive* Early Intervention'

National Research Council (2001)

- Begin early: 14 months-3 years
- 15-20 hours/week (2 hours/day)
- 1:1 or 1:2 adult to child ratio to start
- Engaging
- Strategic Direction
- Comprehensive programs address ASD



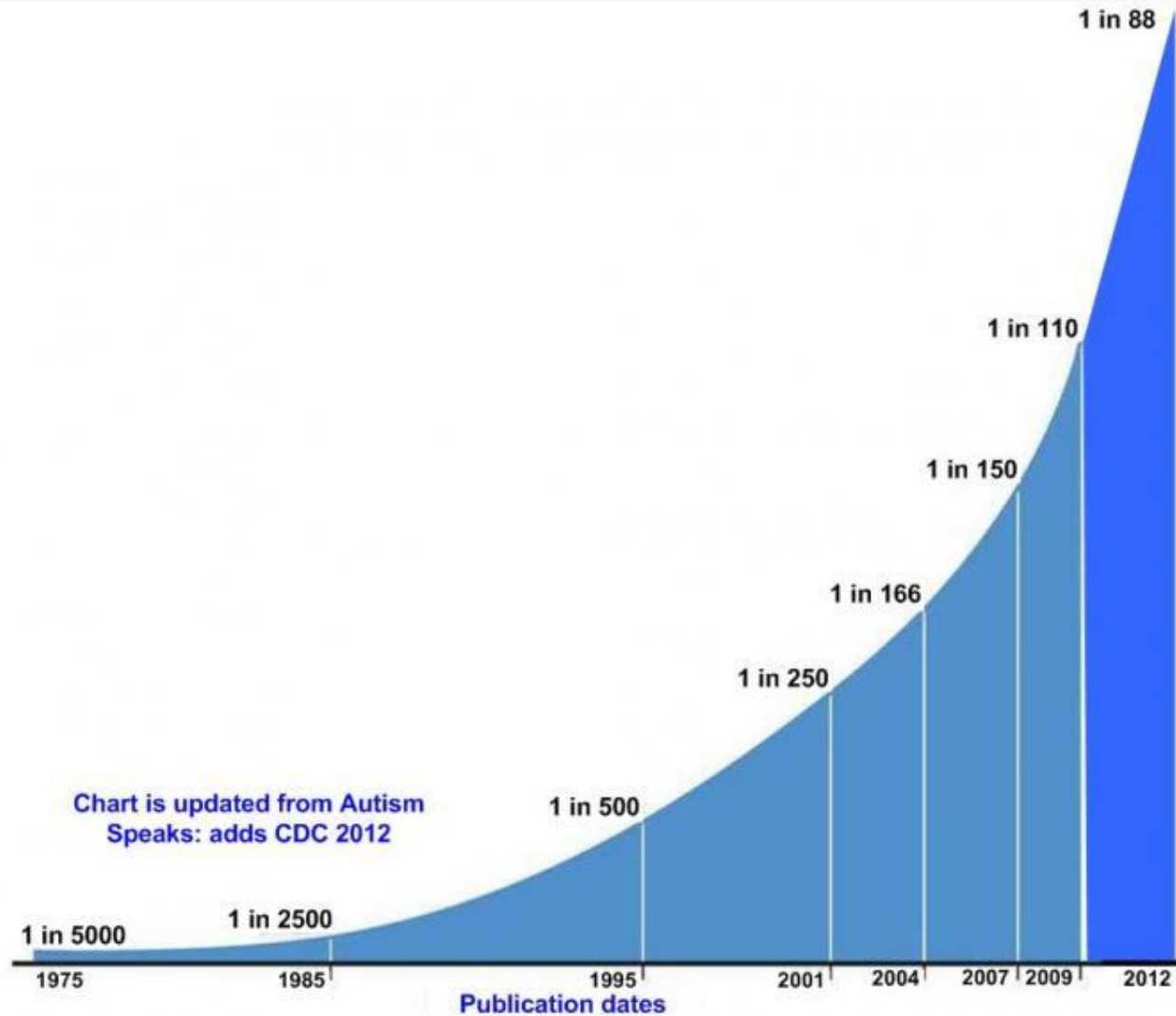
Intervention Options

- Developmental, Relationship-based Intervention
 - See Binns & Oram Cardy and NCAEP
- Applied Behavioral Analysis
- Combined: Early Start Denver, Project Impact
- **Speech and Language**
- **Occupational Therapy**
- Special Education
- Parent implemented vs. Professionally delivered
- Parents feel like they have been left hanging





Autism Prevalence 1975-2012





Estimated Autism Prevalence 2020



* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) prevalence estimates are for 4 years prior to the report date (e.g. 2020 figures are from 2016)



Lesson #1



- With the dramatic increase in recognition of ASD, therapist delivered services can't meet the need
- Training parents is the best way to reach the most children
- More insurance companies are covering parent coaching models.
- See your references (Binns & Oram Cardy)



Good Prognostic Factors

- Early diagnosis
- Early intensive intervention
- Any words before age 2.5
- Splinter skills/special abilities early on
- High parental expectations
- Good response to intervention
- No hypotonia or motor delays
- No genetic findings
- Experienced guidance



Lesson #1

Summary



Start intensive early intervention as soon as possible

Diagnosis is not essential if the signs of ASD are present

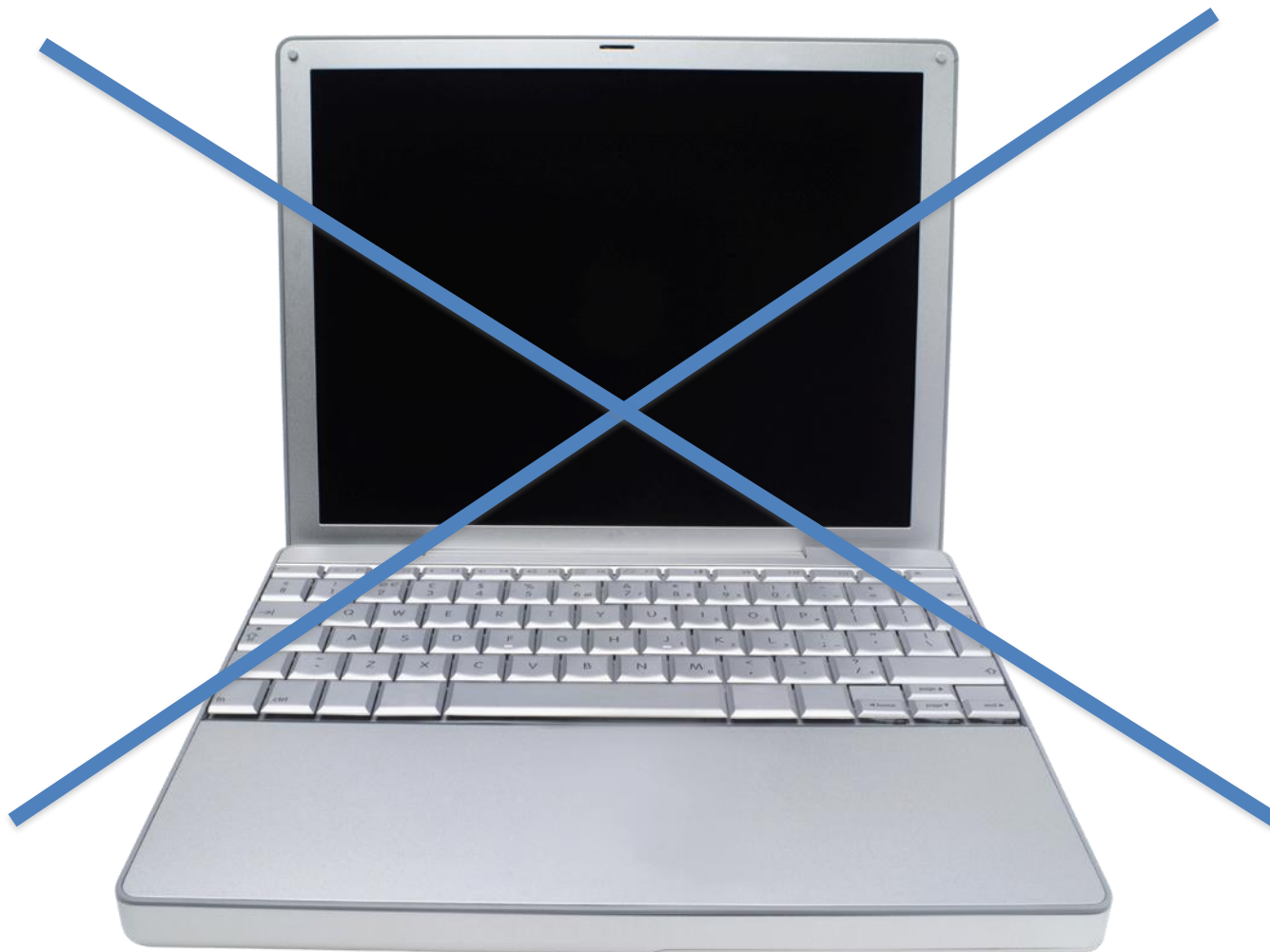
Play based developmental models don't require an official diagnosis

For ABA in the USA a diagnosis is usually necessary

'Empowering parents through parent coaching models' is smart public policy



P.S. Limit Screens (1-2 hours max) . . .





PPS

Why did the
cookie go the
doctor?



He needed a
diagnosis.



I'm feeling
kind of
crummy.



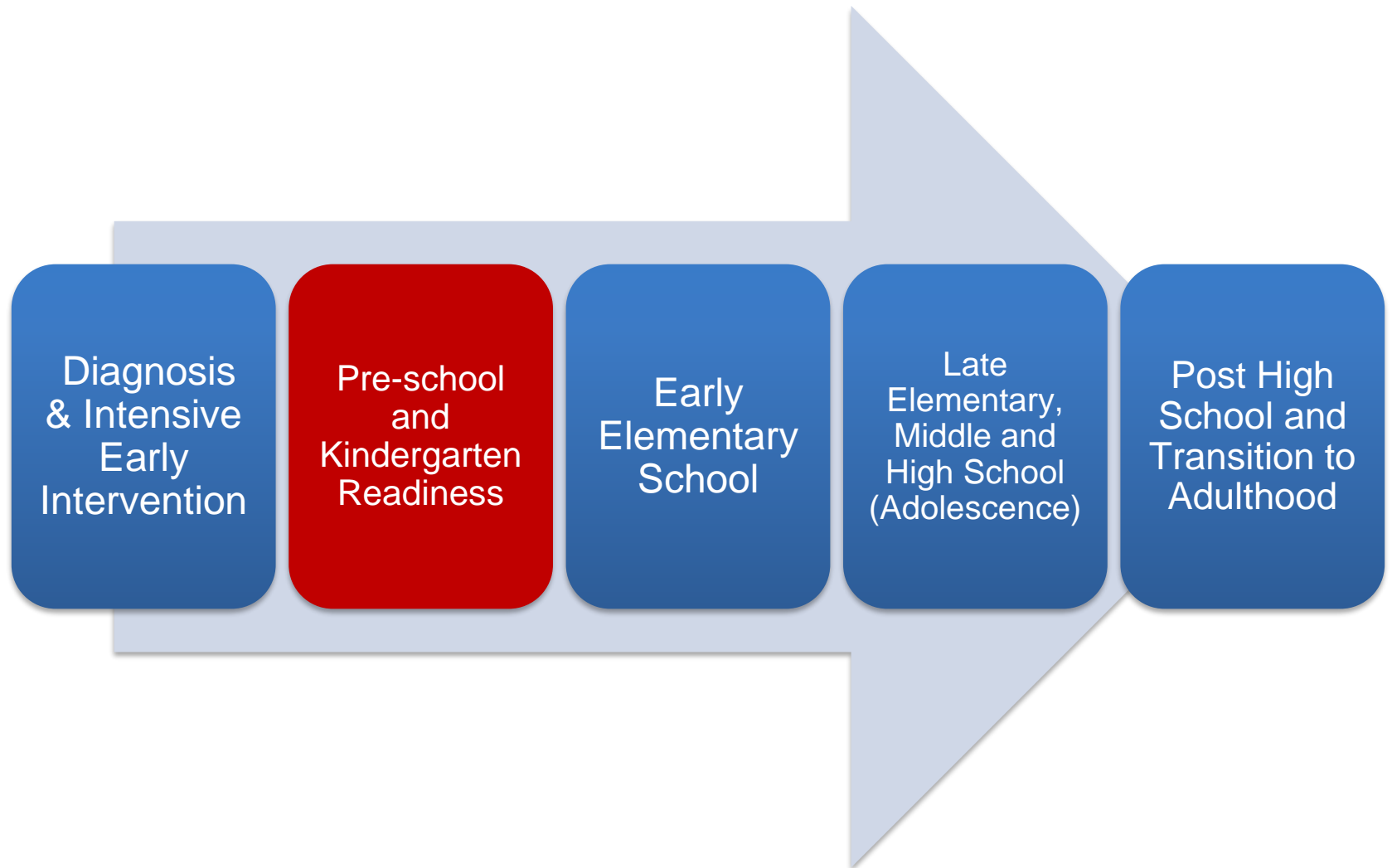
Lesson #2

Parents- Be School Savvy!





