

## Chapter 16

### Visit 9

# The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kindergarteners

#### *Introduction: Life Itself*

Jacob and Charlie have been to my office so many times now that I don't even have to invite them into the playroom. They shed their winter clothes (it's a snowy day in February) dash for the room (without asking—to their parent's chagrin) and start playing with their favorite toys—Mac the Truck, the Jack in the Box and Thomas the Tank Engine trains.

As soon as we settle into our chairs, the boys want to sword fight with my soft pipe insulator 'swords'. I love their initiative, but I tell them that we have to talk first. Charlie, now 3 ½ years old, goes "Aw" and Jacob, 5+ years old, goes "Aw", but they understand that it's not time to play just yet. It amazes me that Jacob, diagnosed originally with moderately severe autism, not only understands but also 'reads' and imitates his brother's responses. I think to myself: 'We've got to talk about social skills and play dates.' But the Grants have a more urgent agenda today.

**Dr. Rick:** "I'm always so pleased by his progress. His social ability is really improving."

**Dad:** "He's really catching on. Still not where he should be but definitely doing better."

**Dr. Rick:** "They're like the dynamic duo."

**Mom:** "They play *Toy Story*. I ask Jacob what Buzz Lightyear is doing and he'll say, 'Getting the bad guy, Zerg'. He makes Charlie play Zerg of course."

**Dr. Rick:** "I know he's got those open-ended 'wh-questions' down. How's he doing with the 'why' and 'when' questions?"

**Mom:** "We're still working with the language therapist on those and the little filler words, but he's getting there."

**Dad:** "He's connecting two ideas together like a champ. I tell him we can't go to Target. . ."

**Mom:** ". . .his favorite big box store. . ."

**Dad:** ". . .because *first* we have to go to grandma's, *then* Target and he totally understands."

**Mom:** "If he's having a good day."

**Dad:** "Most of his days are good these days. The information you gave us about *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* really helped (See *Section 3 Chapter 17*)."

**Mom:** "It's true. He's slowly but surely beginning to get it that '*when you have a fit you never get*'?"

**Dad:** "We caught him lying the other day. He had eaten some chocolate. . ."

**Mom:** ". . .which was all over his face."

**Dad:** "And when we asked him if he had eaten the chocolate, he looked at us so sincerely when he said 'No' we just had to laugh. His face was so smeared up!"

**Dr. Rick:** "You know me; I'm a big fan of the 'dark side'. Even misbehavior, especially when it's manipulative and sneaky, is a sign of problem solving."

**Dad** (not convinced): "If you say so. I'm not happy about the lying."

**Dr. Rick:** "No, but it is a sign of emotional thinking. Let me test something, and then we'll get down to business. Hey Jacob (he looks over quickly). What did you have for lunch? (He looks up from playing and I repeat loudly and firmly) Jacob, what did you eat for lunch?"

**Jacob** (mumbling): "Mac and cheese."

**Dr. Rick:** "Thanks bud, sorry to interrupt."

**Mom:** "Mac and cheese is right."

**Dr. Rick:** “He couldn’t have done that six months ago. *That shows the ability to recall the immediate past*— a major milestone of abstract thinking. So the ‘why’ and ‘when’ questions are definitely getting there. He’s putting ideas together. He’s thinking emotionally. Fantastic! That bodes well for school. How’s his pretend play?”

**Mom:** “Much better. And since our last visit, I feel more comfortable with the higher level pretend. Not so much pressure like I use to. It’s more fun.”

**Dr. Rick** (needling mom a little): “Play *should* be fun.”

**Mom** (ignoring me): “When I ask him, ‘What do you want to play?’ he’ll tell me. He’s also telling me *how* to play. *You do this mom and you that mom.* He’s a bit of a control freak.”

**Dr. Rick:** “If you don’t like him controlling you, tell him. ‘*Jacob, don’t tell mommy what to do all the time. I don’t like it. You’re too bossy.*’ Share your feelings. *Share your mind.* The more complexity he can handle, the better. Be like another kid. Other kids aren’t going to put up with that. And I’d also make him pay a price for ignoring or not helping out. Use his misbehavior to teach him the *rules* as well as *reasoning* about *why* there are rules and the *real consequences* if you do or don’t follow the rules.” (See *Section 3*)

**Mom:** “I’m getting more and more worried about his social skills with his peers. He’s so self-centered! He’s good with Charlie.”

**Dr. Rick:** “You can’t lose your brother, but you can lose your friends. Jacob needs to ‘consider’ others, and he’s going to need play dates (See *Section 3*), which will help him learn the *hidden* social rules that he’s not getting (See *Resources: The Hidden Curriculum*).

### ***Kindergarten: The Big Decision***

As I was launching into my talk about play dates, I could see that the Grant’s were looking a little anxious and pre-occupied. I read *their* cues.

**Dr. Rick:** “So . . . what’s up? I’m sensing that you’ve got something on your minds.”

**Mom:** “Well, Dr. Rick, helping Jacob with play dates *is* very important, but we have a big decision to make for Jakey. This fall, he’s going to school, kindergarten.”

**Dad:** “About a year ago, you suggested we wait. That turned out really good.”

**Mom:** “Jacob wasn’t ready last year. But I thought *this* year he’d be ready but . . .”

Suddenly mom looks sad, and her face gets cloudy as if she were holding back tears.

**Dad:** “He went to a kindergarten roundup and they tested him. . .”

**Mom** (starting to tear up): “. . . and he did terrible! He wouldn’t cooperate with the testing. And he *knows* all that stuff, his numbers, colors, shapes, and letters.”

**Dad:** “And we just heard that his IEP is going to be in March.”

**Dr. Rick:** “He’ll be six in October.”

**Dad:** “Right. So we don’t really have a choice. He’s got to go to school.”

**Dr. Rick:** “*Technically, if he isn’t six by the time school starts in September you could wait another year.*”

**Dad:** “But he’s already taller than the other kids.”

**Mom:** “If we wait *another* year, he’ll be almost seven.”

**Dr. Rick:** “I hear you, but tallness and age are less important than true readiness.”

**Dad:** “I know, I know, but you said he’d be ready for kindergarten.”

**Mom:** “But that test. . . it didn’t *really* test Jacob. He was having a really bad day. There was so much noise and so many kids. He just fell apart.”

**Dr. Rick:** “That’s the problem with tests. They are only as good as the day they are given on. I really think Jacob *is* ready for kindergarten.”

**Mom:** “I’m so glad you think so.”

**Dr. Rick:** “He may need some support like an aide or resource room help. . .”

**Dad:** “An aide? Like someone who sits by him all day to help him? I don’t want that.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Me neither but *let’s go about this systematically and figure out a plan for his upcoming IEP.*”

### ***The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kindergarteners***

So begins the discussion of school readiness—again. Earlier in *Kindergarten: Ready or Not Here We Come* (See *Chapter 12*), I urged the Grants to give Jacob time to mature. Even though Jacob seems ready academically, being effective in kindergarten involves a lot more than knowing one’s colors, shapes, and letters.

Kindergarten is the new first grade. There’s a lot less playing. The demands have really gone up for functional abilities, compliance with rules, and social skills as well as academics. Kindergarten is a full day in most states. To be *independently* effective in kindergarten, a child like Jacob needs to develop *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kindergarteners*.

**Dr. Rick:** “Here’s the list of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kindergarteners*, which summarizes the functional skills children need in order to succeed in school.”

**Mom:** “Would you record this?”

#### *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kindergarteners*

1. Go along with the gang
2. Auditory process from a distance
3. Get the main idea
4. Perform sequences of actions
5. Use active memory
6. Process information quickly
7. Know when to ask for help

**Dr. Rick** (recording): “Most elementary schools and kindergarten teachers *assume* that children come to school with these habits already developed. But it’s crucial for you to *not* make that assumption. These seven habits must be part of Jacob’s educational plan, his IEP (Individualized Education Plan) (See *Resources & Websites*).

“Since this is your big issue today—how to help Jacob be successful in kindergarten—let’s go over this list and talk it through. Even though Jacob is developing these habits, there are lots of things the school can do through the IEP process to help him solidify his abilities.”

**Dad:** “And we’ll figure out if Jacob can get along without any help?”

**Dr. Rick:** “That’s one of the most common decisions I help parents make in my practice. We’re going to shoot for *the least restrictive educational environment*—regular classroom, no extra help—but if he needs the support, we should err on the side of more intervention rather than less.”

**Dad:** “Why is that?”

**Dr. Rick:** “It’s a lot easier to take away services from your IEP than it is to add them later.”

**Dad:** “Got it.”

*Doctor Jacob (and Charlie).*

Right on cue, Jacob having discovered the doctor's kit and remembering the last time I played *sick*, intrudes on our conversation and interrupts us.

**Jacob:** "Docker Rick. Play doctor?"

**Dad:** "Jacob, say 'Excuse me'."

Jacob ignores dad, but instead of dealing with this social faux pas of being intrusive, I immediately join the pretend play. After all, he looks so cute with his doctor's glasses on and a plastic stethoscope around his neck, how could I *not* join him! He comes at me with an evil smile on his face, wielding the toy syringe in his little hand.

**Dr. Rick:** "Doctor, I'm s-o-o-o-o-o sick, but I don't want a shot. It will hurt."

**Jacob:** "It won't hurt. You feel better."

I'm cringing away from him, screwing up my face in anticipation of the painful shot, which he laughs at while coming at me. Then, he jams me.

**Dr. Rick** (in mock agony): "Owwwwwwww! Ow-ow-ow!"

Of course, Charlie and Jacob now take several turns at making me yell.

**Jacob:** "All better."

**Dr. Rick** (suddenly smiling and healthy): "You know what, Doctor Jacob and Doctor Charlie? You guys really helped me! I was sick. You gave me shots and I'm all better!!"

**Jacob:** "Yeah."

**Charlie:** "All better."

**Dr. Rick:** "Thank you so much."

**Jacob:** "You get a toy. I got a toy at the store."

**Dr. Rick** (to Julie and Jim): "What's he saying?"

**Mom:** "Maybe he's giving you a prize for being such a good patient, but I think he's just changing the subject. He does that."

**Dad:** "His conversation just shifts."

**Mom:** "Very quickly. I worry about his attention span. Sometimes, his mind goes all over the place. How's he going to do in school if he can't stay focused?"

