

Autism: 10 Life Lessons Summaries

Lesson #1: Intensive Early Intervention Matters

- Early signs can be detected by 6-14 months. Don't wait for a diagnosis to start play-based, interactive, engagement.
- Diagnosis can help pay for services
- Developmental and behavioral interventions are evidence based
- 'Intensive intervention of 2 hours per day of engaging interaction that is based on evidence is the key
- Empowering parents through coaching is smart public policy

Lesson #2: Be School Savvy

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

Lesson #3: EQ is More Important Than IQ

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

Lesson #4: Delay Kindergarten

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

Lesson #5: Take Care of Your Family System

- Take good care of your family system
 - Be aware of the 'Self Care Paradox'
 - If parents take care of themselves, they take better care of all family members in the long run
- Be aware of the 'The Guild Paradox'
 - Better may no be better
- Siblings will be more supportive
- A strong family system promotes the child's competence by making appropriate demands

Lesson #6: Learn to Read, Then Read to Learn

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

Lesson #7: Be Prepared to Deal with Anxiety

- Set the bar at the right level to deal with performance anxiety
- Adapt the curriculum to the child's capacities
- Mirror feelings
 - Talk about how hard the work is
- Learn some 'Transition Tricks'
- Keep giving m&m's
- Throw the 'Stone in the Pond'
 - Follow the child's lead and interests
- Use your summers
- Get tutoring

Lesson #8: Promote Social Interaction

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

Lesson #9: Get Ready for True Academics

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

Lesson #10: Plan for the Life Ahead

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