Autism: 10 Lessons



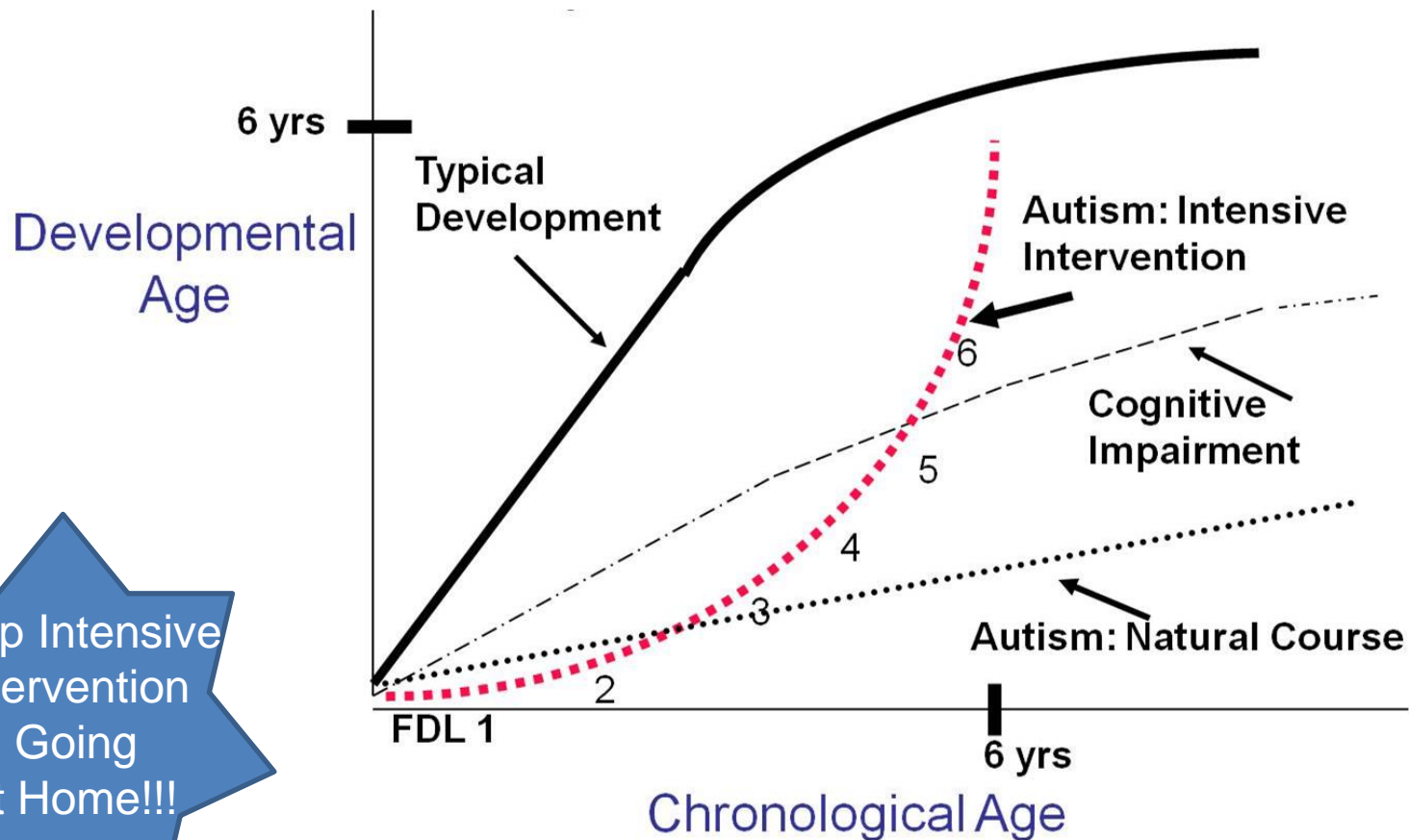


Lesson #2: Parents—Be School Savvy

- The initial period of 1-2 years of intensive intervention hopefully has helped the child move up to FDL 4-5 by age 3. Like Finn.
- The child is more connected socially, but receptive and expressive language are still developing
- As the child leaves early intervention and the child turns 3 years old, parents are considering pre-school.
- Special education services now include an IEP, Individualized Education Plan
- Parents encounter the school system.



Developmental Course of Autism





9 Functional Developmental Levels*

1. Self regulation and shared attention (FDL 1)
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- Parents encounter the school system.



Climbing the Language Mountain



Early Intensive
Intervention is
working
on these FDLs



Lesson #2: Parents—Be School Savvy

- The initial period of 1-2 years of intensive intervention hopefully helps the child move up to FDL 4-5.
- The child is more connected socially but receptive and expressive language are still developing
- As the child leaves early intervention and the child turns 3 years old, parents are considering pre-school.
- Special education services now include an **IEP, Individualized Education Plan**
- Parents encounter with the school system begins.



School & IEPs

- IEPs give parents a lot of power to determine their child's service profile. Know your rights!
 - Think of the IEP as a menu of options (restaurant analogy)
 - You can get whatever you want (within reason)
- Parents rarely feel empowered by the school systems
- The IEP offers a range of supports for the child from the least restrictive to more restrictive services
 - IEP, FAPE (Free and **Appropriate**), LRE (**Least Restrictive Environment**)
- In Ohio all pre-school are integrated; in Michigan few are





Least Restrictive (More inclusive) Environment (LRE)

General Ed with peers
+ Push in or Go out
for (SLP, OT, MSW,
Special Ed Teacher)



Gen Ed + Resource
Room + Push in/Go
Out



General Ed + a **Part-
time Aide/Parapro** +
push in/go out



Gen Ed + **Full Time
Aide/Para** + push
in/go out



Self contained class
with peers with mixed
disabilities with
mainstreaming for
gym, recess, music,
art (noisy)



Small self-contained
class with all children
on the spectrum and
little mainstreaming



"Thou Shalt Not Be
The Highest Functioning Child
In Thy Classroom!"

Lesson #2:

Inclusion is...

- The less restrictive the better
- The child will model after other children
- Being with a range of children helps all children
- There is a growing sense of acceptance of differences and a feeling of belonging

Belonging



School & IEPs

- The **teacher** is **THE** most important factor:
Structured and Nurturing
(can't pick)
- Parents: Trust your intuitions when checking out schools
- The most important thing: Put all requests in writing!
- Keep working on functional social development



Get it in WRITING!





School & IEPs

- Think about what you want your child to achieve
 - Interaction
 - Imagination
 - Emotion
 - Developmental
 - Social
 - Academic
- **Write out** what you want and give it to the school at the beginning of the school year
- The **Demands** of pre-school for compliance and routines are good





Most autistic children
love pre-school!



The more inclusive the better



Lesson #2 Summary

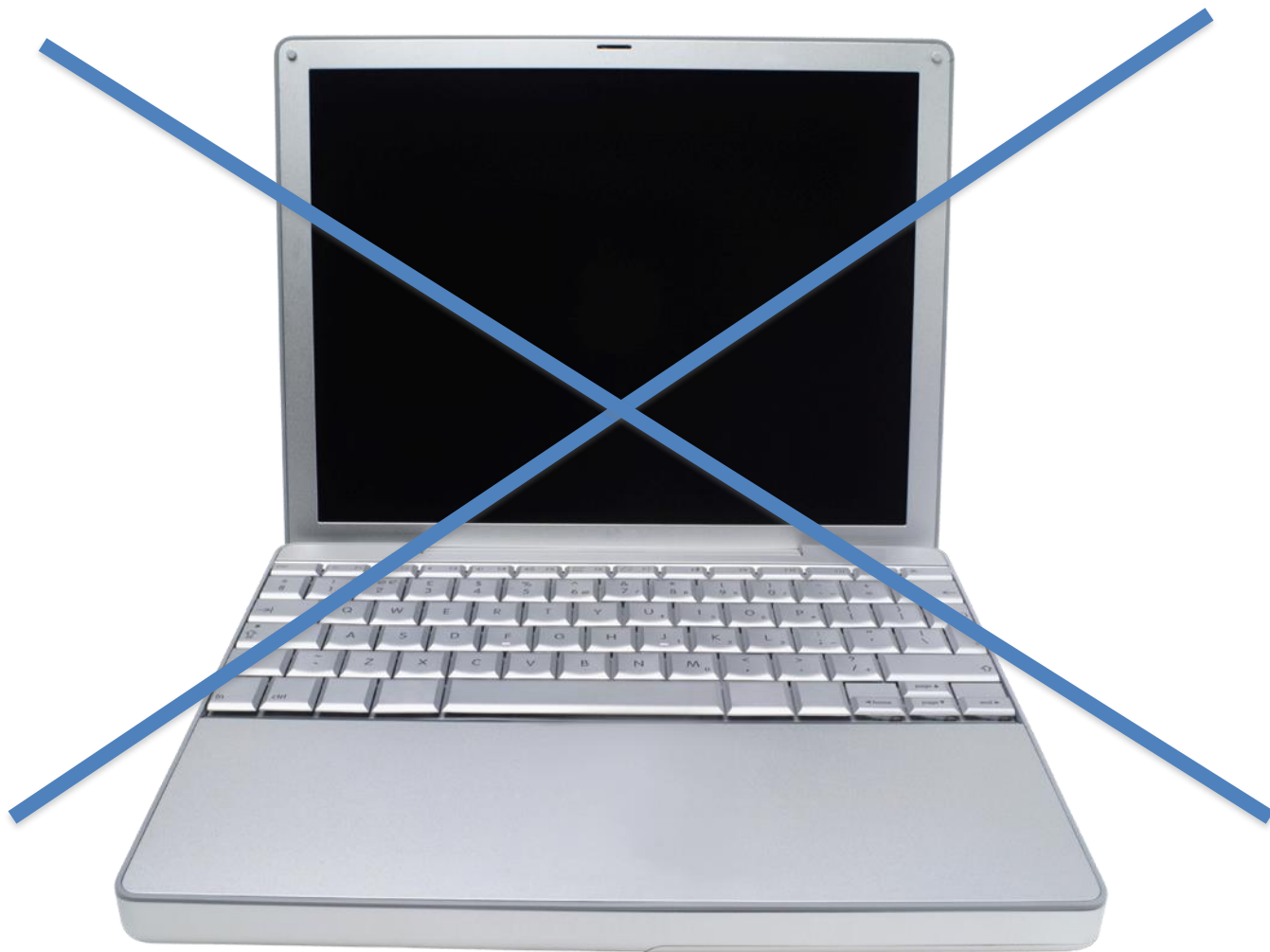


#2: Be School Savvy

- Keep working on the child's functional development by being savvy about the IEP process!
- Teacher: Nurturing and structured
- School as a restaurant. Know your menu of IEP rights.
 - LRE: Least restrictive
 - FAPE: Appropriate—IEPs that fit your child
 - What are YOUR IEP goals?
- Real inclusion leads to a feeling of belonging!
- *"Thou shalt not be the highest functioning child in thy classroom."*
- Put everything in writing



P.S. Limit Screens (1-2 hours max). . .





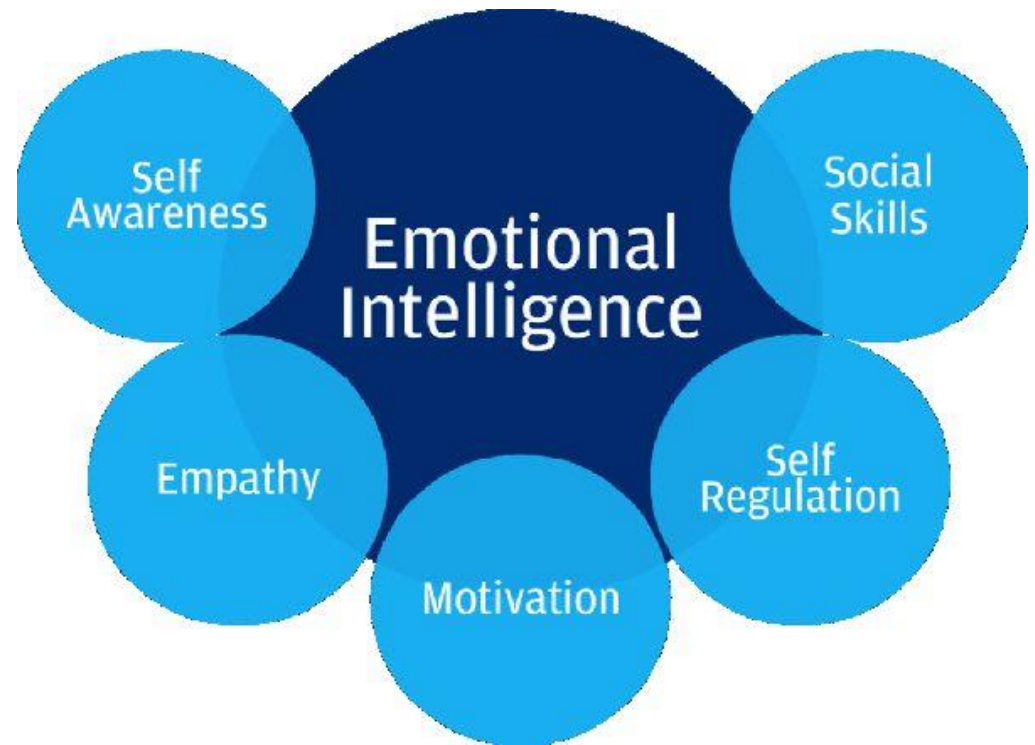
PPS.

HAVE FUN



Lesson #3:

*EQ is More Important
Than IQ*





Autism: Lesson #3

Diagnosis
& Intensive
Early
Intervention

Pre-school
and
Kindergarten
Readiness

Early
Elementary
School

Middle and
High School
(Adolescence)

Post High
School and
Transition to
Adulthood



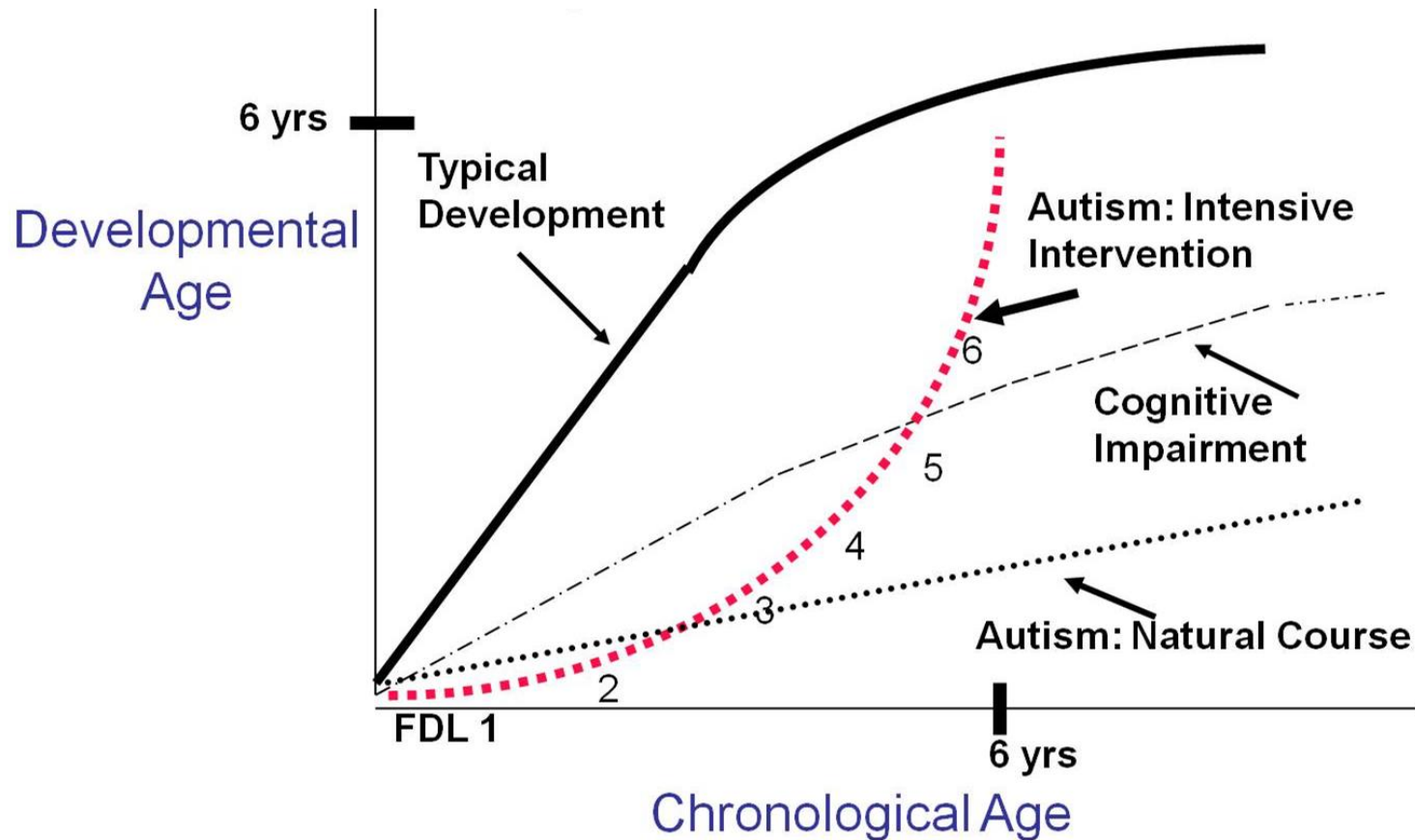
Lesson #3: EQ is More Important than IQ

- As the child progresses to FDL 4-5 and turns 4-5 yrs old
- The Big 3 Developmental Domains:
 - **Interaction**
 - **Imagination**
 - **Emotions**
- Imagination
 - Pretend
 - Sense of humor
 - Imagining the past and future
 - Imagining how others feel