**Dr. Rick:** "That's one of the seven habits and we have to keep our eye out for problems with attention (See *Chapter 23: Medications?*). (To Jacob) OK bud, I'm all better now. Now go play with your brother. (Turning back to the Grants) That was fun even though he did interrupt us. We could have dealt with that, but he was too cute."

**Dad:** "He knows it too."

**Dr. Rick:** "Also, notice that by connecting the shot with hurting and with getting better, we're building bridges between ideas. Rich pretend play is one of the best ways to promote abstract thinking. That's crucial to school readiness. Boy, is he making progress!"

**Dad:** "We love doing pretend."

*Is Jacob Ready for a Full Day?*

**Dr. Rick:** "Let's go through these seven habits and how to incorporate them into Jacob's IEP. I'll warn you that schools see their number one job as helping all children achieve *academic readiness*, and not necessarily on these more functional seven habits."

**Dad:** “I remember the last IEP. They wanted Jacob to go to kindergarten for a full day, and we decided together that he would do another year in preschool, only half days. We were surrounded and outnumbered, but we stuck to our guns and kept Jacob in pre-school based on your advice and they caved. It was definitely the right decision.”

**Mom:** “This year has been an amazing year for Jacob.”

**Dad:** “If we need to get these seven habits into his IEP, we will.”

**Dr. Rick:** “You’re a bulldog dad, but most schools will work with you (especially when you know your rights under the law).”

Dad smiles. Mom looks concerned.

**Dr. Rick** (to mom): “I know Jacob didn’t do great at the kindergarten evaluation, but he had a bad day. In my heart, I know he has the ability to make it. But let me ask you this: Do you think Jacob is ready for a *full day* of school?”

**Mom:** “Can’t kids go to a half day anymore?”

**Dr. Rick:** “Nope. Schools all over the country are moving to a full day. But remember, within the limits of the law, you’re the boss. I’ve had a number of families do a partial full day where they take their child out of school to go to various therapies.”

**Dad:** “You mean we keep Jacob’s speech and language and occupational therapy. . .”

**Mom:** “. . .to help with his handwriting. And he’s getting music therapy too.”

**Dr. Rick** (writing in his chart): “You didn’t tell me that. I love music therapy. So, my point is, you *could* take him out of school to go to the various therapies at least in kindergarten.”

**Mom:** “I would never have thought of that. You sure the school will let us do that?”

**Dr. Rick:** “What do I always tell you?”

**Dad:** “We’re the boss of our child.”

### ***Habit #1: Going Along with the Gang***

**Dr. Rick:** “So let’s talk about the first habit—*Going Along with the Gang*. When I’ve observed kindergarten classes, it’s obvious that there is a *hidden curriculum*, an unwritten expectation (often with no IEP goals!) of *social compliance*—that children will do what they are supposed to do in the classroom setting. It’s like the children have a group mind. They are consciously and unconsciously aware of the movements and intentions of their peers. When the group moves to circle time or lines up to go outside, all go. *They give up their agenda and comply*. Children with ASD are often the exception. They might be oblivious to what the group is doing or worse, go off and do their own thing.”

**Mom:** “I just talked with the preschool teacher about that, and she said Jacob’s doing better that way. At the beginning of preschool, Jacob left circle time a lot and wandered off, to the trains mostly, but he’s doing much better now.”

**Dad:** “But we don’t want him just to do better, do we? I want Jacob to really fit in.”

**Dr. Rick:** “So how do we get there? *The answer lies in the question*. Luckily, he has the pre-requisites. Thanks to all of your hard work over the last two and half years, he has moved up the functional developmental ladder and he can:

- Understand most of what you are saying to him (FDL V)
- He’s making logical connections and bridging ideas together (FDL VI) like the idea: ‘I have to do what my friends are doing.’
- He can interact in a fairly long give and take fashion.
- And he delays gratification, i.e., gives up his agenda to *go along with the gang* and the school rules.

“Here’s a quick summary of what Jacob has to do to go along with the gang:

### *Habit #1: Go Along With the Gang*

- IEP Goal: Jacob will go along with his peers *without prompting*
- Key to success: Requires FDL V to VII
  - Understand meaning
  - Make logical connections/bridge ideas
    - “I should do what my friends do.”
- Delay gratification, i.e., give up his agenda
- Teacher or paraprofessional should talk to Jacob throughout the day about going along

**Mom:** “He’s waiting better but he still needs work on that one.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Believe me, school will definitely help with that.”

**Dad:** “How so? And who’s going to help him?”

#### ***Go Along with the Gang: Methods***

**Dr. Rick:** “Hopefully, his teacher or teacher’s helper. Someone needs to give Jacob the following message on a regular basis: *Jacob, look around. Look at all your friends. We want you to do what your friends are doing.* But our ultimate IEP goal is for Jacob to go along with his peers completely independently *without prompting* him to do so. Let’s talk about the ‘tricks of the trade’, some of the methods I recommend for helping Jacob *Go Along with the Gang.*”

*Schedules, Pictures, & Rules.* To achieve this goal, all teachers use **activity schedules** that list and sometimes picture the activities by the hour and even within the hour—every change should be listed.

#### *Go Along with the Gang: Methods*

- Use picture schedules; get a class picture. Know student names.
- Make the ‘hidden curriculum’ visible: List the social rules for ‘going along with the gang’
  - When my friends line up to go outside, I line up too
- All social rules will be discussed with Jacob
- Use social stories and fables
- If needed, use rewards and charts to motivate
- IEP Goal: Jacob will have longer and more complex interactions with peers over time

**Dr. Rick:** “At home, you should *get a picture of Jacob’s class* (if there is one) and put it on the bulletin board in his room. I’d ask him who his friends are and have him name them.

“Also, in the beginning, we should make a list of **rules**, for example:

- *Jacob will follow the daily schedule.*
- *When the class goes to circle time, Jacob goes to circle time.*
- *When your friends line up, Jacob lines up, etc.*

“As I said, *all rules should be discussed with Jacob*. Trust me, the school will make compliance a high priority. What they might not do is sympathize with Jacob about wanting to do his own thing (‘I know, Jacob, you would like to go and play on the computer. . .but right now it’s time to work on your project’) Good teachers do this well.”

**Dad:** “Let’s just hope he gets a good one.”

**Dr. Rick:** “As I said before, you *can’t* pick Jacob’s teacher, but that’s what good principals do—they put students where they will learn the best, and the teacher is the most important factor for a child’s learning.

“There should be a clear expectation that Jacob will go along with the group. I call this the ‘*iron fist in the velvet glove*’ approach. You can be gentle and nurturing (the velvet glove) but clear and firm with high expectations (the iron fist). That’s part of my ‘philosophy of can’. Literally ask yourself: ‘Can Jacob do it?’ If the answer is ‘Yes, he can’, then he should.”

**Mom:** “There’s no doubt he *can* go along with routines.”

**Dad:** “At least most of the time. The question is, does he want to.”

**Dr. Rick:** “I’ll get to issue of motivation, but *if he truly cannot go along with the gang consistently, then he would definitely need an aide either part time or full time*. Then the teacher and aide would start with what he *can* do and gradually expand the amount of time in the group. We don’t want Jacob to be stressed to the point of upset. That would be counterproductive. Personally, I think he can follow along and won’t need that much help.”

**Dad:** “I’m against an aide.”

**Dr. Rick:** “I hear you dad. But compliance and going along with the gang are the key factors determining if Jacob needs help, and if he needs the help, we should give it to him.”

#### *Social Stories & Fables.*

**Dr. Rick:** “If we need to, we could make up a Social Story™ (See *Resources: Carol Gray*) about a boy who doesn’t go along with the gang. Here’s a sample social story for Jacob. We could put this into a book with simple pictures (from the internet) or not:

- *Jacob, sometimes you like to be by yourself (show a boy reading a book or playing alone with trains). You like to read books or play trains by yourself and that is fun.*
- *But when you are in school, you **have to do what your friends are doing**. When they go to circle time, you go to circle time (draw a picture). When they go to table time, you go to table time (draw a picture). When they stand in line to the playground, you stand in line to go to the playground too (picture). You can just follow the schedule (picture of schedule)!*
- ***Everyone** goes along with their friends all day long in school! (Sing this in a fun and silly way to: ‘This is the way we brush our teeth so early in the morning’). (I sing into the recorder. . .) ‘Everyone goes along with their friends, along with their friends, along with their friends. Everyone goes along with their friends, all day long in school.’*

“Another way to get the point across is to use *fables*. I have a cute fable about Willy the Walking Koala Bear who always walked away. (See the fable at the end of this chapter).”

#### *Incentives vs. Reasons.*

**Dr. Rick:** “If necessary, the teacher can institute a system of rewards with a chart that motivates Jacob to go along with the group and also documents his behavior.

“I want to emphasize, though, that *there is a difference between an incentive and a reason*. Incentives motivate in the short run. Reasons motivate in the long run (I’m reserving *bribes* for the harder habits later!). The *reason* to be part of the group is *not* to get stickers but to have fun, make friends, and interact. However, incentives will get the process going.

“The *Going Along Chart* (See below) should list all the group activities:

**<Insert 1.6 JPEG 7HABITS here>**

“Every time Jacob goes along, he gets a star. When he gets five smiley face stickers, he gets a prize. We can up the demands so that he gets a star only if he does it on his own without prompting, etc. Because eventually, we want to wean him off of a reward system.”

**Mom:** “We could give him computer time for getting five smiley face stickers.”

**Dr. Rick:** “That would be a good incentive. You’d coordinate with the school every day for a while, and when they give you his reward chart, he’d get more computer time at home. *But I don’t want to use a reward system unless Jacob really needs it.*”

*Increased Interactions.*

**Dr. Rick:** “Finally, the most important outcome of going along with the gang is that Jacob will interact more with his peers. This should be a key IEP goal and stated explicitly: *Jacob will increase the number and complexity of interactions with his peers.* The teacher/aide should be promoting interactions between Jacob and his peers frequently throughout the day.”

**Dad:** “We take *going for circles of interaction* for granted as part of the PLAY Project.”

**Dr. Rick:** “But a lot of time, the school assumes that peer-to-peer interaction is easy.”

**Mom:** “And for Jacob, it’s not easy yet. He interacts a lot with Charlie, of course.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Once Jacob is *going along with the gang* consistently then the other habits of highly effective kindergarteners will be easier to achieve.”