Developmental Course of Autism





Simple Play



Simple (One Idea) Imaginative Play



- Everything come alive
- Trains that make train noises
- Animal sounds and pretending to be an animal
- Babies that eat
- Swords
- Monster chase
- Puppets with big mouths that talk and eat
- Doctor shots



Imaginative Play

More Complex (Two Idea) Imaginative Play

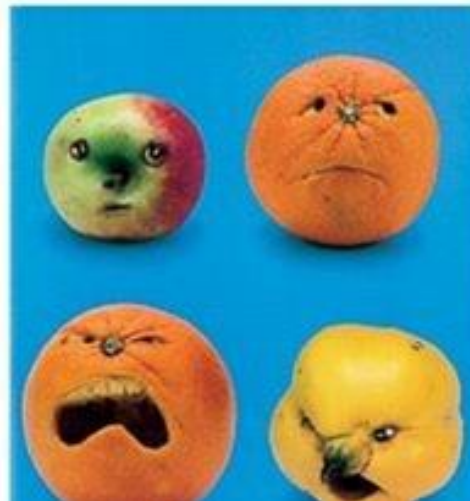
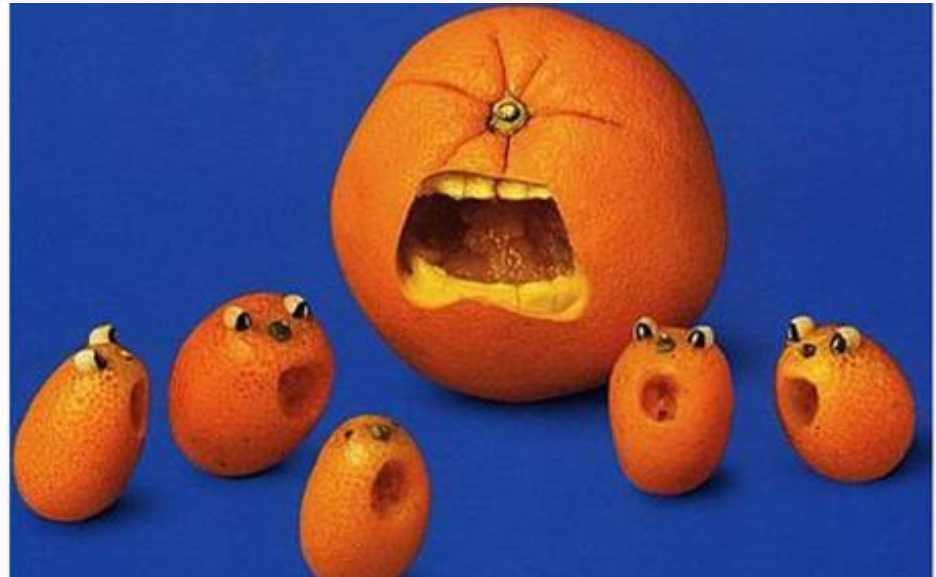
- Role playing
- Doctor
- Teacher
- Good guys and bad guys
- Taking care of babies





Feelings

- When we recognize the autistic child's feelings
- By 'mirroring' back to them what they are feeling
- They learn to put words on their feelings
- Recent studies show that the amygdala which is the seat of strong feelings is less regulated in children with ASD
- They can be overwhelmed with impulses
- This leads to misbehavior
- "How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk"



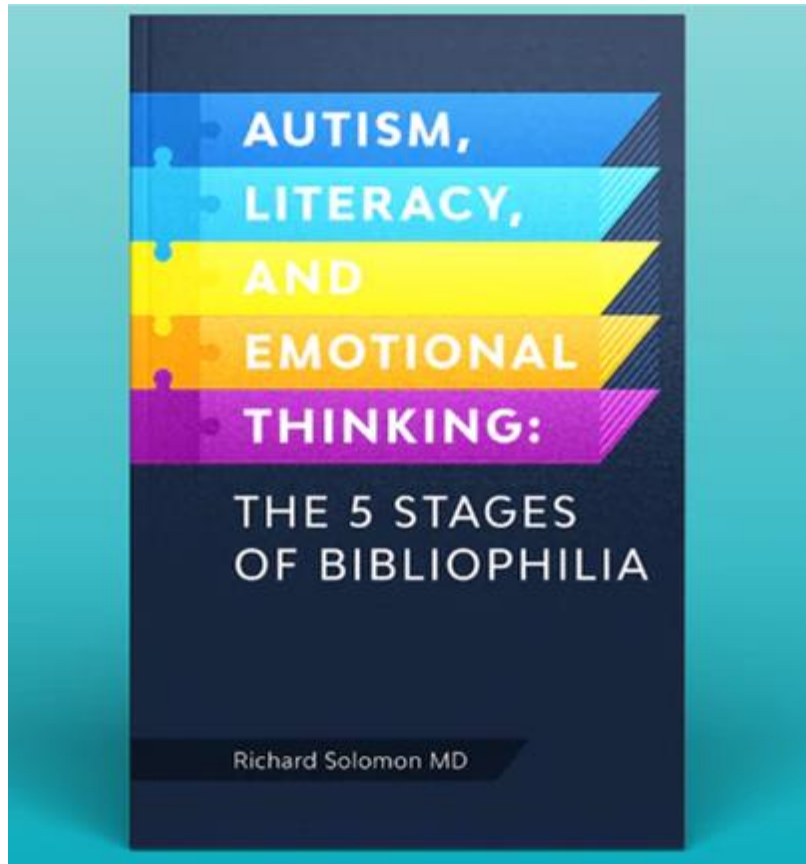


Over Time EQ Evolves with IQ

- Emotional intelligence requires the ability to live in time, connect ideas, and read other people's feelings
- IQ helps and should be nurtured
- Many children on the spectrum do well with letters, numbers, colors, shapes—the basic IQ of pre-school
 - The problem comes with true IQ—abstract thinking and problem solving—putting two ideas together logically
- **Interaction, imagination, and emotional thinking** pave the way
- Eventually the child understands books and develops **reading comprehension** (see Lessons 4-10)



Books & Reading Comprehension



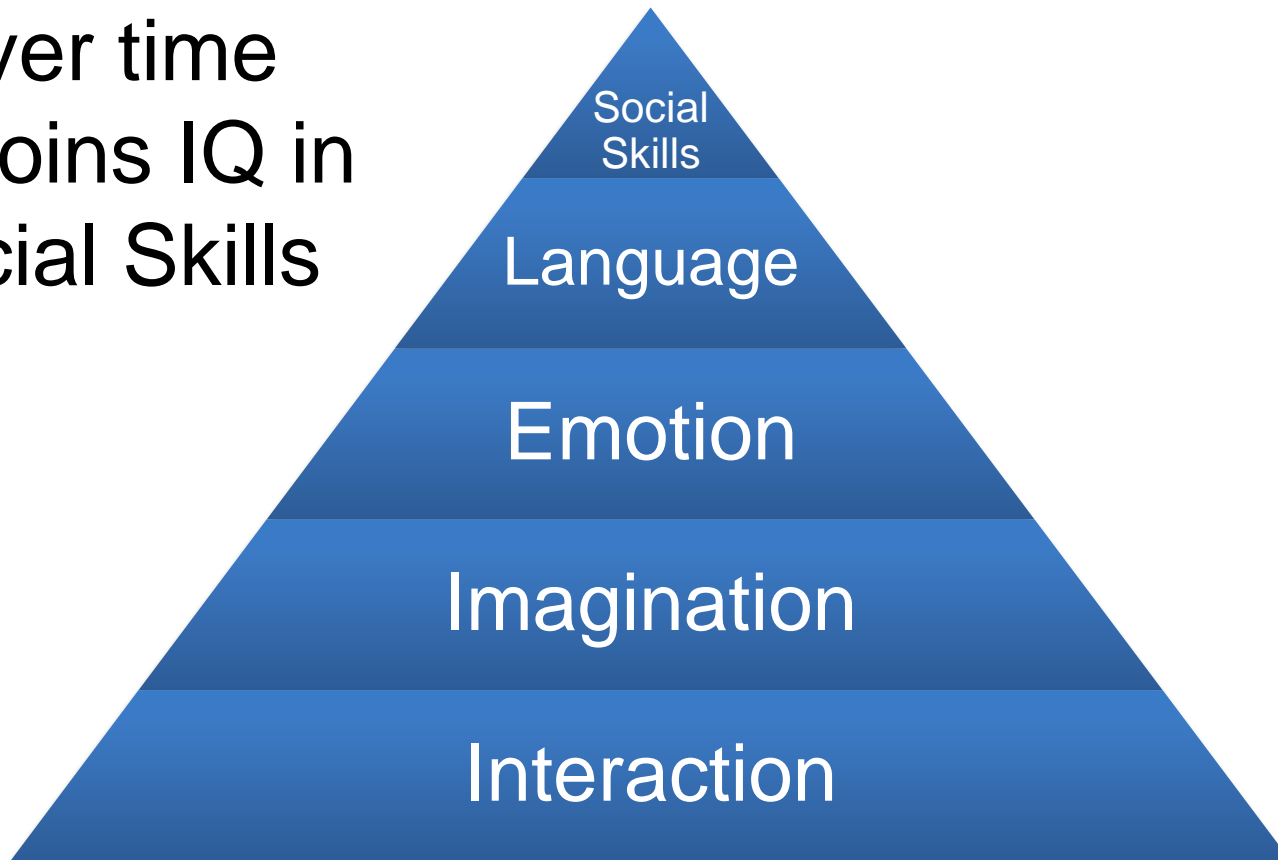
It's free and
only 25
pages!

- See my new eBook:
Autism, Literacy and Emotional Thinking
- **Bibliophilia:**
 - The book (tastes good)
 - The picture on the page
 - The story on the page
 - The story in the book



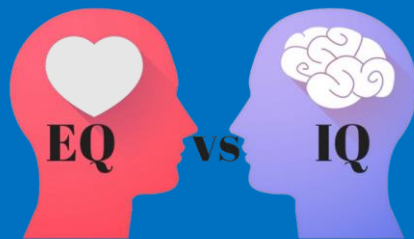
Development of Social Skills

Over time
EQ joins IQ in
Social Skills



Lesson #3

Summary



- EQ is more important than IQ
- So, promote emotional thinking through. . .
- Interaction, Imagination, and Emotions/Feelings to lead to social skills and better IQ
- Recognize and mirror back feelings
- Promote pretend play and imagination
 - One idea pretend
 - Two idea pretend
- Use books to promote EQ



P.S. Limit Screens (1-2 hours max) . . .





PPS.



EQ is more important than.
..