### ***Habit #2: Auditory Process at a Distance***

**Dr. Rick:** “In fact, *going along with the gang* is closely related to this next habit—***Auditory Processing at a Distance***. Notice that I did not call this section ‘Good Listening’ because good listening is the end product of being able to hear first and process sounds. While typical children can hear, listen, *and* make sense of the words spoken across space, children with ASD often can’t.”

**Dad:** “Why is that?”

**Dr. Rick:** “Remember way back we talked about the web of neurons that catches the complexity of the world? It’s a complex process to *make sense* of what is heard. The airwaves (sounds) have to go into the brain area that de-codes them and turns them into sense. Compared to the visual system, the auditory system typically is weak for children with ASD. When you listen, your brain has to send out messages to short and long term memory areas, to visual areas, and to thinking (frontal lobe) areas of the brain. It is tough work for the brain to make sense of sound.”

### ***Habit #2: Auditory Process at a Distance***

- IEP Goal: Jacob will be able to hear, make sense of and do what the teacher says—without having to be prompted.
- Not just ‘good listening’

- Ability to process sounds
- Attend, hear, listen, think, react—circuit
- Sensory integration issues
  - Words compete with ambient noise
  - Distance interferes with hearing and meaning

### *Hearing vs Listening.*

**Dr. Rick:** “So first of all, there is the issue of *sound* itself—the act of *bearing* first and then translating sound into meaning next—listening. This is the definition of auditory processing. The spoken word literally disappears into thin air unless you are really paying *attention*. So first, Jacob will have to be paying attention.”

**Mom:** “So hearing comes first and listening come next. This is so interesting.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Listening is also related to the *complexity of the task*. Long complicated sentences are going to harder for Jacob. Things should be broken down into short clearer statements.

“Also, if there are other noises in the room like talking, shuffling feet, moving chairs, heat/air conditioning noises, etc., then the spoken word must compete with class noise.

“And finally, the farther away one gets from the source (i.e., the teacher’s voice), the more likely it is to get diluted by these other sounds. Have you noticed that Jacob understands what you are saying a lot better the closer you are to him?”

**Mom:** “Definitely. So, maybe he’s not just ignoring me on purpose.”

**Dr. Rick:** “He might be ignoring you on purpose! (We all laugh) but he might not be hearing you and that’s why he’s not listening. He might not be *processing* what you are saying.

“Remember, our IEP goal is: **Jacob will be able to hear what the teacher is saying from across the room, make sense of it, and do what the teacher says—without having to prompt him.**”

**Dad:** “So, how can we promote better listening and auditory processing skills?”

**Dr. Rick:** “The answer lies in the question, dad! First, let’s make sure Jacob is *sitting closer* to the source, i.e., near the teacher whenever auditory processing is important.

### *Auditory Process at a Distance: Methods*

- Make sure you have the child’s full attention
- Move the child closer to the teacher
- Use visual supports: calendars, pictures and importantly, gestures (from teacher/aide)
- Repeat the message
- Have the child repeat the message back
- Use high affect, drama, silliness, singing, games, suspense & surprise to motivate
- Praise success!

“We can also use *visual supports*. I’ve already mentioned *calendars* and *schedules* and *gestural supports* like the teacher getting Jacob’s attention by pointing to her mouth and Jacob’s ears as if to say, ‘Listen up,

Jacob'. Good teachers do these things all the time, but it's good for you to know what it's going to take for Jacob to be good at auditory processing at a distance.

“*Third, instructions should be repeated* in such a way as to help Jacob understand. Make sure you have his **full attention**, that you are connected. *Put the understanding into his brain.* I know this sounds a bit strange but it means talking with the *intent* to put the meaning into Jacob's mind. Use high affect. Use different phrases. Make it make sense to Jacob. Good teachers, of course, do this too.”

**Mom:** “We can use all these ideas at home too.”

**Dr. Rick:** “A fourth technique is to ask Jacob or even the whole class to *repeat what has just been said* and reward the effort with high affect, praise, and jokes (“OK class, who can say what I say? If you can, I'll do a dance for you!”).

“Other techniques to get the point across include *singing with rhythm and rhyme!* Yes, singing is a way of making sounds salient and memorable. If you can't sing, then speak with high affect, rhythm and rhyme.

“It should go without saying (get the pun?) that attentive listening should be *praised* intermittently (“Good listening, Jacob!”).

“Most of these ideas are common practices by good teachers, but *they are rarely made explicit in the IEP; and for kids on the spectrum, like Jacob, they need to be made explicit.*

“At home, you can practice ‘listening skills’ by playing games, with both boys, based on a *Jeopardy* format. Put on your announcer's deep voice: ‘Are you ready panel contestants? And now. . .*Can You Say What I Say* for 100?’—Then do a simple sentence like ‘I love mommy and daddy’. Then. . .*Can You Say What I Say* for 200?’. Then do a longer, harder sentence like ‘I love mommy and daddy and Charlie and Grandma and Grandpa’. Give prizes, money, trips: ‘Today's contestant will win an all expenses paid trip to Chuckeeeee Cheeses.’

“This second habit leads to the third and fourth habits. Ultimately, Jacob should be able to *get the main idea* and then be able to *follow a sequence of instructions* like: ‘*Find the bunny, color her brown. Then, find the dog and color him black. After that cut them out and paste them on the construction paper. Write your name at the bottom.*’”

**Mom:** “That would be a challenge for Jacob.”

**Dr. Rick:** “That's why we need to work on it as an IEP goal.”

### ***Habit #3: Get the Main Idea***

Closely related to auditory processing skills is the idea of *Getting the Main Idea*, our third habit. After Jacob listens, he must translate sound into sense. In other words, *he must not only be able to parrot what has been said but also understand it and summarize it.*

Of course, this doesn't just apply to listening. Getting the main idea means *grasping the meaning of whatever is going on in the classroom* and is closely connected to:

- Sequencing
- Active memory
- Processing speed

which are the next three habits.

### *Habit #3: Get the Main Idea*

- Ability to see the ‘Forest for the trees’
- Can child answer open-ended ‘wh’, why, when and how questions
  - ‘What’s next?’ ‘What did the teacher just tell you?’ ‘What’s the story about?’ ‘How should we do that?’ ‘Why did Sally say that?’
- State the main idea throughout the day when:
  - Teacher is reading or giving instructions
  - A friend is talking
- Use different strategies (visuals, stories, dramatizing, etc.) to help the child ‘get it’

I hope you’re getting the main idea of the main idea. It’s seeing the ‘forest for the trees’. This ability is closely related to Greenspan’s Functional Developmental Level VI: Emotional Thinking/Bridging Ideas and represents a very important set of IEP goals (See *Appendix H*) that are luckily a focus of academics in the schools. The **key language milestones** for Level VI include:

- Understanding ‘why’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ questions
- The ability to read with comprehension, and
- The ability to recall events from the school day *without much prompting*”

**Mom:** “I still have to prompt Jacob.”

**Dr. Rick:** “But I asked him what he had for lunch, and he told me.”

**Dad:** “After you repeated the question three times.”

**Dr. Rick:** “It might help to recall what just happened. For example, you might say ‘Boy that was a good lunch. Did you like that lunch, Jacob? Let’s see, what did you have?’ You can go around the table. ‘Daddy what did you like?’ ‘Charlie what did you like?’”

**Dad:** “We’ll practice that.”

**Dr. Rick:** “A kindergartener needs to get the main idea when:

- The teacher is reading a book in circle time
- The teacher is giving instructions to the class
- The class is moving on to a new task
- The child is joining a classmate in a new activity
- A friend is talking

“In other words, Jacob should be able to, at least briefly, answer open-ended what-type questions like:

- What are you doing?
- What was that book about?
- What game are you guys playing?
- What did you do at recess?
- What do you want to do next, Jacob?
- What does your friend want?

“Ideally, Jacob should be able to answer ‘why’ and ‘when’ questions like:

- Jacob, why did you do that?
- Why did Thomas (referring to a book about Thomas the Tank Engine) go over the mountain?
- When is it going to be your turn?
- What’s Sally going to think if you do that?”

**Mom:** “I think he could do all of those except maybe the last question.”

**Dad:** “He has a hard time with understanding Charlie’s feelings.”

**Dr. Rick:** “That’s where his social skills work is and the school can help. *Answering complex ‘wh-type questions’ should be one of Jacob’s IEP language goals.* But that’s not my main idea here. I’m talking about generalizing, the ability to answer and truly understand open ended ‘what-questions’ in real time in real situations in the ongoing classroom.

“And don’t get me wrong. Teachers reading this will say: ‘But we do this all the time.’ And I agree. But it is not emphasized *as a social process* and made *explicit* in the IEP goals because it is part of the *hidden curriculum*, and it needs to be an IEP goal not just in language therapy but all throughout the day.

### *The Main Idea: IEP Goals*

Throughout the day:

- Child will answer open ended ‘wh questions’
- Child will ask and answer ‘why’ questions
- Child will connect two ideas in a logical fashion
- Child will recall the immediate past
- Child will briefly summarize the plot of a story
- Child will use pronouns appropriately
- Child will demonstrate thematic pretend play with a peer (e.g., doctor, tea party, cooking food)
- Child will state the intentions of others

*Reading.*

**Dad:** “So, we’ll make these Jakey’s IEP goals, but how do we help him *get* the main ideas?”

**Dr. Rick:** “The answer lies in the question. One thing for sure is read a lot. Make sure Jacob and Charlie tell you what each page is about. Reading is the high road to getting the *main idea.*”

**Mom:** “I read to the boys all the time, but Jacob especially just wants me to read it the same way, straight through without stopping.”

**Dr. Rick:** “You should discuss it as you go.”

**Mom:** “I’ve tried. He doesn’t like it. He says, ‘*Just read, mom!*’”

**Dr. Rick:** “Well, trick him and state the main idea *on the page* as well as of the book and ask little questions and be dramatic. It should be a discussion.”

**Mom:** “I’ll try that.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Let me summarize the methods of the main idea habit, and then we’ll talk them through.”