IQ



Lesson #4:



*Delay
Kindergarten?*

Lesson #4:



*Delay Kindergarten**

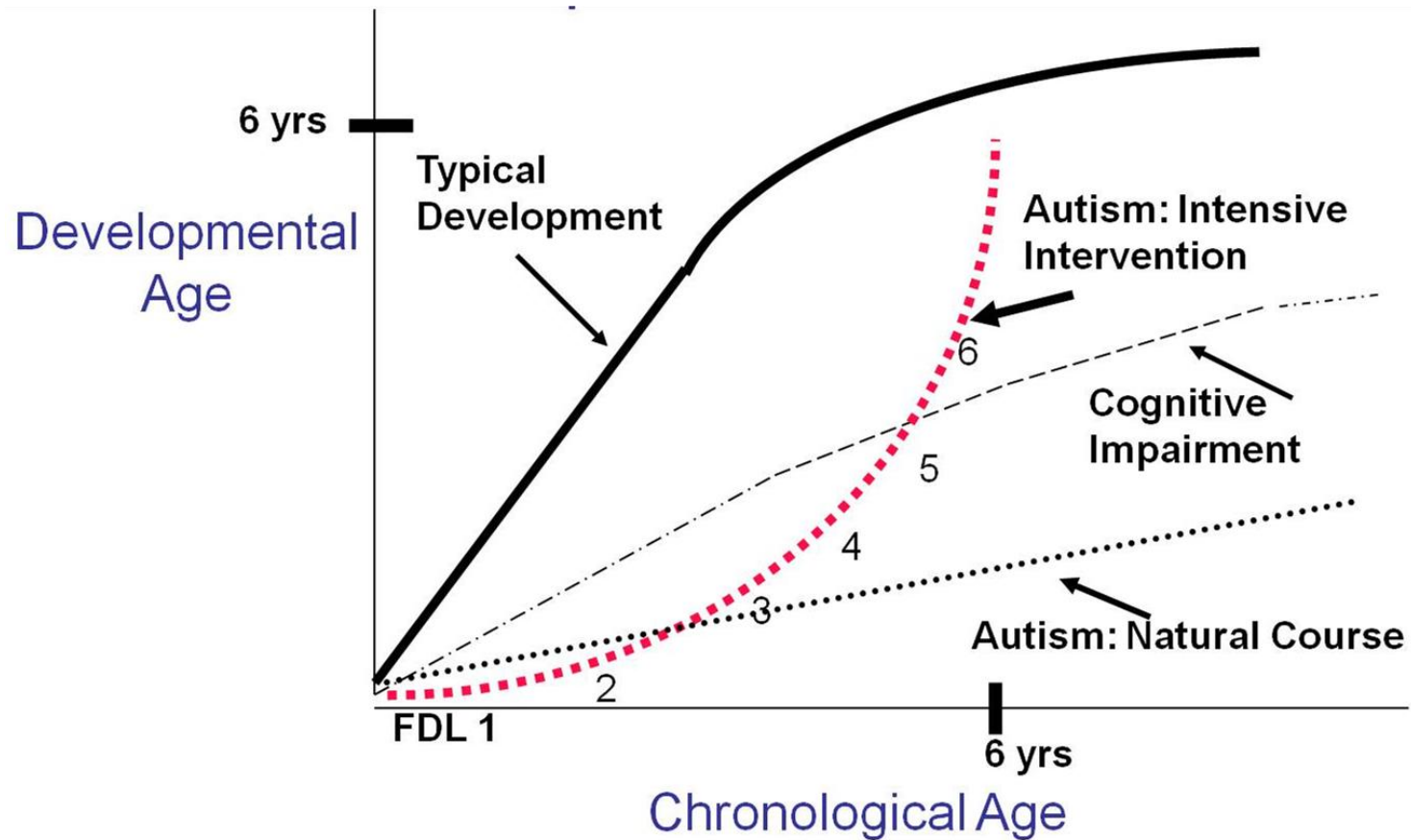
***Age doesn't matter!!**

- The child is getting older and moving toward kindergarten.
- Hopefully, they are moving up developmentally to FDL 5-6 like Julian
- Most kindergarteners are at FDL 6-7
- **Sound-letter phonics is FDL 6**
- Beware the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Kindergarteners
- It is here that parents have to make an important decision.
- Do I send my 5 year old to kindergarten?
 - I have advised parents to wait and have never heard a parent regret the decision. Wait until 6 or even 6

$\frac{3}{4}$



Developmental Course of Autism





9 Functional Developmental Levels*

1. **Self regulation and shared attention (FDL 1)**
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*Greenspan and Weider



Climbing the Language Mountain



Conversations

**Expressive:
Sentences**

**Expressive:
Single Words**

**Receptive:
Give/Get Commands,
Routines**

**Expressive:
Gestural
Communication**

**Two Way Back and
Forth Communication**

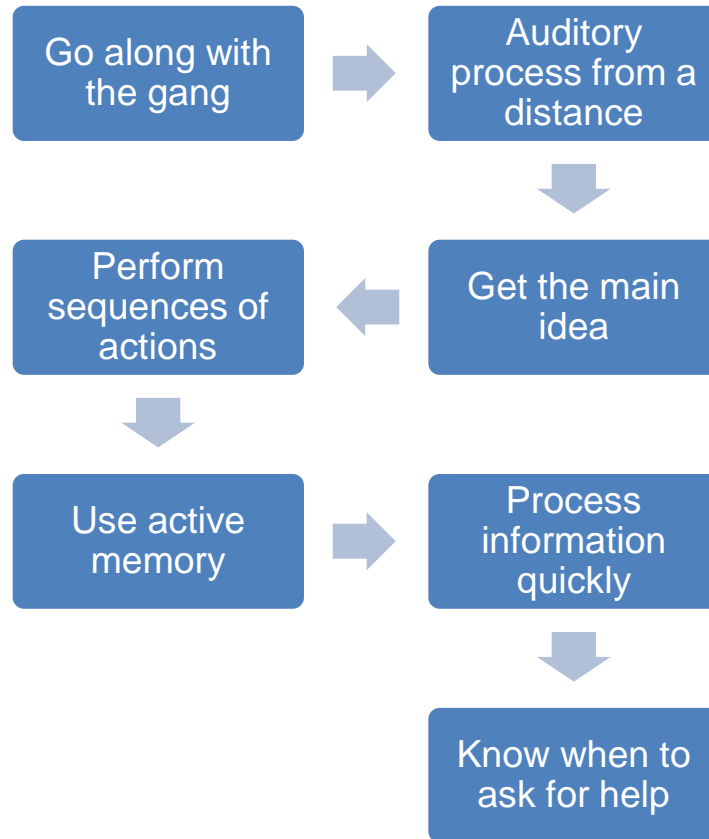
Engagement

Shared Attention

Faster movers
in Kindergarten
& First Grade
Need to get to
FDL 6



The 7 Habits are Daunting



Lesson #4:



*Delay Kindergarten**

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Ageism and School

- **The Big Lesson** is that this is a rare opportunity to give your child a ***whole year*** to mature and catch up
— Never again
- To have time to move from FDL 5? FDL 6 or FDL 6? FDL 7 is a gift
- Luckily, if you do send your 5 year old to kindergarten, the schools usually do a good job of *adapting* the curriculum to *accommodate* the child.



The Philosophy of 'Can'

- This year before kindergarten is a big growth year
- This is a time to work in that Zone of Proximal Development
- Here's some guidance: "Ask yourself: **'Can my child do this?'** **If they can, then they should.**
- THIS IS THE PHILOSOPHY OF 'CAN'
- It helps parents understand their child's potential.



Faster Movers: IEP Goals

- Kindergarten **at age 6+.**
 - Reason, reasons, reasons!!
 - Getting to ‘Why’ and ‘When’
 - Focus on early literacy, math, writing
- Get the right amount of help—IEP. Be school savvy.
- **Use your summers for academics**
- **Get tutoring**



Slower Movers

- Gaining a year is great for slower movers too!
- The 'just right challenge'. Set the bar right and hit the nail on the head
- Keep working on the FDLs!
- If they do go to kindergarten
- Consider more support:
 - Part time aide
 - Full time aide
- Be strength's oriented and
- Go for the 'Philosophy of CAN'



Lesson #4

Summary



- Delay Kindergarten
- One year at this age is huge!
- Never again will you have this opportunity
- Keep working on FDL 4? 5? 6
- Once in kindergarten, if the child stands out socially, talk to the class about 'Autism'
- Keep being school savvy
- Aim for the 7 Habits



P.S. Limit Screens (1-2 hours max). . .





PPS.



What do you call a dinosaur that doesn't take a bath?

A Stinko-saurus!



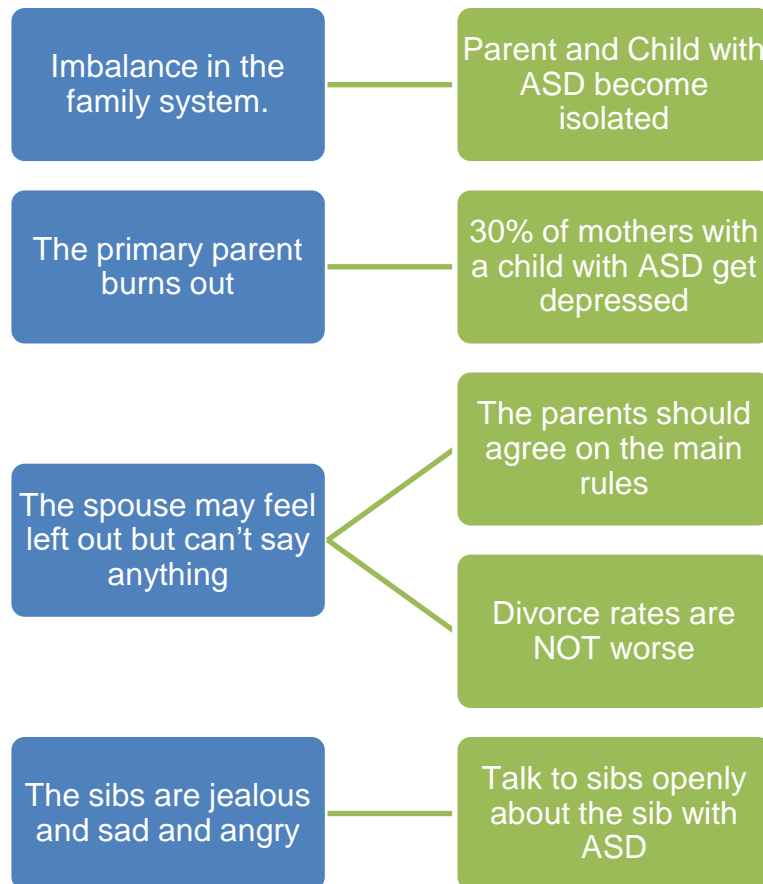
Lesson #5:

*Take good care of your
family system!*





4 Dangers of the Path: The Family





Take Care of Your Family

- **The Self Care paradox:**
When mom's and dad's take care of themselves, they take better care of the family!
- **The Guilt Paradox:** Doing the 'best' for the autistic child in not necessarily the best for the child (especially if the family or marriage falls apart!)

We must take care of
our families wherever
we find them.

Elizabeth Gilbert





The Mom is Usually The Team Leader





The Competent Child



- Parents with high expectations have children who achieve high levels of success
- Very good parents hurt their child's feelings—by saying 'No'.
- By making appropriate demands you give your child a 'message of competence'.
- By not expecting them to do what they can—the philosophy of can—they internalize weakness and often become tyrants. They **MUST** have what they want or they fall apart (secretly feel weak).
- Poor frustration tolerance, lowered self efficacy (esteem) are the result of too much tenderheartedness

Lesson #5

Summary



- Take good care of your family system and it will take care of everyone including the child on the spectrum
- Siblings will be more supportive
- A strong family system promotes the child's competence by making appropriate demands



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PPS.



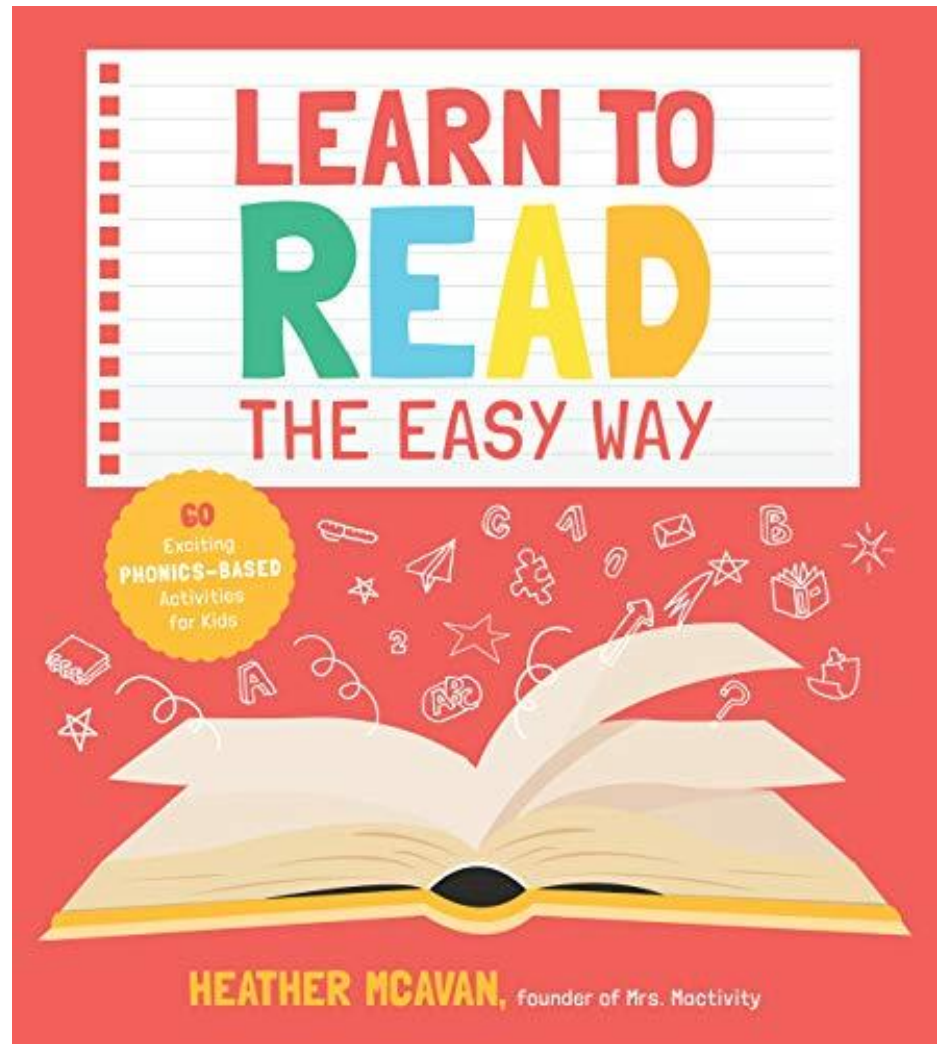
I shook my family tree and a bunch of nuts fell out!

That's insane!