“**First**, we must *state the main ideas frequently throughout the day.*

- ‘Oh, I see, the Big Bad Wolf wants to eat the Three Little Pigs. That’s why he wants to blow their house down. The three little pigs have to be smart to beat the Big Bad Wolf.’
- Or: ‘This book is about bees and how they live together and make honey. . .?’

- ‘Jacob, Johnny wants you to help him build this tower. What are going to do?’
- ‘What’s everybody doing now, Jacob? Look around. Yes! They’re getting ready to go outside for recess.’ (Here, I’d pause and let Jacob draw the conclusion. I’d only prompt him with a ‘what should we do next, Jacob?’ if he doesn’t figure it out)

“A **second** more sophisticated approach is to *NOT summarize the main idea and let Jacob figure it out himself*, even if he gets a little lost in the process. Ask each of the ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘when’ questions above and WAIT. WAIT. WAIT! If he figures out the answers, then I’d praise him heavily and summarize. ‘Way to go, Jacob, you figured out what to do (or say)! Yay, good job!’

“A **third** key method is the ‘*show, not tell*. Dramatize the story or idea. For instance, have Jacob and two other students stand on one side of the door and **be** the three little pigs. Have another student *be* the wolf and pound on the door and say, ‘Little pigs, little pigs, let me in.’ etc. Other modalities besides words include using:

- Pictures
- Songs
- Cartoons
- Peer modeling
- Social stories
- Fables (See Fable at the end of the chapter)
- Videotape (iPad)

**Dad:** “Videotape?”

**Dr. Rick:** “Or iPad.”

**Dad:** “Jakey loves taking movies with the iPad.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Take a movie of *the main ideas* for Jacob. You could record mom reading a book, watch it again and go over the main ideas. Teachers could record other students playing a game and go over the main ideas of the game. Making movies allows for mastery through repetition. Why not use our most sophisticated technology to help Jacob understand the main idea?”

**Dad:** “That’s a great idea, but do you think the school would actually do that?”

**Dr. Rick:** “Innovative schools use all sorts of creative approaches to teaching students.”

**Mom:** “I think something like that would be good for all the students.”

**Dr. Rick:** “One key to making any method effective is *high affect*. This means that the adults have to be fun, energetic, dramatic, and touchy-feely to get the main idea across. They shouldn’t be afraid to be silly, expressive, a little over the top. You have to ask the question: ‘What’s the best way to get ‘the main idea’ into Jacob’s mind?’”

**Mom:** “I think Jacob might shy away from someone coming on too strong.”

**Dr. Rick:** “True, but if done with sensitivity, caring, and at the right developmental level, I think Jacob would be OK with it. An IEP goal like: ‘*School personnel will act silly and be dramatic to help Jacob get the main ideas*’ might be asking too much.”(We all laugh)

*The Boys.* Intermittently, through all the talking, I am keeping an eye on Charlie and Jacob who are playing great together. First, of course, they played with all my newest toys—my new Buzz Lightyear (from *Toy Story*) who speaks Spanish; has big plastic wings that pop out when you push a button; and a space helmet that opens and closes. I have a big dragon that shoots gold coins from his mouth. And Jacob’s favorite is my new Mack the Truck with all the wheels (Remember the fit he had when he

discovered the wheels were missing?) Then, they played pretend with the dozens of matchbox cars, zooming around the room.

As they lose interest and start to get a little bored and intrusive, I pull out my *Beyblades*, little spinning metal discs that battle by bumping into each other. They absolutely love the *Beyblades* and stop only to pester and beg their parents to buy them a set, which Jim Grant promises to do if they would just let us talk. That keeps them busy through the next two habits. I have my ways. . .

#### ***Habit #4: Perform Sequences of Actions***

**Dr. Rick:** “OK. Let’s talk about sequences. This is a tough one. In order to *perform sequences of actions WITHOUT being prompted*, the child with ASD needs to not only go along with the gang, not only auditory process at a distance, not only understand the main ideas—but also remember and implement a series of connected actions.”

#### *Habit #4: Sequences*

- Goal: Remember and implement a series of connected actions without being prompted
- Requires the first three habits
- Observe child’s motor planning. OT can help.
- Use M&M’s: Meaning and Motivation
- Techniques:
  - Calendars (for month/week)
  - Schedules (for day/hours)
  - Lists (for minutes), and
  - Sequences (for seconds)

“Here’s a typical teaching instruction: ‘OK children, circle time is over. Now go over to your tables, sit down, and in front of your seat is a folder. Take out the papers from the folder and wait for me to show you what to do next.’

**Mom:** “Wow.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Wow is right. This can be hard for many of the typical children. The child with ASD can easily get stuck on sensory stimuli (like visually ‘stimming’ on a Thomas the Tank Engine) or disappear into their Comfort Zone. It is truly difficult for them to follow a multiple step instruction and then perform a series of connected actions.”

**Mom:** “I have a hard time with that.”

**Dad:** “Yes, you do, dear.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Watch out dad! The right answer is ‘You do great, dear’. We all have our limits as to how many things we can do in a row at a given time.”

#### *Creating IEP Goals.*

**Dr. Rick:** “Just as with all the Seven Habits, we’re going to have to develop a set of IEP goals and methods to help Jacob *process sequences*.”

**Mom:** “That sounds challenging. How do you do that?”

**Dad** (beating me to the punch): “The answer lies in the question.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Smart aleck! If you don’t ask, it won’t happen. I’ll give you a handout for each habit and you can give the handouts to the school.”

**Dad:** “Does the school have to incorporate our ideas into the IEP?”

**Dr. Rick:** “Well, we tell the school what we would like, and they will add them to their goals.

- Send them an official letter (*all important communications must be in writing*) and tell them that ‘We would like the school to incorporate goals related to the Seven Habits into Jacob’s plan. See the enclosed list.’
- Give them the Seven Habits and the methods for each of the habits that I have provided and send them along with your letter to the school before the IEP meeting. They can help you put them in the right form. They’re good at that.

*Occupational Therapy.*

**Dr. Rick:** “When it comes to the sequencing habit, the first thing we have to do is actually *observe* how Jacob sequences and motor plans.”

**Dad:** “I hate to say it, but he’s not that coordinated. At least not at sports.”

**Mom:** “His handwriting is a real problem too.”

**Dr. Rick:** “We’re probably going to need the help of an occupational therapist (OT). They are the experts at this.” (See *Resources & Websites: Handwriting Without Tears*)

**Mom:** “He’s got an OT now in preschool, and the private OT you recommended is great with Jacob.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Then we should ask the new school’s OT to observe and find out:

- Where Jacob gets stuck in the sequence: in the beginning, middle, and/or end?
- If you gave him a set of pictures that depict actions, could he order them correctly? (Boy gets up. Boy walks to desk. Boy sits down. Boy takes out paper. Boy waits for teacher.) Mix them up and see if he can order them.
- How are Jacob’s gross motor events, like getting up from sitting and moving across the room?
- And what about fine motor events like writing or even taking a crayon from its package?
- Where does Jacob lose the thread of the sequence?
- Does noise or visually stimulating objects distract him from the task?
- How far can he get without help?

“Let’s assume Jacob has problems with all of the above. The focus for the school OT will be on sequencing, motor planning, and fine motor skills, as well as sensory integration issues related to distracting noises and or sights. And he may need a break to keep him regulated so he can stay focused in order to make sure that he can sequence a series of connected events.”

*Give M&M’s: Motivation and Meaning.*

**Dad:** “Even though he has some problems with sequencing, I think Jacob could do most, if not all, of this IF he really wanted to. . .”

**Mom:** “. . .It’s just that, you know, he has his own agenda.”

**Dad:** “What if he doesn’t want to go along, listen, or sequence?”

**Dr. Rick:** “The answer lies in the question! Gotcha Jim!”

“This is really a critical issue. We assume (as part of the hidden social curriculum), that children *want* to learn, but kids on the spectrum have their own agendas and may not find the Seven Habits to be much fun. So let’s talk about *motivation* because the ability to *sequence* (Habit #4) and use *working memory* (Habit #5) to *get things done in a timely fashion* (Habit #6) need the most motivation—they’re the hardest task for kids with ASD to do.

“Most typical children naturally want to please their parents and teachers. While it might be boring or too challenging some of the time, most of the time children find school to be relatively easy and fun.

“When children are NOT motivated, we often blame the child. We might see lack of motivation as the *cause* for school failure. But I see it the other way around; I see *school failure as the cause for lack of motivation*. The vast majority of children—including those with ASD—want to do well and to please; the reason they don’t is because school tasks are often too hard so they give up.”

**Dad:** “That makes total sense.”

**Dr. Rick:** “And school is going to be a big challenge for Jacob. You guys have been *following his lead* for years now, and this is going to be a big switch. Now, he’s going to have to comply with school rules—a big change.”

**Mom:** “He doesn’t comply with house rules. I think he’s smarter than we are.” (See *Section 3: Daily Hassles: Using Misbehavior to Promote Jacob’s Emotional Thinking*)

**Dr. Rick:** “That’s a good thing. His behavior is becoming more challenging. He’s testing more. By going through the Seven Habits, we’re coming up with a school plan for Jacob.”

*The Best Type of Teacher!*

**Dr. Rick:** “The bottom line is that if we make school a fun experience, if he has a teacher he likes, and we give him (and his teacher) support, he’ll do well.”

**Dad:** “But you said we can’t pick his teacher?”

**Dr. Rick:** “It’s *not* one of your rights by law. You can *try*, but most principals won’t go there. If they let parents pick teachers, it would be chaos. Having said that, the principal will often try to pick the best teacher for the child.”

**Mom:** “You said before that the teacher is the single most important factor.”

**Dr. Rick:** “She or he is. And the best teacher is one who is *structured and nurturing*. If they are rigid, that’s no good. If they are too loose, that’s not good. But even the best teacher can’t help Jacob if he needs more support than she or he can supply.”

**Mom** (turning to her husband): “So if we don’t give him the necessary support, Jim, he could have trouble in school.”

**Dad:** “I want to see how he does on his own.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Dad, I know you want Jacob to make it on his own, and we don’t want Jacob to have help if he doesn’t need it, but as your advisor on this, I want to give you fair warning that if Jacob doesn’t get the support he needs and starts school off on a bad foot, he could have serious problems with motivation for a long time. *I think it’s a fundamental mistake to assume that Jacob will want to do well in school unless it makes sense to him AND is not too difficult*. School, learning, and making friends have to be fun and meaningful to Jacob. Dad, we have to give Jacob the necessary supports and that means giving him M&M’s.”

**Dad:** “He doesn’t even like M&M’s.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Motivation and Meaning—M&M’s.”

**Mom:** “I thought you were talking about the candy.”

**Dr. Rick:** “That’s the joke.”

**Dad** (smiling): “Not funny.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Actually what I’d do, in the beginning at least, is not just support him, I’d *bribe* him if I had to! Kindergarten is going to be challenging. Forewarned is forearmed. We might have to really motivate Jacob with some short-term incentives.”

**Dad:** “But shouldn’t he just do the work because it’s school and he has to.”

**Dr. Rick:** “You would hope, but there’s nothing wrong with incentives. You get paid to work. Hopefully, your work is meaningful in and of itself, but getting paid is a definite incentive. Let’s face it, not everything in school is fun. Jacob will have to delay gratification. Incentives can motivate him when the learning process bogs down, gets boring, or if it’s too hard. So what would be some meaningful incentives?”

**Mom:** “Oh I don’t know, maybe, some stickers.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Stickers are good, but what can he get for his stickers?”

**Dad:** “Computer time?”

**Dr. Rick:** “OK, that could work, but what would Jacob really love.”

**Mom:** “Going to *Target*. He loves to go to *Target* and *Lowe’s*.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Bingo!”

Jacob hears the word and looks up from his play with a big smile.

**Jacob:** “*Target*? I want to go to *Target*.”

**Dr. Rick:** “If you do good in school, you’ll go to *Target*. Not now.”

Poor Jacob understood too well, and his face dropped into disappointment and then returned to play with Charlie.

**Dr. Rick:** “So this could be our secret weapon. The school, for example, could make a *Target* chart and Jacob could get smiley face stickers for sequencing a series of actions (Habit #4). If our meaningful discussions and our bribe, I mean our incentive, for motivation helps him be successful, that’s great; then, we can wean the incentives down over time. This is an important behavioral principle.”

**Dad:** “But we can’t give a prize for every little thing.”

**Dr. Rick:** “You know what I say to that? (I stick out my tongue and give dad the ‘raspberries’) Not for ‘every little thing’, Jim, just the important things. And just in the beginning. Our ultimate goal is for Jacob to completely internalize the motivation so he loves school and loves learning because it’s not too hard and it’s fun.”

**Mom:** “But what if Jacob still has trouble even if he’s motivated.”

**Dad:** “Julie, I think we have to be optimistic.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Mom, you’re talking about an aide again.”

**Dad:** “I’m against it.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Jim, it’s a lot easier to wean an aide than it is to get one in the first place. If Jacob has some trouble going along with the gang, if his mind still wanders a lot when people are talking to him from a distance, if he has some trouble getting the main idea and he struggles with sequences some—he might need a part time aide. I want to be optimistic too, but it’s sounding like Jacob is going to need at least a part time aide.”

“A good aide could:

- Repeat the teacher’s instructions to help with auditory processing.
- Have Jacob practice the steps by previewing what happens next. For instance, show Jacob a picture of the steps in order.
- Read his cues to see if he is distracted and/or tuned out and prompt him to pay attention and ignore distractions.
- Support the fine motor difficulties by breaking down the task into simple doable steps and don’t let him get too frustrated. When he’s having problems, step in.

- Praise persistence, problem solving, and success.
- And finally, remind Jacob of his incentives. “When you do all this stuff, Jacob, you get to go to *Target*. Who’s going to do all this?”

**Mom:** “Jim, he might need one.”

**Dad:** (silent)

**Dr. Rick:** “Just consider it.”

**Dad:** “I’ll consider it.”

**Dr. Rick:** “So, here’s a quick summary of what we’ve been talking about (see below).”

**Dad** (taking the handout): “I’ll admit it sounds like too much for the teacher. I’m just not happy about the idea of an aide.”

### *Sequences: Methods*

- Repeat instructions (may need a helper)
- Practice the steps ‘on paper’, then do them
  - Picture the sequence
  - Use numbers or colors to create steps
  - Model using puppets or favorite characters
- Teach him to avoid distractions. Use call and response:  
Should we listen to cars outside? No!
- Break down difficult fine motor tasks into steps
  - Don’t let him get too frustrated. Help him!
- Praise persistence, give incentives

**Dr. Rick:** “I hear you, dad. You’d like Jacob to be completely independent in the classroom, and maybe he will be. Believe me, if you tell the school you want the aide weaned off by the middle of the year, they’ll be happy to do that. They want Jacob to be independent too. How does that sound? Start with a part time aide and wean off over a few months. If we can.”

**Dad:** “And if we can’t.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Then it means we did the right thing.”

**Mom:** “Jim, I think Dr. Solomon is right. Jacob is going to need some help.”

**Dad:** “I know Jacob. He’s going to start depending on the aide.”

**Dr. Rick:** “That is a real danger, but we have to be clear that the ultimate IEP goal for all of the Seven Habits is *complete independence*.”

### ***Habit #5: Use Active Memory***

By now, the boys are getting restless and starting to get into the closet in the corner and play with toys that make noise like my bell and my Mr. Roger’s push button toy, where he says, ‘*I like you just the way you are*’ and sings, ‘*It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood*’. Played over and over and over again.

**Dr. Rick** (loudly): “I think we need a sucker. Who wants a sucker?”

**Charlie:** “I do!”

**Jacob:** “I do!”

I send them out to Amy for a sucker and that buys us some quiet time.

**Dr. Rick:** “So, how is Jacob’s *active memory*, the next of the Seven Habits?”

**Mom:** “He has an amazing memory.”

**Dad:** “He can literally quote from books or movies he’s seen over and over.”

**Mom:** “He remembers the way to *Chuck E. Cheese’s* (a pizza and arcade chain).”

**Dr. Rick:** “And he can still remember a game he played at my office from a year ago, but *active memory* (also known as *working memory*) is different from this kind of rote, static memory. *Active memory is the ability to bring what you know from the past into the present in order to DO something new.* It requires a sense of purpose, of getting something done within a certain timeframe. And it requires a ‘sense of self’ acting in the world.

### *Habit #5: Active Memory*

- Use past information and apply it to a new task
  - As opposed to rote memory or long term memory
- Active memory
  - Remember information to complete a task
  - Needed for multi-step activities, math, and following complex instructions
- IEP Goals
  - Preview and then review the task
  - Summarize the task as it’s being completed
  - Increase vocabulary, definitions, and general knowledge.

“Active Memory and Processing Speed, the next habit, are the ultimate achievements among the Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kindergarteners. Think of it as ‘fine tuning’ the radio, or, better yet, the ‘finishing work’ of carpenters. It’s not good enough for Jacob to just go along with the gang, listen to the teacher, make sense of the task and establish a plan to do something (sequence); now, *Jacob must put it all together using active memory.*”

The Grants look a little confused.

**Dr. Rick:** “OK, let me give you an example. When kindergarteners are expected to do a classroom craft, it goes something like this:

*‘OK children,’ says the teacher, ‘it’s autumn outside. Who knows what autumn is?’*

- Is Jacob auditory processing? Is he raising his hand like his peers? Is he getting the main idea? *‘That’s right. It’s when leaves fall from the trees, and it starts to get colder outside. Right now, we’re going to make a present for your mommies and daddies.’*

- Does Jacob know what ‘a present’ is?

*‘We’re going to make a tree with colorful leaves that are falling to the ground.’*

- Does he get: ‘falling’ to the ground? What about ‘colorful’? Working memory has to do with vocabulary and definitions.

*‘On your tables are different colored construction paper, scissors, and paste. Here, up on the board, is an example.’*

- Does Jacob remember how to use both the scissors and paste together AND, at the same time, recall what a leaf falling might look like AND will he know to look up at the example on the board?

**Dad:** “When you break it down it that way, it’s amazing we function at all.”

**Dr. Rick:** “For most kids, it’s automatic.”

**Mom:** “Now I’m feeling overwhelmed with all these habits. I can’t imagine how Jacob is going to feel. Now you’ve got me worried.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Forewarned is forearmed, mom. If he can’t cope he’ll probably protect himself emotionally and go into his Comfort Zone, or he’s going to become anxious and possibly misbehave. Personally, I think he’ll hold it together emotionally at school. *What I’m afraid is that in a busy classroom, no one will notice that Jacob is overwhelmed.*”

“But let’s assume for the moment that he will be able to use all the Seven Habits. The question about *Active Memory* here is: *How can we help Jacob use information he knows from the past and use it to something new? Dad?*”

**Dad:** “The answer lies in the question.”

**Dr. Rick:** “By George, I think he’s got it.”

“*Definitions, General Knowledge, and Time.* Common active memory skills include using past knowledge like *definitions/vocabulary, general knowledge, and time* for a new task. Another way of thinking about active memory is that it involves putting ‘*the main idea*’ together with ‘*sequencing*’ in order to achieve a specific task. Most kindergarteners, for example, know what ‘autumn’, ‘presents’, and even ‘example’ mean. Jacob may not. *He may need help with new vocabulary and definitions.* Most children will have a sense of how long it should take to do a task. Does Jacob get lost in the visual stimulation of the task, or can he learn to ‘stay on task’ and have a sense of time.”

**Mom:** “It’s like a whole other realm I hadn’t even thought of.”

**Dr. Rick:** “I’m sorry to overwhelm you, but I just don’t want Jacob to feel overwhelmed and then tune out. It’s these kind of little demands throughout the school day that can add up to be very stressful and cause anxiety.”

**Dad:** “Unless he tunes out.”

**Mom:** “But then he’s not learning.”

**Dr. Rick:** “So let me give you some examples of IEP goals that will help Jacob develop *active memory skills*:

- Jacob will increase his *vocabulary* related to what the teacher says
- Jacob will expand his *general knowledge* of common daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, and yearly events
- Jacob will *review* what he needs in order to complete a task before beginning, and then the process will be *summarized* afterwards
- Jacob will answer open ended ‘what’ questions, ‘why’, ‘when’, and ‘how’ questions throughout the day
- Jacob will complete a craft without help or prompting in a timely fashion (See also *Process Information Quickly* below)

**Dad:** “This is still pretty abstract for me. Can you give us an example?”

**Dr. Rick:** “OK. Let’s do a little thought experiment and apply these IEP goals to Jacob as he sits at his desk doing a craft.”