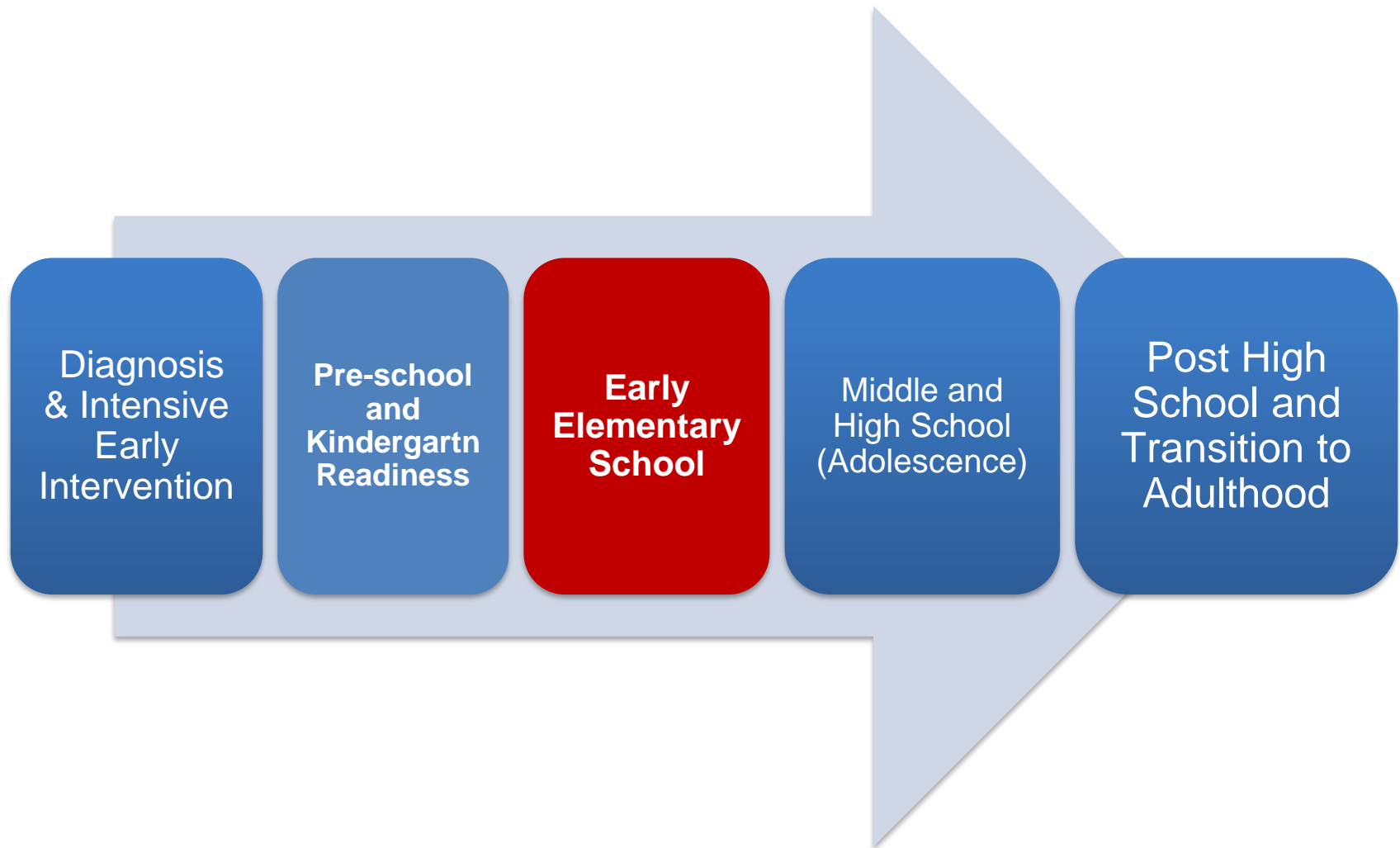
Lesson #6:

*Learn to Read
Then Read to Learn
2nd ? 3rd Grade*





Autism: Lesson #6





Reading 1st, 2nd and 3rd Grade



- Phonics is an FDL 6 skill learned in 1st grade
- By end of second grade most students are fluent readers. Many children with ASD are fluent too.
 - They've learned to read
- But, by third grade, **can they read to learn** and make sense of the stories/books? i.e. Do they have reading comprehension?
 - Are they at Greenspan FDL 7?
- Many autistic students will not be ready to read and will need a more adapted curriculum to enjoy school (be school savvy—set the bar right)



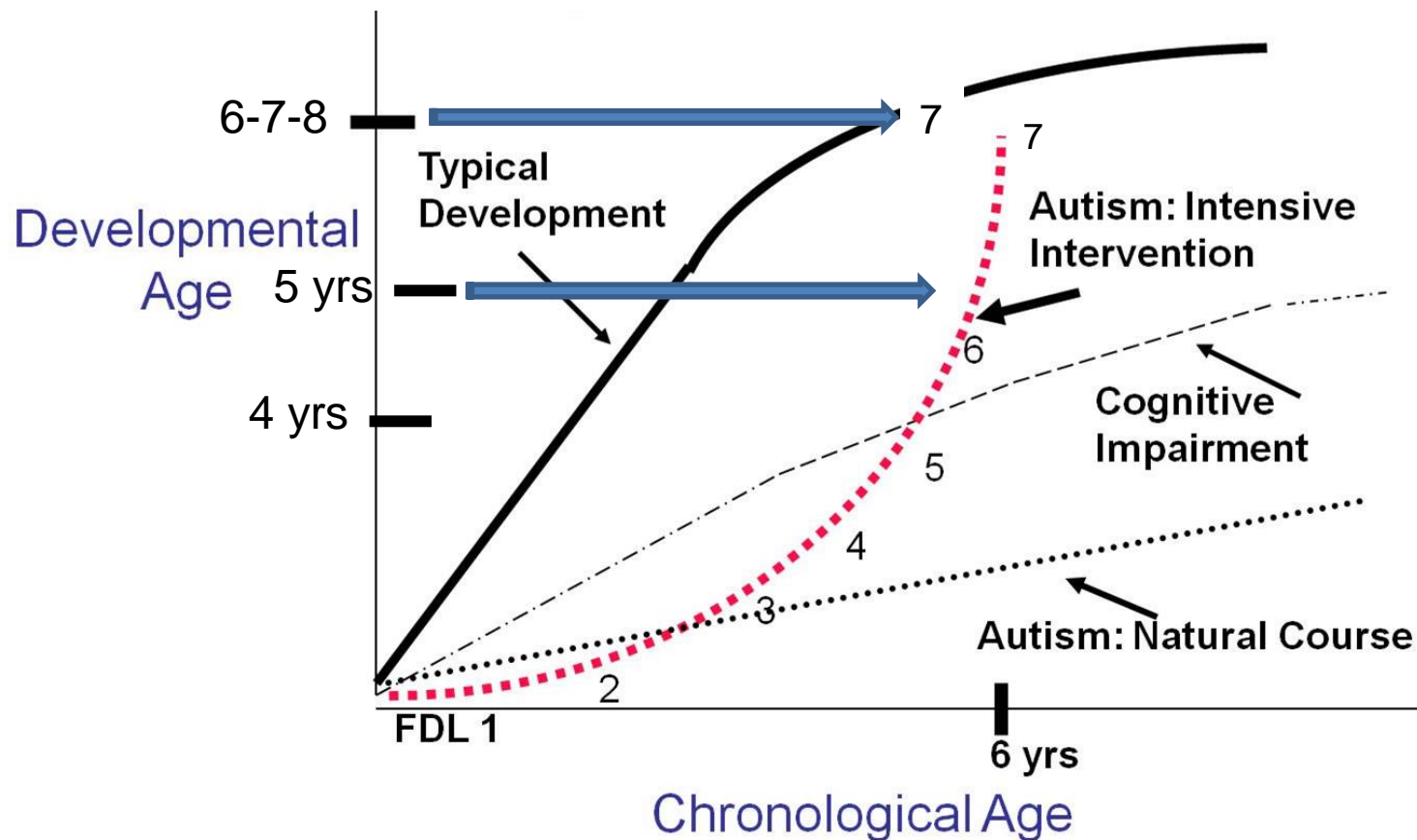
9 Functional Developmental Levels*

1. Self regulation and shared attention (FDL 1)
2. Engagement (FDL 2)
3. Two-way Communication (FDL 3)
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9. Thinking off an Internal Standard (FDL 9—13+ year old)

*Greenspan and Weider

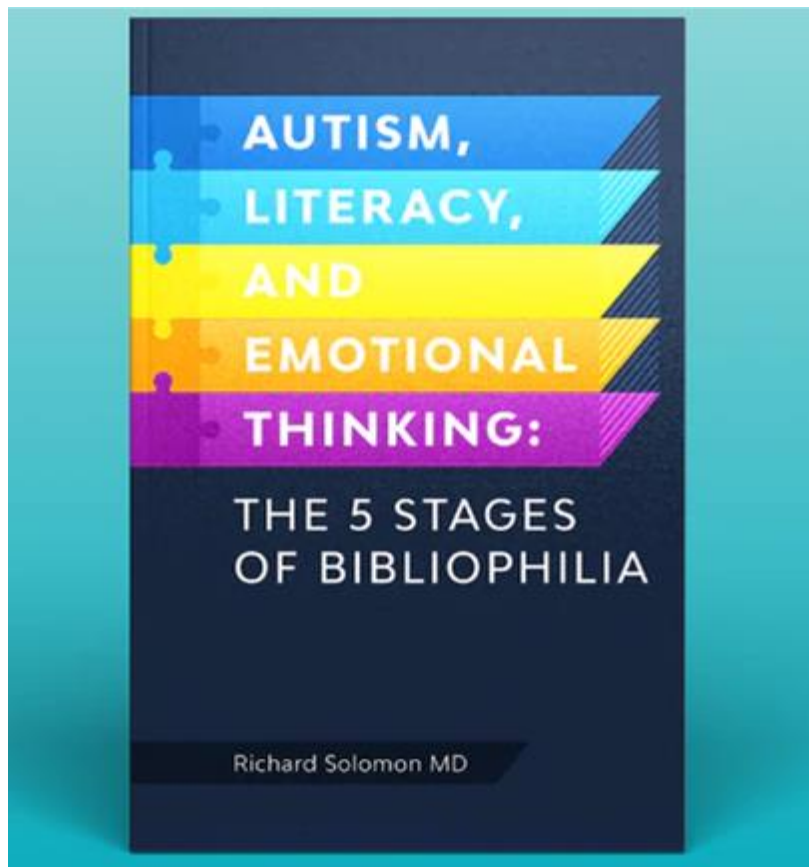


Developmental Course of Autism





Books & Reading Comprehension



It's free and
only 25
pages!

- See my new eBook:
Autism, Literacy and Emotional Thinking
- **Bibliophilia:**
 - The book (tastes good)
 - The picture on the page
 - The story on the page
 - The story in the book



Learning to Read, Reading to Learn

- Literacy and the love of reading—leads to success in school
- Get a dictionary. Love words. Read books
- Use your summers to learn!!
- **Getting reading, math, and writing tutors (The 3 Rs)**
- Use OTs for help with fine motor coordination
- Speech and language therapists and ABA for higher level language skills
- Continue to give m&m's
- Use 'The Stone in the Pond' approach
- Take jokes seriously!





Give them M&M's

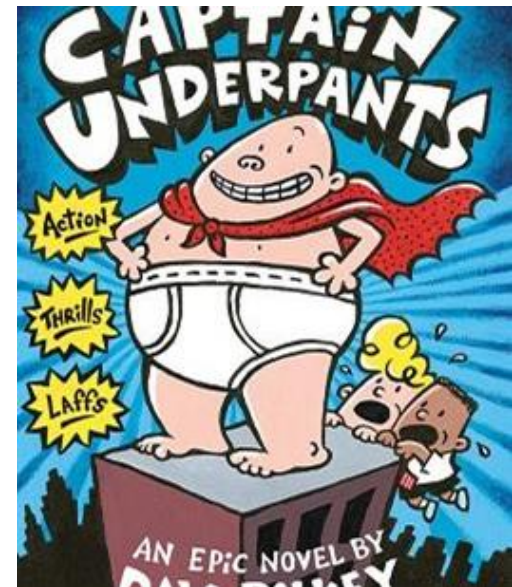
- Meaning and motivation
- IEPs should be built around the child's interests
- Be project oriented and playful
- Make learning/reading fun
- Learning is a lifetime of joy or a school career of misery and boredom





The Stone in the Pond

- Start with what the child loves
 - Captain Underpants
- Expand their interests (ripples out to the edges)

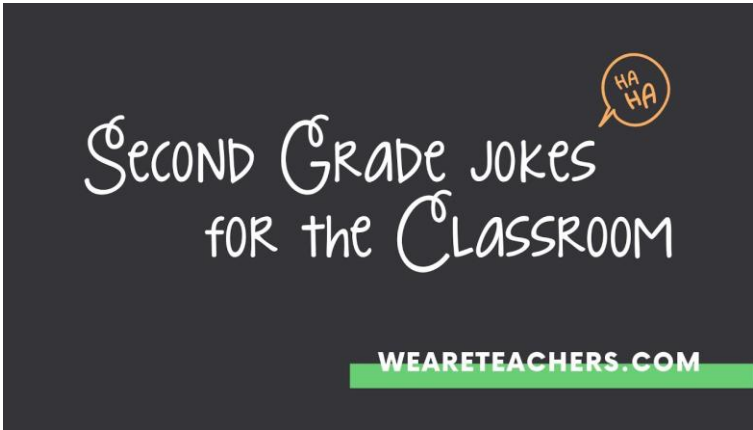




Don't Forget...



Don't
forget to
PLAY!!!



Why was that funny?





Fully included means 'Belonging'

For the children on the **spectrum who are moving more slowly developmentally**, the school's curriculum should be adapted to accommodate the child's needs and interests

"If the child cannot learn the way we teach, then let's teach in a way that the child can learn."

Learning should be child centered, fun, and have all the 5 elements of play. Joyful, social, engaging, meaningful, iterative

The child should be in the classroom with peers as much as possible



The Reading Paradox



While 'typically developing' children learn to read in 2nd grade, children on the spectrum may not be ready until they are older

The irony is that the schools tend to teach reading when autistic children are young and not ready

Then give up on teaching them reading when they are older and are ready!

Ageism: Age is not the key, it's the child's FDL

When do children read? At FDL 6-7

Lesson #6

Summary



- Learn to read, then read to learn
- Big academic change between 2nd and 3rd grade
- Many children with ASD can make the transition but they will have to work high in their 'zone of proximal development'
- For others who are not yet 'reading to learn' schools can adapt to keep the child in the classroom and learning at their level of need and interest
- Use summers for academics and the 3 Rs (& Jokes!)
- Play dates, emotional thinking, and pretend-- never stop being important





P.S. Limit Screens (1-2 hours max). . .





PPS.

HAVE
FUN



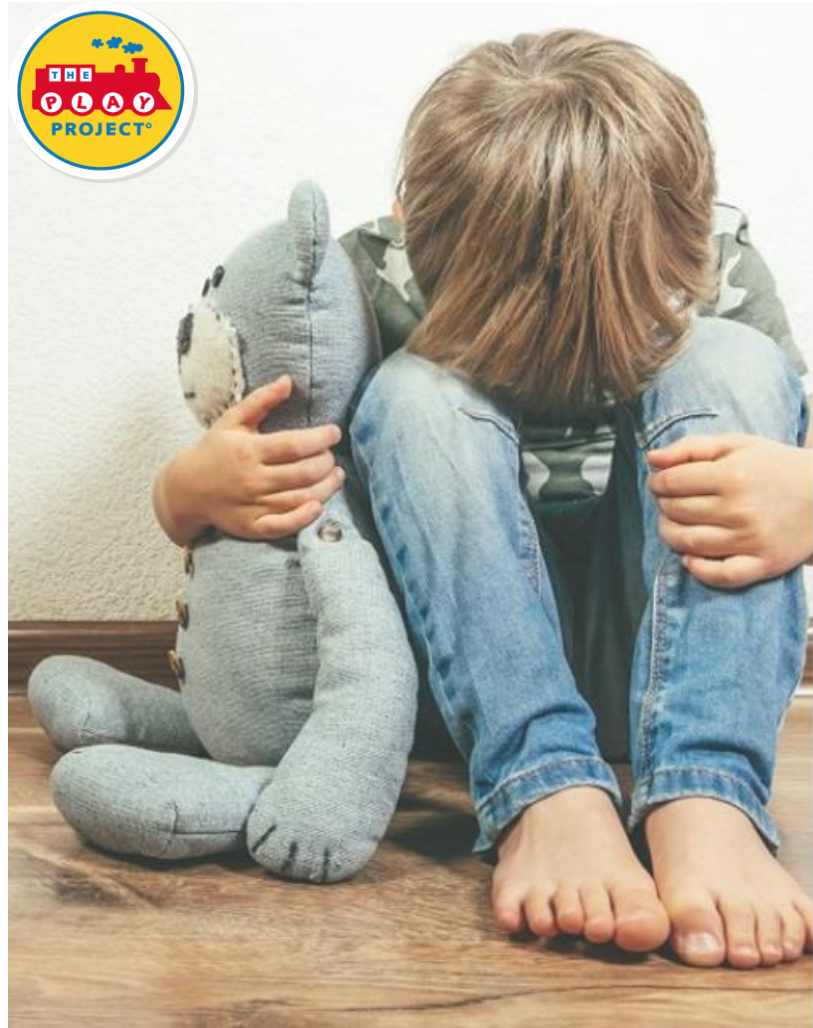
Why did
the M&M
go to
school



He wanted to
be a 'Smarty'.

Lesson #7:

*Be Prepared to Deal with
Anxiety
(And other hard feelings!)*

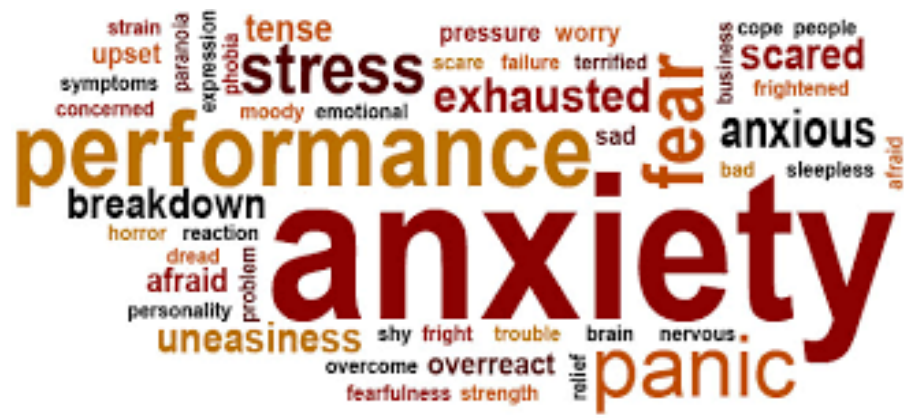


**Check out 2 free webinars
on 'ASD and Anxiety' at
<https://playproject.org/playstore/>**



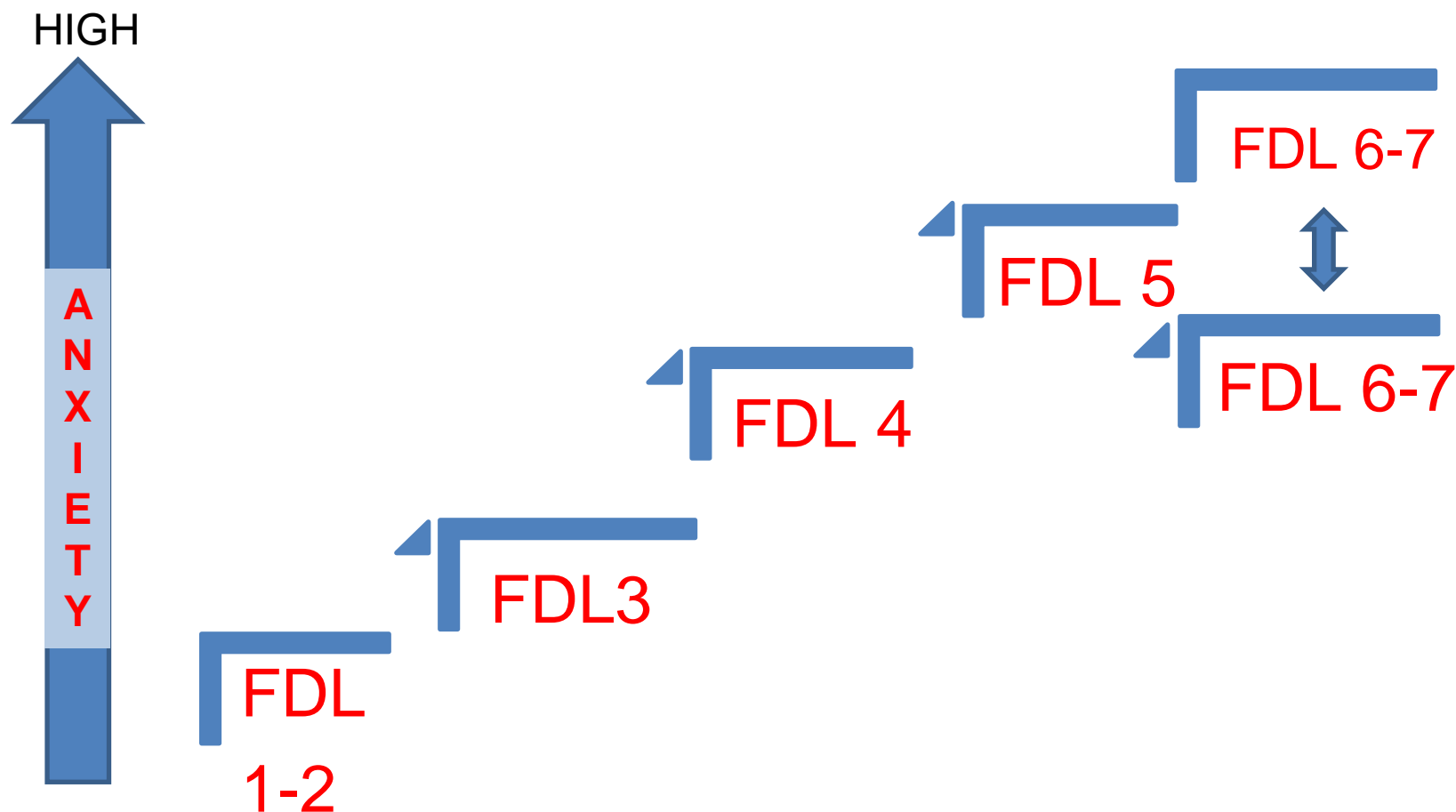
Anxiety & Autism

- By the time we get to 3rd grade, school demands increase with an attendant increase in anxiety
 - Reading to learn
 - 3 R's
- Children with ASD want 'to keep the world the same'
 - Uncertainty, demands, stress, life, change, people, & school? anxiety
- Leading to worry, frustration, misbehavior and aggression
 - 8-9 years old
 - 70-80 lbs and watch out.
- Anticipate anxiety: Forewarned is forearmed





As FDLs Emerge Anxiety Increases





9 Functional Developmental Levels*

1. **Self regulation and shared attention (FDL 1)**
2. **Engagement (FDL 2)**
3. **Two-way Communication (FDL 3)**
4. ***Complex two-way Communication (FDL 4)***
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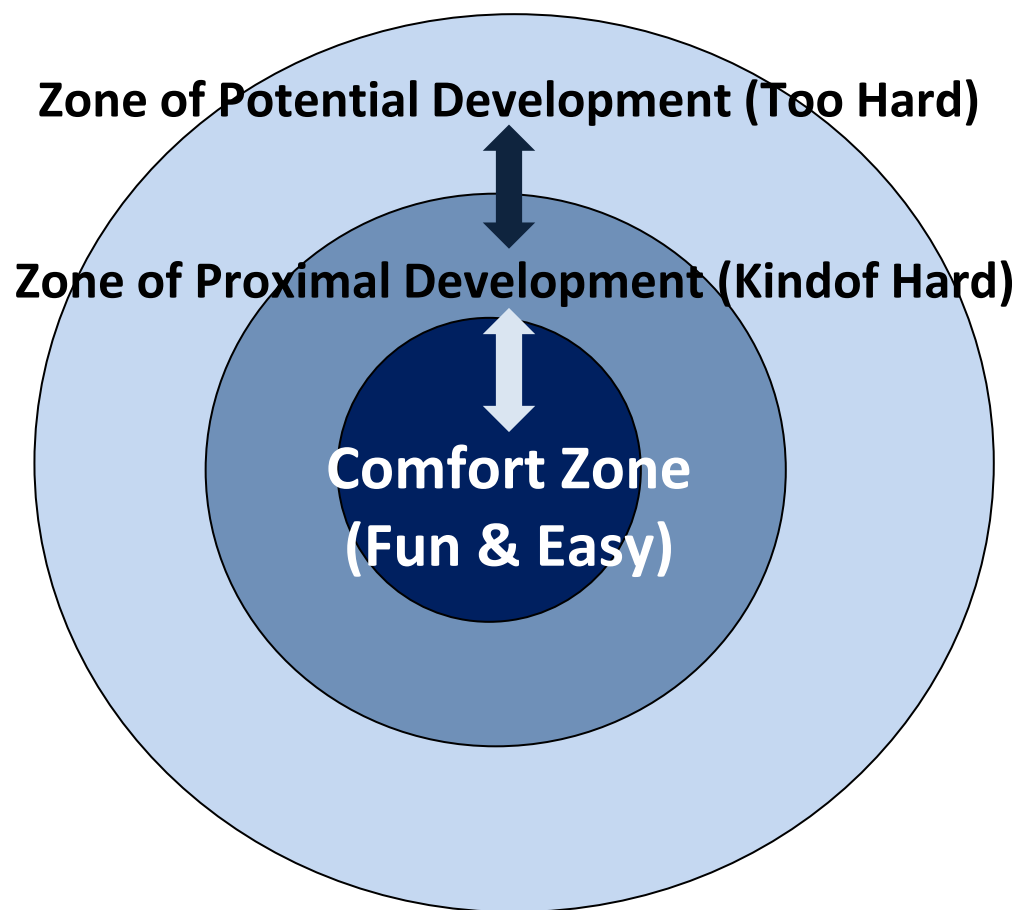


Several Ways to Cope with Anxiety

- Set the bar at the right level to deal with performance anxiety
- Adapt the curriculum to the child's capacities
- Adapt the child to the curriculum—get tutors
- Use your summers to catch up
- Make learning fun and playful
- Anti-anxiety techniques
 - Mirror feelings
 - Talk about how hard the work is
 - Learn some 'Transition Tricks'
 - Keep giving m&m's
 - Throw the 'Stone in the Pond'
 - Teach some self reg skills
- Medications



Talk About How Hard School Work Is





Use Transition Tricks to Reduce Anxiety

Mirror feelings

No sudden 'No's!'

'I'll tell you what, I'll tell you what':
Making a deal

Tussling

Preview/Review

Exposure by degrees: Desensitizing



Mirror Feelings

- How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk—Faber and Mazlish
- Mirrors don't ask questions, they express facts and make statements:
- “You think this work is too hard! And you can't do it.”





Transition Tricks to Reduce Anxiety

Mirror feelings

No sudden 'No's!'

'I'll tell you what, I'll tell you what': Making a deal

Tussling

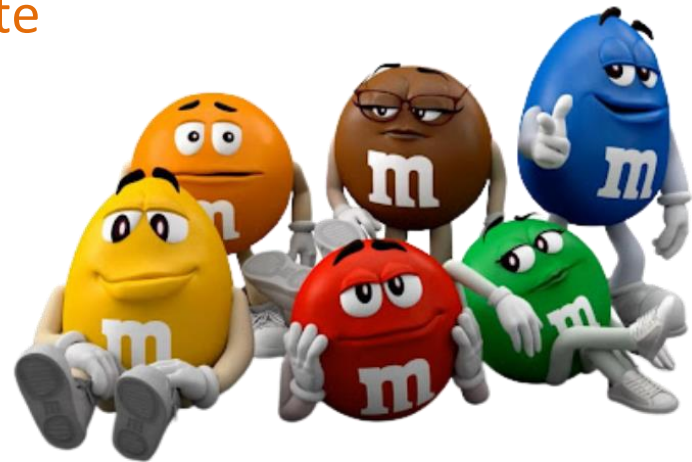
Preview/Review

Exposure by degrees:
Desensitizing



Give'em M&M's (Better than Prozac!)

- Meaning & Motivation
- Beware of 'The Stop Light' approach to motivation in schools (Red, Yellow, Green)
 - Rewards are incentives not reasons
- Intrinsic motivations/reasons are best
 - To learn, to get smarter, to create
- Exhort children to love learning
- Teach the way the child learns
 - That's what great teachers do





Child Centered Learning*

*Especially important
for children with ASD

**IF A CHILD CAN'T LEARN
THE WAY WE TEACH,
MAYBE WE SHOULD
TEACH THE WAY THEY
LEARN.**





The Stone in the Pond

- Start with what the child loves
- Individualize the curriculum
- Planets, dinosaurs, Captain Underpants, American Girl Dolls
- Expand on their interests
- Move, go into nature, be project oriented, work with your hands, plant a garden





Teach Self Regulation Skills

- Progressive relaxation
- Breathing
- Soothing music
- Headphones
- Playing video games
- Meditation
- Biofeedback
- Yoga





When Kids Need Meds

- Most children will do well with these above strategies
- But some children are very anxious by nature
- SSRIs can be magical
- A good pediatric psychiatrist, neurologist, or developmental pediatrician can be helpful

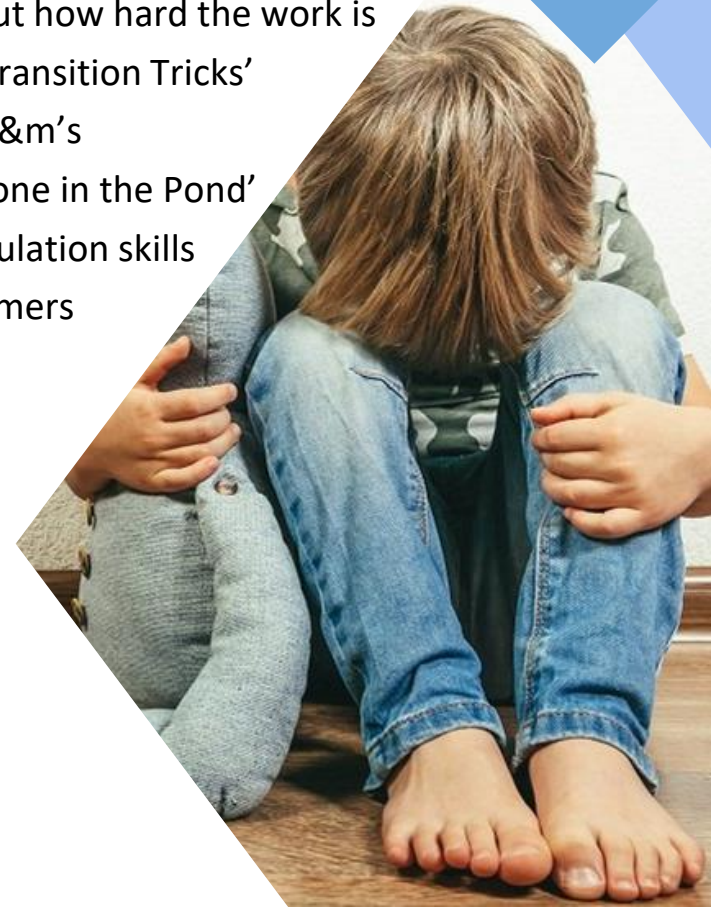


Lesson #7

Summary



- Be Prepared to Deal with Anxiety
- As the child makes progress, anxiety is inevitable and normal
- Set the bar at the right level to deal with performance anxiety
- Adapt the curriculum to the child's capacities
- Mirror feelings
 - Talk about how hard the work is
- Learn some 'Transition Tricks'
- Keep giving m&m's
- Throw the 'Stone in the Pond'
- Teach self regulation skills
- Use your summers
- Get tutoring





P.S. Limit Screens (1-2 hours max). . .