“Let’s pretend that the teacher’s helper (not an ‘aide’, dad) *waits without prompting* and Jacob goes to his chair, sits at his desk, and even takes out the materials from his folder all on his own (by going along

with the gang, auditory processing at a distance, and sequencing). Good waiting, Mrs. Helper. Good sequencing, Jacob!”

As I act out the scene dramatically getting up from my chair to be *The Helper* and sitting in my chair to be *Jacob*, the boys sit quietly, lick their suckers, and listen as I put on my little drama.

**Dr. Rick:** “Now, let’s pretend that Jacob is sitting in his seat and not doing much. He seems a little lost. The helper reads his cues and goes up to him. She says ‘Hi’. She waits for him to acknowledge her. A few seconds pass and he looks at her:

*Helper (always in a deep dramatic voice):* ‘So what are you up to Jacob?’ (This is an open-ended question to see if he gets the main idea). She gives him time to auditory process.

*Jacob:* ‘Making leaves.’

*Helper:* ‘Right, you’re making leaves. Green summer leaves or red and yellow and brown autumn leaves?’ (Note: She throws him a softball multiple-choice question instead of the more difficult open-ended ‘wh-question’: ‘What kind of leaves?’ I’ll forgive her.)

*Jacob:* ‘Autumn leaves.’

Jacob and Charlie like it when my voice changes from *The Helper (deep voice)* to *Jacob (high voice)*. Of course, I ham it up by being loud and dramatic.

*Helper:* ‘Right you are, Jacob. High five (I give Jacob a high five). But Jacob, What is ‘autumn?’

*Jacob:* (silence). “Hmmm.”

*Helper:* (waits, then repeats in a demanding funny voice). ‘What is autumn?’

*Jacob:* ‘When the leaves fall down.’

*Helper:* ‘Right Jacob! In summer, it’s hot; in autumn, the leaves fall down; in winter, it’s very. . .’

And here Jacob actually answers. . .

*Jacob:* ‘. . .cold.’

*Helper* (I give a big high five): ‘. . .and in spring, the flowers grow. Four different seasons.’ (To Jim and Julie: “So here the helper reviews the concepts.”)

*Helper:* ‘So *now* what are you going to do Jacob?’ (an open ended ‘wh-question’).

*Jacob:* ‘Make a picture for mommy and daddy.’

*Helper:* ‘Right, you’re going to make an autumn picture for your mommy and daddy. You know how to do that?’

*Jacob:* (I exaggerate my head with big nods. The boys love it.)

*Helper:* ‘And Jacob, how are you going to make a picture for your mommy and daddy?’

*Jacob:* ‘Brown for ground. Black for tree. Colors for leaves. Cut and paste them.’

*Helper:* ‘Beautiful! You got it Jacob. If you have any questions, check in with your partner Susie over here. Have fun.’

**Dad:** “That was very helpful. Funny that this helper was using all the play techniques like reading Jacob’s cues, following Jacob’s lead, and getting circles.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Funny about that!”

**Mom:** “Jacob could do all that and it would be fun for him.”

**Dr. Rick:** “With a little help from his friends. What I don’t want is for Jacob to sit there lost or not understanding the meaning of what he’s doing.”

### ***Habit #6: Process Information Quickly***

**Dr. Rick:** “Onward. We’re almost done. Let’s talk about Habit #6: Processing Information Quickly. This is primarily a matter of *focused attention* but there is a lot that goes into paying attention. If you watch any kindergarten classroom closely, you will notice that the children are moving smoothly and *quickly* through their day. They are usually (though certainly not always!) paying attention and completing tasks (with some help) in a timely fashion. The hidden (unspoken but expected) curriculum here is *sequencing, using working memory, and processing information quickly*—our last three habits.

“Children with ASD have problems with these. They become fragmented and wander off to do their own thing. This keeps them from connecting sequences of actions. They have trouble using what they know from the past in order to apply it to a task (*active memory*), and as a result, they lose focus and don’t get things done in an efficient manner.”

**Dad:** “And all this is part of Jacob’s autism?”

**Dr. Rick:** “Remember a long time ago when I first diagnosed Jacob, I talked about the brain of the child with ASD as being like a loose web of nerve cells that can’t capture the complexity of the world?”

**Mom:** “I remember that. It really helped me understand that autism was a brain problem.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Processing information quickly is a big challenge to Jacob’s brain. In kindergarten, the children are expected to pay attention, stay on task and get things done well and *quickly* without (too much) help. Here’s an overview of Habit 6: Processing Information Quickly.”

### *Habit #6: Process Quickly*

- Goal: *Tasks are done well and quickly*
- Key Factor: Pay attention & stay on task
- Rule out LD, ADHD, Fine Motor Concerns
- Methods:
  - Keep environment predictable, structured
  - Help with transitions
  - Pick up cues of distress early & process feelings
  - Be clear about task/work rules & reasons
  - Reward paying attention
  - Create high interest, affect, & relevance

### *Learning Disabilities and ADHD Must Be Ruled Out.*

**Dr. Rick:** “Our first consideration is: Does Jacob have a learning disability of some sort. Difficulties with processing information quickly are going to show up in writing, phonics/reading, and multiple step crafts, namely, in the most complex work that kindergarteners do. I’m assuming that Jacob does not have *specific learning disabilities (LD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)* (See *Glossary and Note\**) but I’ll be keeping my eye on him for these as school continues.”

**\*Note:** I didn’t share these considerations with Jacob’s parents at the time because I didn’t want to worry them any more than I already had, but a specific learning disability (LD) (See *Glossary*) means that a child has trouble learning in a specific academic area *despite an overall average intelligence*. My clinical opinion was that Jacob didn’t have LD or ADHD, but these considerations were on my mind. For instance, many children with autism have terrible problems with handwriting because they have fine motor (small muscle) coordination problems. This would be an example of a specific learning disability.

A child can have a learning disability in any area of academics including most commonly in reading and/or math. When establishing the need for an IEP as part of the initial multi-disciplinary team evaluation, schools often test the child in all

areas of learning to rule out specific learning disabilities. We can't expect a child to *process information quickly* if they have a learning disability.

On the other hand, ADHD or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder means the child has fundamental difficulties with attention, distractibility, impulse control, and over-activity. The diagnosis is clinical, meaning that the teacher and the parents need to fill out forms and/or share their observations with a trained professional usually a doctor or psychologist. As of this writing, there is no objective tests for ADHD. To complicate matters even more, the medical literature suggests that children with ASD, who have been professionally diagnosed with ADHD, do not respond to medications nearly as well as typical children. In fact, the response rate to stimulant (i.e. Ritalin-like medications) is less than 50%.

**Dad:** "But how do you know he doesn't?"

**Dr. Rick:** "Honestly, I don't know for sure. It's too early to tell yet until he gets more into academics. One test will be Jacob's ability to complete tasks in a timely manner. This will be a huge achievement (and challenge) for Jacob. But I think he can do it. I've got a bunch of tricks up my sleeve to help Jacob stay on task and get schoolwork done."

**Dad:** "You mean we have to focus on focusing?"

**Mom:** "Oh no! Now you've got Jim punning." (I slap five with dad)

*Processing Information Quickly: Methods.*

**Dr. Rick:** Probably the most important factor in helping Jacob focus and process things quickly is to keep the *school environment predictable*. I've already mentioned the importance of a teacher who is nurturing but *structured*. If there's a lack of order and predictability Jacob will get upset, lose control, and it could ruin his whole school experience. To keep the environment predictable good teachers will:

- Help Jacob get through transitions
- Pick up on Jacob's distress signals/cues early
- Be clear about the work rules and reasons for a given task and
- Reward attention to task

Let's take each of these school 'methods' in order.

**Dr. Rick:** "The first task is to help Jacob transition from what he was doing to the new task. This is not easy for children with ASD."

**Mom:** "We've been using your 20 Transition Tricks, and that has really helped us." (See *Chapter 18: Dr. Rick's 20 Transition Tricks*)

**Dr. Rick:** "The school needs to use them too. Problems with transitions can look like attention deficit disorder but it's not. *Kids with ASD have real trouble with transitions and shifting their attention from one act, let alone task, to another can be challenging.*"

**Dad:** "But Jacob focuses for hours on his Legos or cars. His attention span is amazing."

**Dr. Rick:** "He can focus when it's easy and interesting and he doesn't have to change or transition. His problems start when the task gets more complicated, right? "

**Mom:** "Or he gets absorbed in thinking about his own thing. Then, it can be really hard to get him to focus on what we want him to."

**Dad:** "He ignores or, lately, he argues or just refuses. He's getting downright stubborn."

**Dr. Rick:** "These are all factors in transitioning and attention. What's going to happen when he *can't* do his own thing for the whole day? Calendars can't compare to Buzz and Woody."

**Mom:** "It could be a nightmare."

**Dr. Rick:** "Or he'll hold it together at school. . ."

**Dad:** “. . .and take it out on us at home. That’s already happening some days when he comes home from pre-school.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Let’s face it. Transitions, especially to non-preferred activities, are going to be hard for Jacob. If the school does not help him transition well, it will interfere with attention and compliance.”

**Dad:** “We should make these part of Jacob’s IEP goals too, right?”

**Dr. Rick:** “You’re getting savvy dad! Let’s take an example. Let’s say the teacher has just finished reading a story in circle time. She notices that Jacob was restless, internally distracted, and not listening very well (even though he sat without getting up or disturbing the other children).

“Now, the children are supposed to change from circle time to *going to their desks and making a calendar* by cutting out the names of the days of the week from a ditto sheet and pasting them, Monday through Sunday, on top of a blank calendar and then numbering the days of the month from 1 to 31 *inside* the calendar. This task is from one of the classes I observed.”

**Mom:** “Learning about calendars and the days of the week *is* important.”

**Dr. Rick:** “But before the teacher gets to the task, I feel that she (or the aide) should tune in to Jacob’s cues (*How you doing buddy. It was hard to sit in circle time*) and acknowledge that it’s time to change. Connect with him knowing that transitions are hard. Good teachers do this.

“Next, she *states the work rule* about what to do next and *explains the reasons* for the task: ‘OK. Now it’s time to do your calendar, Jacob. Please sit down and paste the days across the top of the calendar, then put numbers on the calendar. All children have to know about the seasons, calendars, and days. The helper Mrs. Jones will help you.’”

**Dad:** “Jacob’s good at counting. I know he could do a task like that.”

**Dr. Rick:** “If Jacob is not getting started, the teacher might need to *use a carrot and stick approach*. She might say something like: ‘And I’ll make you a deal, Jacob. If you do a good job and you get it done in five minutes (holds five fingers up), I’ve got Buzz and Woody stickers (that were provided by Jim and Julie Grant, of course). So, do a good job and do it quickly, and you’ll get *two* Toy Story stickers! Ready, set, go!’”

**Dad:** “I really think that would work for getting Jacob to do things around the house too. He likes races. He’s becoming competitive.”

**Dr. Rick:** “I wonder where he got that from, *dad?*”

*Reading Signs of Distress Early (Or Not!).*

**Dr. Rick:** “Usually, schools do a good job of *keeping the environment predictable*. But sometimes they don’t recognize that changes in the schedule or special events can be very upsetting for children with ASD and *they miss reading the signs of distress early enough*.

“Here’s an example from one of my recent school visits. It was sub-zero and bitter cold outside. Instead of going out for recess, the class had to stay inside. The class got more noisy and chaotic. The child I was observing who had high functioning autism was clearly upset by this. I could easily tell by his cues. He started to pace; he frowned; his head went down. *He was showing signs of distress*. He really wanted to go out.”

**Mom:** “When Jacob expects something to happen and it doesn’t, he still has hard time.”

**Dr. Rick:** “The staff person *missed the early cues*. By the time the obvious signs manifested themselves—bolting for the door, hitting, pinching, and screaming when the staff tried to stop him—it was too late.

“*Unpredictable environments* are noisy and/or chaotic, involve sudden and/or unexpected transitions, expect the child to get work done that is too hard, or if there are challenging situations (like other children misbehaving).

“Observant staff will notice the *early signs of distress* like facial and body tension, shut down and withdrawal or excessive activity. Sometime the children will start talking loud, or be silly or just won’t do what they’re supposed to like leaving their seat without permission.

“If school personnel (or parents!) don’t recognize the signs and act early, the children won’t stay calm and regulated. That’s when behavior problems happen.”

*Processing Jacob’s Feelings.*

**Mom:** “I could see something like this happening with Jacob. What should they do?”

**Dad:** “The answer lies in the question.”

**Dr. Rick:** “I knew you were going to say that. So what’s the answer?”

**Dad:** “As you taught us, they should *mirror his feelings*: ‘*Jacob, you really want to go outside*.’”

**Dr. Rick:** “Dad, you’re a genius! And good teacher and aides do this; but remember, schools are primarily focused on academics not feelings.”

**Mom:** “I don’t want Jakey suppressing his feelings all day long in order to get along at school.”

**Dr. Rick:** “I’ve seen too many of my kids hold it in and explode later. It would be great if the school could help Jacob resolve upsets on the spot.”

**Dad:** “You think the school won’t do that? Can you can put *that* in his IEP?”

**Dr. Rick:** “That would be radical, dad, because IEP goals are for the child, not the school personnel, but here’s what it could look like:

- ‘School staff will help Jacob control his behavior by acknowledging and ‘mirroring’ Jacob’s strong feelings by *telling* (not asking) him what he wants and/or how he feels.’

“I call this ‘processing’ a child’s feeling. The point is that all these things—helping with transitions, making clear rules, rewarding him, and reading his cues and acknowledging—will not only prepare Jacob for getting tasks done well and quickly—the 6<sup>th</sup> Habit—but should make school fun for him.”

**Mom:** “It’s amazing what it takes to. . .”

**Dr. Rick:** “. . .Process quickly? True, but when a child like Jacob is supported he’ll pay attention and get the job done. So, all this leads to the last element of processing quickly—paying attention.

*Pay Attention to Attention.*

**Dr. Rick:** “So how can we improve attention itself? All together now. . .”

**All:** “The answer lies in the question!”

**Dr. Rick:** “Very good children! There is good scientific evidence that when we pay attention to attention, we can increase attention span. Obviously, the most important factor in attention is *interest*. The more we can *make the topic relevant* to Jacob, the more he will pay attention.”

**Mom:** “When I’m reading him a book about *Thomas the Tank Engine* or *Toy Story*, he’s riveted.”

**Dr. Rick:** “I like to build the school curriculum around the child’s interests as much as possible. This is called being *child centered*.”

**Dad:** “But how much can a teacher in a busy classroom with 25 kids do that?”

**Mom:** “Jacob’s teacher this year is fantastic. She’s high energy and makes learning fun.”

**Dad:** “But, Dr. Solomon, don’t kids in school have to tolerate boredom and just do it? I remember school as boring most of the time, but I did my work because it was expected.”

**Dr. Rick:** “I call it ‘delayed gratification’. Put off fun to get work done. It’s one of the big things you learn in school. But that’s where reasoning and motivation come in.”

*Time it! Pay attention to attention.*

**Dr. Rick:** Last two things. Let’s say Jacob is only half way through the calendar task of cutting out the days of the week, pasting them on top of the calendar, and then numbering the November calendar from 1 to 30. Let’s say he’s ‘scripting’, repeating quotes verbatim from *Toy Story* or *Thomas*. The other children are almost done. Here, I’d have the teacher or aide set a timer, focus on attention itself, and play ‘beat the clock’. I’d also try some reverse psychology. In fact, I’m going to try some right now. I’ll demonstrate my techniques of structure, motivation, high affect, working quickly, paying attention, and reverse psychology by getting them to clean up this mess.”

**Dad:** “I gotta see this.”

**Mom:** “They hate to clean up.”

Jacob and Charlie have made a total mess of my playroom, toys everywhere.

**Dr. Rick:** “Jacob and Charlie. Hey guys. (They look) You want to sword fight and beat the evil Dr. Solomon?!”

**Charlie and Jacob** (start chanting): “Sword fight, sword fight!”

**Dr. Rick** (chanting): “Sword fight, sword fight. All right, let’s clean up first, and then we’ll sword fight AND you can have an extra sucker!! AND *don’t* you put the tracks in the basket. *I’m* going to put the train tracks in the basket *first*. Don’t you put them in. I’m going to put more in than you. Really fast! (I quickly throw in a track) That’s one. Ha ha, I got one and you didn’t get any.”

Well that did it, Charlie and Jacob start throwing the tracks in like madmen while I yelled, “Don’t! Stop! *I* want to put them in. Darn it, you’re beating me. Stop!” They love beating me. We move on to the doctor’s kit, then the food, then the big box of toys, and then the Legos. I feign mock anger with each defeat and the room is cleaned up in no time.

**Mom:** “Unbelievable.”

**Dad:** “Impressive.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Sword fight, sword fight, sword fight!!”

I get out three long soft pipe insulator tubes—which make loud but harmless slapping sounds when they hit—and we have a rousing round of sword fighting where the evil Dr. S attacks the superheroes but is defeated, slumping against the door and sliding down to the floor begging for mercy.

**Dr. Rick:** “I give, I give. You won. You won! Stop hitting. You won! Now go get your suckers.”

They race out to get more suckers from Amy.

**Mom:** “And tell Amy *thank you*.”

**Dr. Rick** (still breathing hard from the battle): “No problems with attention when all the planets are aligned. And success breeds success. OK. Let’s tackle this last habit quickly.”

### ***Final Agreement on Jacob's IEP Plans***

**Mom:** “But we have to decide how much support Jacob needs in kindergarten next year and whether he goes full or half day.”

**Dr. Rick:** “By talking through the Seven Habits, isn't it pretty clear? I'd recommend a *part time aide*. And he still needs time for his therapies. So make sure you let the school know that he may be leaving for various therapies.”

**Dad:** “Will the school help with social skills?”

**Dr. Rick:** “More and more schools are adding social skills as part of speech and language or social work. I'd put a social skills group into his IEP. If they don't offer it, you'll have to do it yourself with play dates. We don't have time to talk about that now but we will.” (See *Chapter 24: Sibling With Rivalry!*)

**Dad:** “With all due respect, Dr. Solomon, I'm against an aide. I'm OK with taking him out for therapies, but I'm against an aide.”

**Dr. Rick:** “You're the boss, and you could be right. I'm just warning you that it's a lot easier to take support away than it is to get more support if you need it.”

**Mom:** “We'll talk about it at home, Dr. Solomon. What about the rest of his IEP goals?”

**Dr. Rick:** “The handouts I've been giving you outline the most important goals based on the Seven Habits but I've got a nice list of other IEP goals as well (See *Appendix H*). The school will have academic goals. I'll help you draft a final document of IEP Goals by having this visit typed up and edited for you.”

**Dad:** “That would be great!”

**Mom:** “Thank you so much. I'm feeling better. This has been so helpful.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Forewarned is forearmed. You are such wonderful parents, and Jacob is an amazing guy who's doing so well. I don't want him to plateau. Can we just touch on this last habit, and then we'll finish up.”

### ***Habit #7: Knowing When to Ask for Help***

**Dr. Rick:** “Really, everything we've been talking about is a form of *problem solving*. The last habit—*knowing when to ask for help*—is simply letting Jacob know that when he can't solve the problems on his own, he can ask for help. *Give him permission* to ask for help.

**Dad:** “He's already got that one down. He says ‘Help’ all the time.”

**Mom:** “It took a long time for him to even know he needed help.”

**Dr. Rick:** “This lack of self-awareness is one of the hallmarks of autism. That children with ASD are often unaware of *others'* feelings is common knowledge, but much less appreciated and more important is that they often don't register *their own* feelings of frustration. Helping Jacob become more aware and conscious of his own feelings will not only help him solve problems but may help him understand the feelings of others.

“While Jacob might be able to ask for help at home, it's going to be much harder in school. And if he sits there and doesn't ask for help, he's going to get stressed out.”

**Mom:** “I was starting to feel better, but now I'm feeling stressed again. I didn't realize how hard school is for kids like Jacob.”

**Dr. Rick:** “That's one of things I love about you Julie. You are self aware and honest about your feelings. Jacob will get it. It just takes work.