PPS.



DON'T
WORRY
BE HAPPY



Don't
Worry
Be Happy


**KEEP
CALM
AND
KEEP HAVING
FUN**

But the
Buddha's First
Noble Truth:
Life is
Suffering.



Lesson #8:

*Promote Social
Interactions with Peers
(Play the long game)*





Lesson #8: To Tell or Not to Tell

- By 1st grade, many of the typically developing children will notice that the child on the spectrum is 'different'
- I believe that it is vital to talk to the class about these differences and for them to embrace neurodivergent kids.
- It increases tolerance for neurodivergent children
- It creates understanding and compassion
- It helps the child with autism to feel like they belong
- TELL!! (Only if you feel comfortable!)



How to Tell Peers that Billy is Autistic

- Parents can do it with a school social worker
- The child with ASD should be out of the room
- Ask the children if they know what 'autism' is?
- It is a brain condition that causes some children to act different sometimes
- Have any of you noticed that 'Billy' acts in a different way sometimes? Give them a chance to say. . .
- Yes, that's because Billy has autism. He also does x, y, z
- And sometimes he's shy and doesn't know how to make friends. You could really help him by being nice and friendly to him. Thanks!!



The Capacity to Be Social

- Hopefully you have been working on the Big 3 all along
 - Interaction
 - Imagination
 - Emotions
- Your child is moving up to FDL 6-7, age 8-9, 2nd to 3rd Grade
- You've talked to your child's class so they will be kind
- You've done a lot of play at home
 - Catch, hide & seek, wrestling, kicking a ball, etc.
- You've worked on simple games, turn taking, maybe even winning and losing, sharing with sibs



The 6 Rules for Sharing

1. You don't have to share
2. If you have a special toy, put it away
3. Otherwise all toys are first come, first serve
4. If I want to play with your toy, you have to wait 10 minutes (or until they are done). Take turns.
5. If you arrive at a toy at the same time, flip a coin.
6. It's good to share
 - Make your sister happy
 - If you share with her, she will share with you



Friends? (Play the Long Game)

- When do **typical** children move from parallel play to more interactive play?
 - Age 3-4
 - This is FDL 6!
 - 'Friends' by 6-9
 - Socializing in middle school
 - Lasting friendships in high school!
- Children with ASD usually reach FDL 6 at a later age
 - Age 6-8
- Siblings are the best source of child-to-child play
 - Have more children!
- So school is the 1st place for social interaction
 - Tell peers about the child's autism in 1st to 2nd grade
 - Teasing, bullying, failure to connect





The Social Domain: FDL 6-8

- When your child is 7-9+ yrs old and can carry on simple conversations, start looking for social opportunities
- Beware. Birthday parties can be too loud and chaotic
 - Desensitize first
- Beware. Organized sports are often too demanding for many
 - Break it down into component parts
- Activities should be fun, easy, simple, and interactive



The Spectrum of Best Social Activities

Parks

Art Classes

Board games

Karate

4 H/Animals

Gymnastics

Camps (with supervision)

Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts

Bowling

Tennis, golf, pool, ping pong

Swimming

Chess

Interactive video



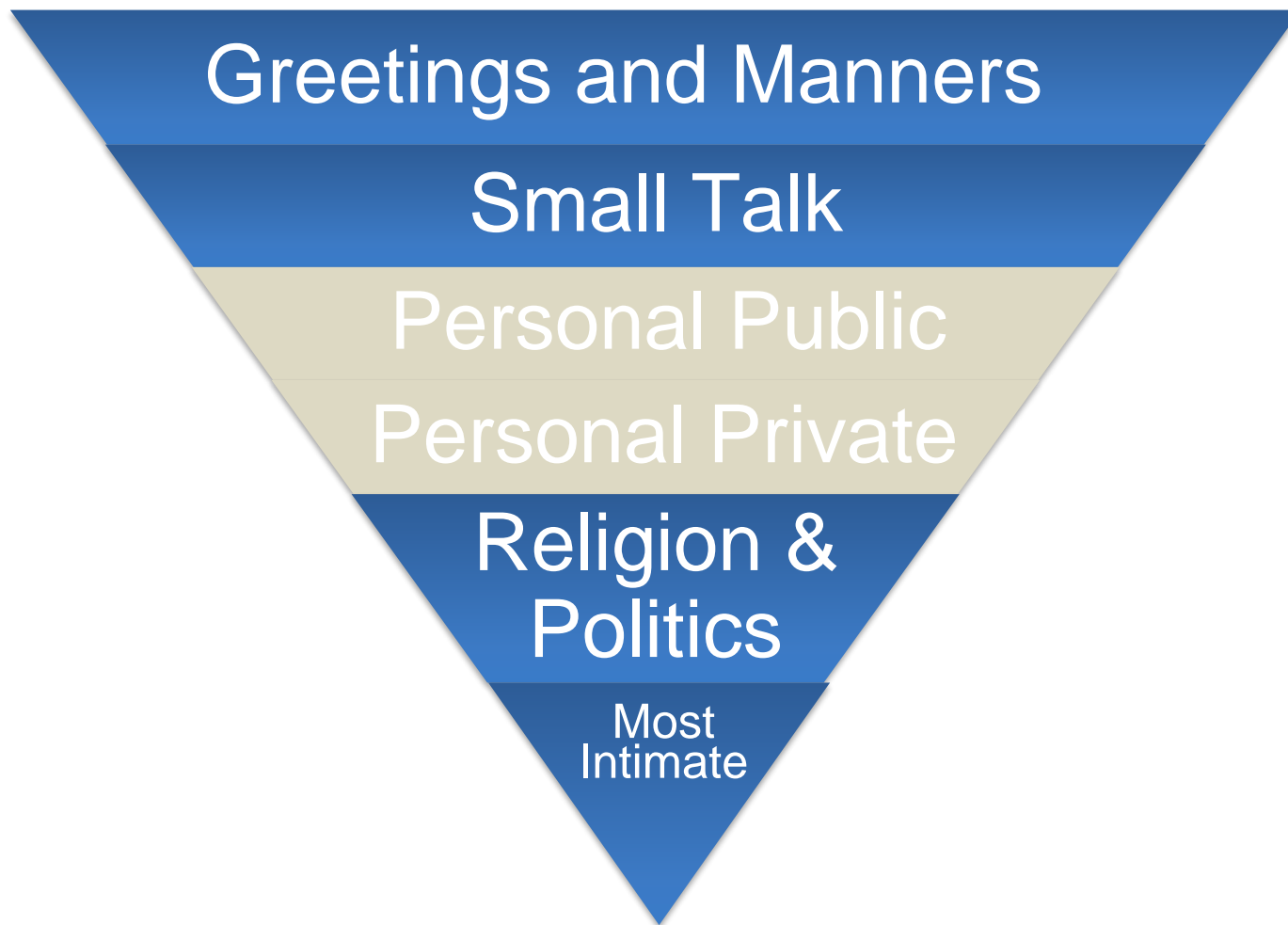
Play Dates

- Play dates begin with finding the right kid
 - From school, neighborhood, cousin
 - Someone nice, kind, and fun
 - A little older or younger usually
- A Birthday Party without the cake
 - Adult led
 - Game, game, snack, game, good bye!
 - Adults monitor and promote interaction
- My favorite social skills books/web
 - *Talkability (Hanen)*
 - *Social Thinking.com*
- Over time, work on more advanced social skills
 - “Do you celebrate Kwanzaa?”
 - Jimmy and Johnny pass on the street





The 6 Degrees of Intimacy



Lesson #8

Summary



- Promote social interaction
- By working on the FDLs you've paved the way for more social interactions with peers
- This can be a late school age accomplishment
- By working on simple games, turn taking, sharing, rules, and winning & losing you child can join activities
- Use a gradual approach to large, loud or active, group activities
- Certain activities seem to be better for kids on the spectrum
- Eventually you can work on intimacy and friendship



P.S. Limit Screens (1-2 hours max). . .





PPS.



HAVE
FUN



What time
would it be if
Godzilla came
to school?

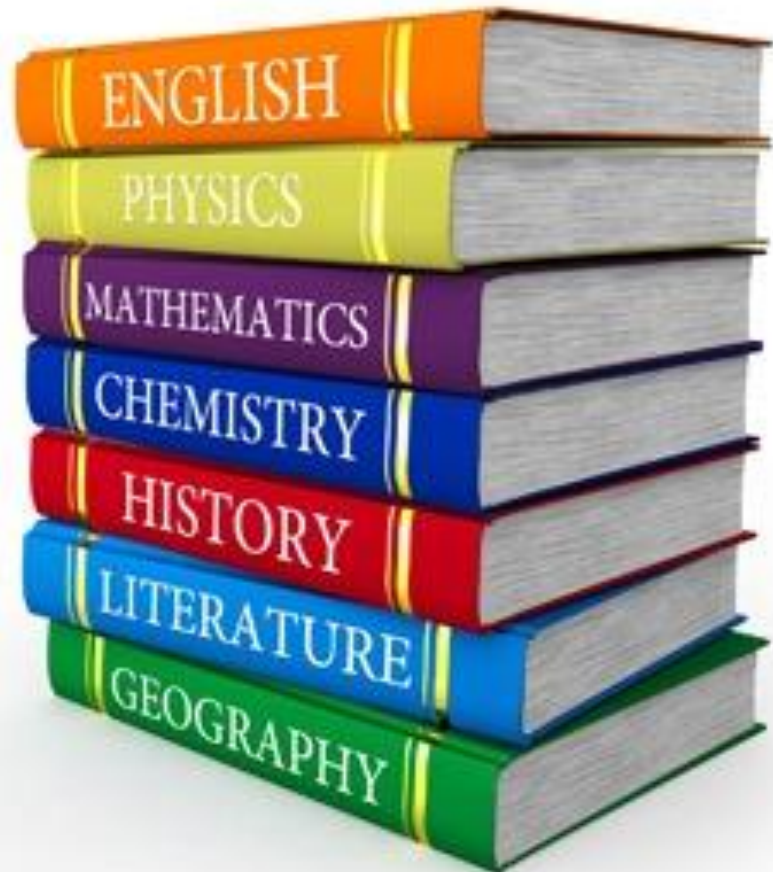

**KEEP
CALM
AND
KEEP HAVING
FUN**

Time to
Run!



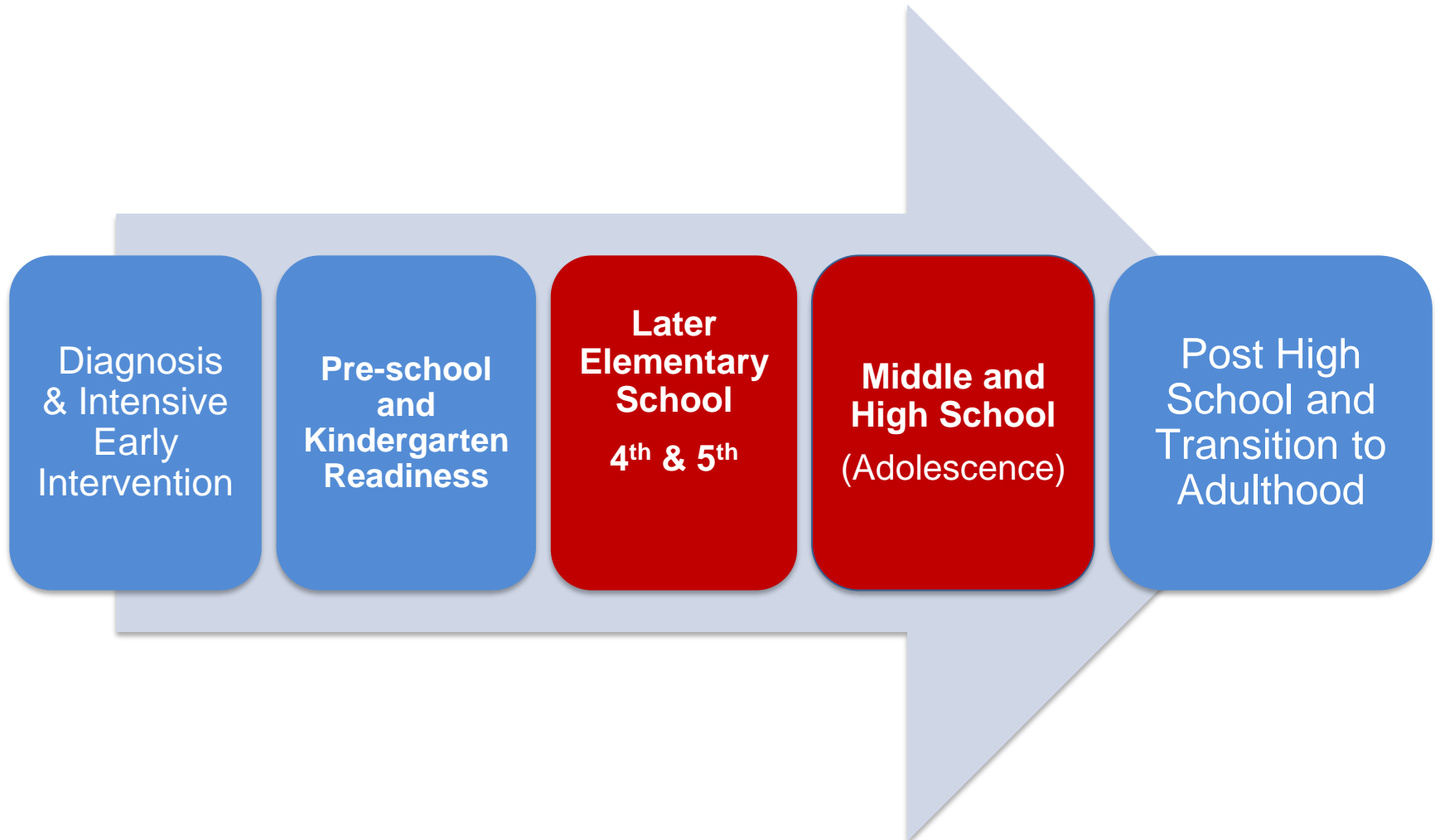
Lesson #9:

*Get Ready for
True Academics*





Autism: Lesson #9





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*Greenspan and Weider



Three Types of Progress

Slower

Medium

Faster



Test & Homework & Projects: O my!