“And remember, forewarned is forearmed. That's why we have to get him and the school (and you two!) prepared. The school should make sure that they ‘give Jacob permission to ask for help’.

Throughout the school day, his teacher and/or helper should say: *“Jacob, if you can’t do something and you’re getting frustrated, you can always ask for help.”*

### *Habit #7: Asking for Help*

- Lack of self-awareness leads to school problems
- And leads to two major problems:
  - Not knowing when to ask for help
  - Stress!
- Methods:
  - Give permission to *ask for help*
  - Wait for child to problem-solve
  - Praise, practice, problem-solve, prize
  - Read cues early & reflect the child’s feeling

**Dad:** “Another IEP Goal like: ‘Jacob will recognize when he needs help by asking for help.’”

**Dr. Rick:** “Bingo, dad. It’s not enough to say it once. It will need to be repeated at each failure to ask for help when he needs it. This habit takes time and repetition to develop. Here’s another opportunity to *read Jacob’s cues* and *reflect back his feelings*: ‘Jacob, it looks like you are having a tough time getting that glue on the little pieces of paper’. Jacob would probably nod and be relieved that they noticed. Then the helper should say: ‘When you’re having a hard time and getting frustrated, what can you do to help yourself?’ Give him the problem.”

**Mom:** “I think I’m too quick to step in and help Jacob.”

**Dad:** “Not me.”

**Mom:** “No. You don’t step in fast enough. You let him get frustrated.”

**Dr. Rick:** “The answer lies somewhere in the middle. It’s very important to pause and give Jacob a chance to problem-solve on his own. Wait. Give him a chance to raise his hand. But not too long, though usually longer than you think. It takes time to process for these kids. You can repeat the question maybe after a 10 count.”

#### *Praise.*

**Dr. Rick:** “If Jacob raises his hand or comes up with the answer, give him lots of praise. If he still hasn’t answered, then tell him: *‘You can always ask for help.’* Now ask him again: ‘So when you’re having a hard time and getting frustrated, what can you do to help yourself?’ Jacob: ‘Ask for help.’ Slap five and yoo-hoo!”

#### *Practice.*

**Dr. Rick:** “Next, you must immediately *practice the skill*. “OK, Jacob, let’s practice this again. Let’s pretend you’re having trouble. I’ll go over to the other side of the room and you raise your hand to ask me for help. Would you do that?”

“Here, again, it is very important to pause and give Jacob a chance to problem-solve on his own. If he says: ‘Raise my hand?’, high five and yoo-hoo! “That’s right, Jacob, good going. You raise your hand, and I’ll come right over and give you some help.’ Then you practice.”

**Mom:** “That’s a great idea—practice the process of problem solving.”

**Dr. Rick:** “I call this ‘meta-cognitive’ thinking or thinking about thinking. Then, of course, you keep an eye on Jacob to see if this new way of thinking leads to a change in behavior and truly becomes a habit.”

*Prize.*

**Dr. Rick:** “If not, the last thing I recommend is upping the ante. When Jacob asks for help, he gets a prize—something that will really motivate him—like points toward a trip to *Target*.”

**Mom:** “He’d raise his hand a lot for that.”

**Dr. Rick:** “Of course, we don’t want Jacob asking for help when he doesn’t need it. But one step at a time. Let’s get him asking first and then shape his behavior to be more appropriate. Of course, Jacob needs to get the message: ‘We want you to try first on your own, but I’m always here if you really need help.’”

“The second cost of not knowing when to ask for help is that it *leads to stress* for a child like Jacob. When stress mounts—related to all the habits we’ve talked about—meltdowns, tantrums, misbehavior, resistance, poor transitions, and other forms of displaced anger could disrupt Jacob’s functioning in school, which could disrupt the whole class.”

**Mom:** “That would be bad. He’s doing so well at home now; I’d hate to see him get worse because of school.”

**Dr. Rick:** “I’ve seen it too many times. Everything we talked about earlier—*reading cues, reflecting feeling, helping Jacob stay regulated*—applies here too. When Jacob is calm he’ll be able to problem solve and ask for help when he needs it.”

**Dad:** “What if the school says they don’t have time to deal with Jacob’s stress?”

**Dr. Rick:** “This is a central part of Jacob’s education. The time it takes to work through feelings and stressful situations will save time from meltdowns and misbehavior in the future.”

The boys are done with their second suckers and are starting to take my toys out again.

**Dr. Rick:** “Whoa, whoa. It’s time to stop you guys. Get your coats on. You have to go and it’s cold outside. Did you have fun at my office today?”

Charlie and Jacob nod and slap me five.

**Dr. Rick:** “Hope all this was helpful. I know it was a lot to take in, but you’ve got your handy dandy handouts, and I’ll send you the transcript when it’s done.”

**Dad** (getting up and shaking my hand): “Very helpful.”

**Mom** (shaking my hand): “I always feel a bit overwhelmed when I leave your office. There’s so much to deal with.”

**Dr. Rick:** “It *is* a lot. But better to know and be overwhelmed than not know and be surprised when Jacob is struggling.”

**Dad:** “We’ll deal with it.”

### **Follow up phone call**

Two days after our visit, Julie Grant calls to say that after the visit, she and Jim had a ‘bad argument’ about Jacob’s upcoming IEP. She wanted Jacob to have a full time aide and Jim wanted Jacob to have no help at all. They arrived at a compromise, and she wanted to know if I agreed. The compromise

was that Jacob would start with a shared or part time paraprofessional and depending on how he did the school could either increase or decrease the para's time.

I told her I loved that solution, but I warned her that schools in Michigan just went through some budget crunching and there might be push back to start Jacob in kindergarten without a 'para' (paraprofessional). I quickly added: "The school should never tell you that they can't afford a certain educational plan because of money considerations, but it happens all the time. You have to be tough and strong and fight for the part time para if you need to". She didn't think that being tough and strong was going to be a problem for Jim. I said I thought she was pretty tough too seeing as she got Jim to compromise. We had a good laugh together.

## Summary

- Jacob continues to make progress functionally, developmentally, and academically. But Julie Grant is upset. Jacob did poorly in his kindergarten evaluation. Is he really ready?
- For children with ASD, kindergarten presents daunting challenges that can be met by helping them develop the 'Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kindergarteners'.
- They must:
  - Learn to 'go along with the gang' (Habit #1);
  - Listen and process what they hear (Habit #2);
  - Accurately grasp the main idea of books, conversations, and situations (Habit #3);
  - Then they have to organize themselves by sequencing multiple steps (Habit #4);
  - Remembering to remember important facts, concepts and strategies (Habit #5); and
  - Focus their attention in order to get things done well in a timely fashion (Habit #6);
  - Finally, they must know when they are having trouble and ask for help not just for academics but also for upsets (Habit #7).
- I help the Grants think through their IEP Goals, especially how much help Jacob might need in kindergarten. Jim Grant is against having an 'aide' for Jacob even though it's clear that he needs one.
- Jacob is becoming more and more of a behavior problem at home and the Grants are worried that this will spill over to school.

## Resources & Links

### Websites

- Autism Speaks IEP Guide: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/iep-guide>

### Books

- *7 Easy Steps to Take Charge of Your Child's Education* (2013), Beverly Geltner PhD.
- *Know Your Child's Educational Rights! Learn about the law*
- *The Hidden Curriculum* (2004), Brenda Smith Myles
- Carol Gray's *Social Stories*
- *Handwriting Without Tears* (1997), Jan Z. Olsen

## Coming Up Next

In Section 3: *Daily Hassles: Using Misbehavior to Promote Jacob's Emotional Thinking*, a series of office visits addresses common behavioral problems like tantrums and aggression, problems with morning routines, sibling rivalry, eating, toileting, etc.

## A Fable

Storytelling and fables help get a message across like nothing else. I'll give an example below but here's my underlying technique:

1. Pick a lesson/main idea to be learned.
2. Find an animal with the same first letter as the lesson.
3. Show the problem using the animal character.
4. Bring in the wise old animal that teaches the lesson.
5. Have the animal resist the lesson.
6. The animal suffers consequences and changes his mind.
7. Happy ending with a social story conclusion.

Let's say Jacob doesn't get the 'main idea' of 'going along with the gang'. I've given you an example of a social story; now let me create a fable on the same subject for Jacob (who, by the way, loves Koala bears).

Once upon a time there was a Koala Bear named Willy. They called him Willy the Walking Koala Bear. You know why? Because he walked all around the school. (Show Jacob what wandering is as you say. . .) When the other children were sitting in circle time, Willy walked away. When the children were standing in line, what was Willy the Walking Koala Bear doing? That's right. He walked away. When the other children were playing together outside what was Willy doing? He walked away and did not play with the other children.

Poor Willy. He couldn't stop walking away and you know what happened? He didn't learn his lessons, and he didn't make friends. Poor Willy the Walking Koala Bear! He was sad.

One day, when he was walking back home from school feeling kind of sad and lonely, a wise old Koala Bear jumped down from the tree and said, 'What's wrong, Willy, you look sad'. 'I want to learn my lessons, and I want to play with the other children, but I like to walk around'. 'Well, I've got good news for you Willy the Walking Koala Bear.' And Willy looked at the old wise Koala to see what he was going to say. 'You can do both!! Sometimes you can walk, and sometimes you can sit or stand'. 'I don't think I can sit or stand'. Willy worried. 'I know it seems hard, but you can do it. And. . .' said the Wise One raising his eyebrows, 'when you sit or stand with all your friends, you will get two prizes! First, you will learn and make friends. Second, you can get a new Thomas the Tank Engine train!' Willy liked that idea. 'O boy, when I sit in circle time I will learn, make friends AND get a prize'. Willy the Wandering Walking Koala Bear loved prizes.

So Willy the Walking Koala Bear decided he was going to sit in circle time and stand in line with his friends so he could learn his lessons and make friends at school. At first, it was hard because he wanted to walk away but you know what? He did it! He stayed put! He sat in circle time; he sat at his desk to do crafts; he stood in line to go to the library. At first, just for a little time and then for more and more time. And he got a Thomas the Tank Engine prize! The Wise Old Koala bear was right! He felt good about sitting and not walking away. And that's how Willy the Walking Koala bear learned to stop walking. The End!