- The demands of 4th and 5th grade can be challenging
- Late Onset School Failure
- But many of my patients have done very well with some help
- Learning is a great joy
- Still only 1 main teacher
- Here are some ways to make later elementary fun. . .



Homework Expectations

Here are some expectations that children in Grade 5 & 6 should meet when completing homework:

- ★ Homework must be well presented. To achieve this you need to:
 - ★ Trim and paste in your homework sheet
 - ★ Fill in pages sequentially (in order)
 - ★ Rule margins with straight red lines
 - ★ Write **neatly** in pen and use spaces between words
 - ★ Pay attention to capital letters, punctuation and spelling
 - ★ Use a grey lead for Maths problems
 - ★ Keep your book clean and store in pocket.
- ★ Read all directions carefully.
- ★ If you don't understand what to do, speak to your teachers during the week – don't leave it until Friday.
- ★ Write in complete sentences and re-read to check they make sense.
- ★ Get your homework signed by a parent/older family member.

Homework will be handed in on Friday mornings.

Have after school sport or activities at least once a week. Mark out your schedule and spread your workload. Much needed good habits.





The Joy of Learning

- Don't worry about grades
- Learn to learn
- General approach of writing and essay
- Use the internet
- Love to learn
- Set the bar
- Adjust homework load
- Learn for a lifetime
- 5-8th a time to get ready for high school



4th Grade

- The grade for self organization and executive function
 - Academics begins by subjects beyond the 3 R's
 - Planners
 - Every Assignment, in Every Subject, Every Day (EA, ES, ED)
- Inattentive, distracted, poor focus, over-activity, impulsive
 - It could be autism or it could be ADHD. Skilled eval is indicated to sort out the difference
- A good IEP markedly help the intellectually ready child survive 4th grade, but there must be strong advocacy. Be savvy!



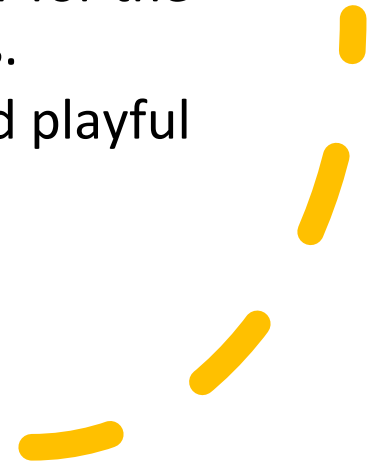
5th through 8th Grade

- 5th Grade is the academic turning point
- If your child can do well in 5th grade, he/she has good prospects through middle school (and high school)
- Use your summers for reading, math facts, tutoring
- Kumon, Sylvan, Lindamood Bell
- Individualize the curriculum: Stone in the Pond
- Talk to your child about WHY academics is so important
- Be project orientated/hands on learning
- Keep emphasizing reasons and meaning: m&m's
- Promote true curiosity and true learning
 - What do you really want to know about this subject



The Inclusion Paradox

- Beginning in 4th to 5th grade inclusion can backfire, where the child on the spectrum is no longer really part of the classroom for much of the day.
- They sit in class and the discussion is in their Zone of Potential Development (Too Hard) .
- No M&M's!
- Some schools can pull it off. Not many.
- Paradoxically, in this case, less is more and it is better for the child to be with his 'developmentally matched' peers.
- Where the bar is set at a level of learning in a fun and playful social setting.



Lesson #9

Summary



- Get Ready for Academics. 4th and 5th grades are challenging for many children
- 4th is demanding of organization and executive function
- IEPs can help a lot by giving necessary supports to remember assignments and prepare for tests
- Keep your eyes open for signs of inattention, distractibility, poor focus
 - It could be autism; it could be ADHD
- 5th grade is a measure of success for middle school
 - Use your summers; get tutors if needed
- For slower movers inclusion may not be good for



P.S. Limit Screens (1-2 hours max). . .





PPS.



Did you hear the one about the constipated mathematician?



He worked it out with a pencil!



Lesson #10:

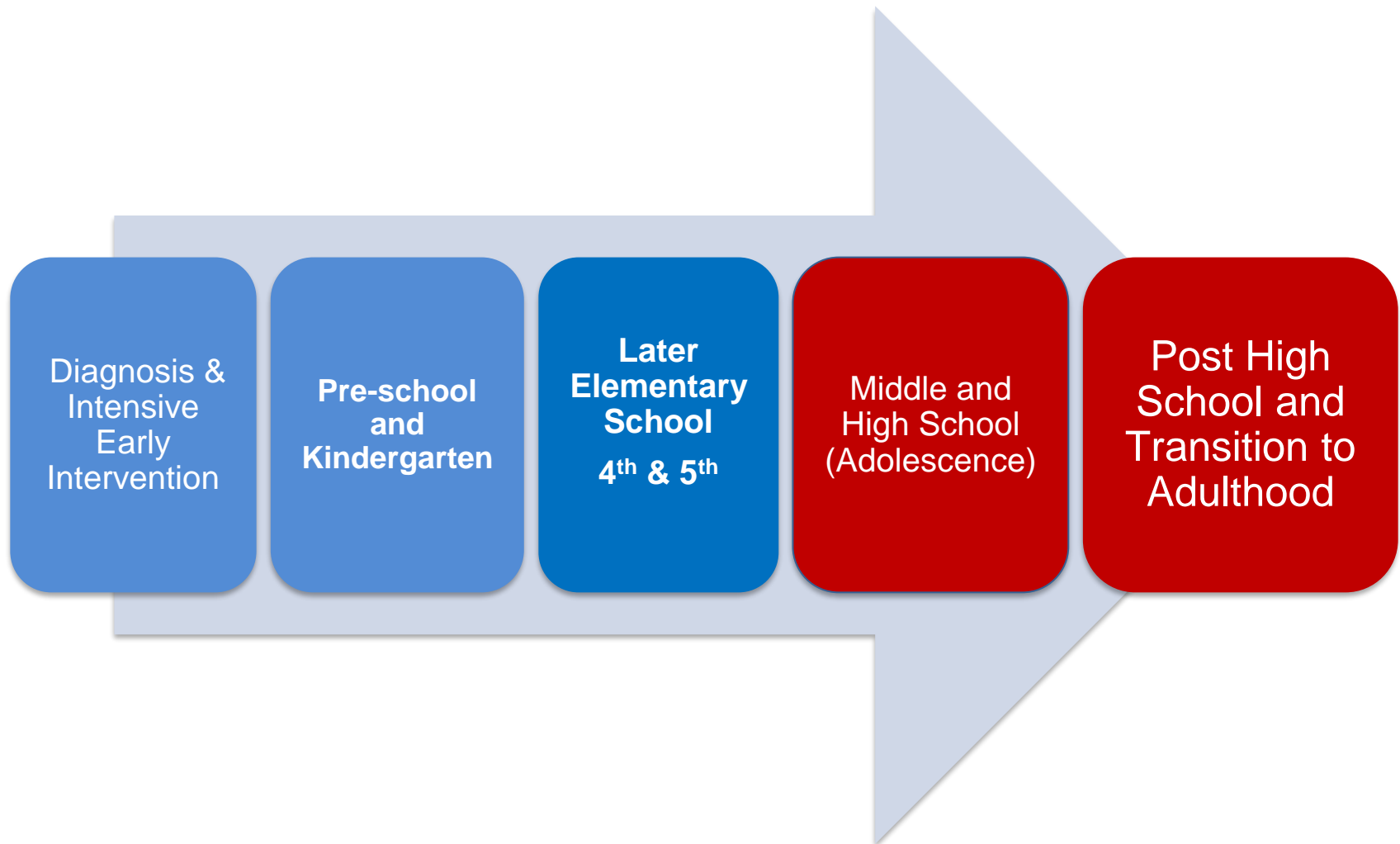


*Plan for the Life Ahead—
High School and Young Adulthood*





Autism: Lesson #10





The Future

- The best predictor of the future is the past
- What I have learned is that those children who achieve FDL 6 or higher can live with a large degree of independence despite have trouble with academics
- Those children who do well in 5th grade often will do well in high school and the schools know how to help them get to a diploma if they are capable
- But adolescence can be. . .



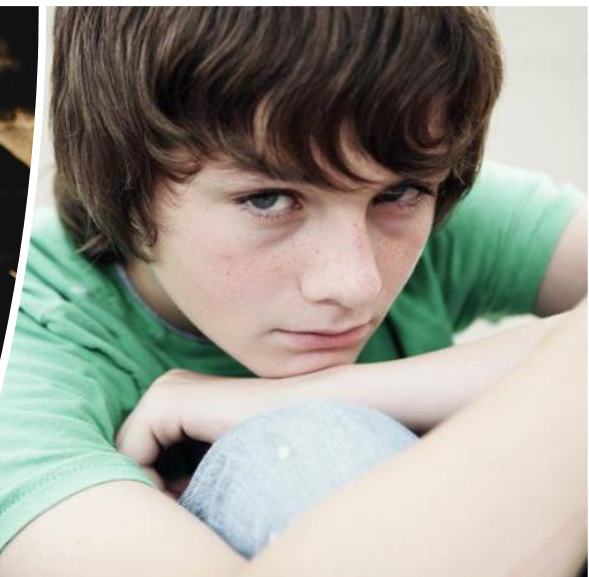
Adolescence Can be Awkward and. . .





...Difficult

- Withdrawn
- Rebellious
- Moody
- Argumentative
- Stubborn & wrong
- Anxious
- Depressed
- Suicidal





Dealing with Puberty & Adolescence



- Puberty: Your child becomes an alien
- It passes (eventually)
- You can't treat adolescents like children
- **The Secret: Teen 'Fairness' vs adult 'comfort'**
- Reframe feelings to express the true emotions and don't buy in to extreme expressions
- Keep an eye out for depression and get professional help if you are worried
- Social media is dangerous in many ways and should be closely monitored
- The Talks: Screen time, room alone, household chores, allowance, self care, etc



School & The Future



By middle school, it's time to start thinking about whether your child is going to be on a diploma or certificate track



Education: What is the point?



- Academics?
- **Life skills and self care?**
- Diploma?
- Certificate?
- Grades?
- Fulfillment?
- Meaning?
- Drudgery?
- Fun/discovery?
- Learning!



Adolescence & Transition to Adulthood





The Biggest Fear...

Parents'
Biggest Fear

What will happen to my child after I die?



Threats to the Future

- Severe delays with no language, not toilet trained, functional capacities below FDL 5
- 'Stuckness' with OCD, anxiety, anger/impulsiveness
- Screen dependency
- Good long term support is poor even in CMH settings
- Supervised housing is in short supply
- More and more attention is being given to long term care



Back to the Future



- Certificate path but FLD 6-7
- Can live with a large degree of independence
- The goal all along is to grow developmentally, socially, emotionally, intellectually to have a meaningful, fun, and happy life.
- It also happens to be the best way to live an independent life.
- Here are the Big 5 Questions going forward



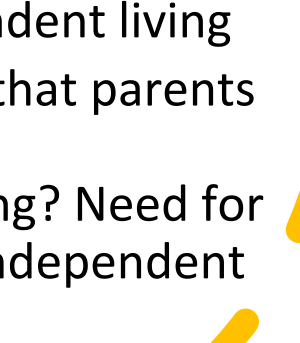
The Big Five Questions for the Future

1. Diploma or Certificate?
 - College? Western Michigan, EMU
2. Driver's license?
3. Legal Independence or Guardianship/POAtty: Get a lawyer
 - Can they make decisions about health, banking/money?
4. Living on one's own or Living Under Care
 - Self care, laundry, shopping, cooking
 - A Family 'Trust'
5. Work or Social Security Income (SSI)
 - Part time vs full time
 - Michigan Rehab Services (MRS)

Lesson #10

Summary



- Plan for the Life Ahead
 - All children, no matter what capacity they have, can play, find joy, enjoy relationships, and continue to grow and be happy
 - Play is never ending
 - The threats to the future are severe delays with misbehavior, addiction/'stuckness', OCD, anxiety, depression, and anger/impulsiveness
 - Education/learning is never ending. Learning should be joyous.
 - Getting to FDL 6 markedly improves the likelihood of more independent living
 - There are 5 Big Questions that parents ask me about the future:
Diploma/Certificate? Driving? Need for guardianship/legal help? Independent living? and Work?
- 



P.S. Limit Screens. . .





PPS.



HAVE
FUN




**KEEP
CALM
AND
KEEP HAVING
FUN**



People are making
end of the world
jokes!

Like there's no
tomorrow.





Conclusion

‘Autism: 10 Lessons on Course of Life’

- For those who are neurodivergent, navigating through the various phases of life can be very tricky
- I have shared what I have learned from families who are living with a person on the autism spectrum
- They have taught me what it means to live with many struggles and overcoming struggles through loving relationships, playfulness & meaningful growth.
- I’ve summarized each of the 10 Lessons as one of your handouts and hope it will serve as a map to happiness and fulfilment
- It has been a joy to serve the children and the families and learn from you parents and professional for all these years
- Thank you thank you all for helping me to help you.



Thank you

- Thank you for attending!
- We'll send out a link to the recording of this webinar, and post it within the PPC portal on our website

