



CASD CHAT E-Newsletter

2021: A Fresh Start

Dear CASD families and friends,

Are you looking for a fresh start in 2021? If so, you are not alone. One powerful tool for a better year ahead is to focus on strengths and self-advocacy skills, for your child and for you as a parent, teacher or other helping adult.

Why is a focus on strengths and expressing your needs so effective?

Research shows that all of us humans, and even our pets, learn best when we are told what we are doing right. We grow when we identify and nurture our strengths and we are healthier and more effective when we speak up for ourselves and ask for what we need.

Advice for Parents

Julia Bascom directs the Autism Self Advocacy Network. Here is her advice for parents:

I think it's important to understand that knowing about and understanding your disability and how to ask for accommodations is one of the most important life skills that a disabled person can have. That's something your child is going to need ... for the rest of their life. The people with disabilities who are the happiest and who are the most successful are people who know what they need and how to ask for it.

Five tips for helping an autistic child leverage their strengths and build self-advocacy skills:

1. Celebrate differences

- Talk with your child about their autism, the limitations and gifts associated with it, and ways to overcome its challenges.
- Teach your child that everyone is different and has different interests and abilities, and that everyone has something important to offer. One person might be good at sports, another at reading, and another might be great with animals. All make important contributions.
- Notice specific abilities in your child. Are they honest, kind, a good artist, a fast runner, or good at cooking? Help your child may see themselves as a complex person with strengths as well as challenges.

2. Notice and cultivate successes

- Allow your child to pursue their interests. Provide your child with opportunities to try

activities related to their interests. For example, if your child is interested in plants, flowers, or bugs, have them help you in the garden and take your child to the local plant nursery.

- Encourage them to practice their strengths. For example, if your child is good at jump roping, suggest that they do it every day for five minutes to become even better. Help them track their progress (if they are interested), which is another way to engage with them around their interest.
- Praise and encourage effort: “I am impressed with how hard you worked on this”; “This might be hard, but I know you can do it.”

3. Create opportunities to help others

- Facilitate opportunities for your child to volunteer with younger children at a library, daycare, or school or with animals at a local shelter.
- Do a service activity as a family, like working in a soup kitchen or cleaning up a local park.
- Ask your child to help you with tasks like preparing a meal or taking care of a family pet and point out how they’re growing up and able to help.

4. Encourage your child to speak for themselves

- Ask your child often about their likes, dislikes, and abilities and celebrate them. It’s okay if some of their interests are unusual or seem immature. The things that bring them joy are part of what makes them unique.
- Allow your child to speak for themselves. Have them order their meal at a restaurant. This can be done verbally, with pictures, or using an augmentative device. Try not to interrupt; instead, give your child the chance and needed time to express themselves.
- Encourage your child to stand by their preferences even if they are different from those of others. For example, if you discover that your child no longer likes a certain movie because of a peer’s opinion, tell your child that true friends accept each other for who they are and not what movie they like.

5. Teach your child to self-advocate

- Encourage your child to self-advocate by expressing their wants, needs, and feelings. Teach them to ask for help when needed and praise them when they do so. It is important for your child to know that you want them to stand up for themselves.
- Teach your child to say “no” when appropriate, and respect your child’s “no.” As parents, we often have to set limits for our children, but we also need to help our children set their own limits. If your child does not like hugs, for example, teach them how to express that they would prefer to give a family member a high five instead.
- Teach your child to advocate for themselves by practicing different scenarios. For example, practice how they can self-advocate with other children who take away a toy while they are playing with it. Then, coach your child on how to appropriately respond and advocate to get the toy back.
- If your child struggles with speaking, practice simple phrases they can say, like “stop please” or “my turn.” You can also work with their school team or therapist to program self-advocacy phrases into a voice output device or PECS system.
- Teach self-advocacy skills one step at a time, fading support as your child progresses. For example, begin by discussing how to self-advocate, then role-play a scenario focused on self-advocacy, and then prompt your child to self-advocate in a real-life situation. Gradually allow your child to self-advocate independently with minimal support. Give them a lot of support at the beginning and then gradually decrease support when they show they are ready.

More advice from Julia

We're not going to be like 7 forever, which hopefully everyone knows how aging works, but I

think it can feel really scary sometimes, especially when you're working with a younger kid - and they need to develop a lot of skills and it can feel really stressful like their whole future comes down to whether or not in this moment they can be flexible or use a certain skill. And it's really not. You have a lot of time and people keep learning and developing over the course of their lifespan, so it's a critical skill, but the day-to-day moments aren't really what makes or breaks that kind of thing. You have time, it's OK.

Help yourself and your child by cultivating your own strengths and self-advocacy skills.

- Be a role model for your child by demonstrating self-determination skills yourself. Show your child that self-determination skills (e.g., choice-making, decision-making, problem-solving) are valued and important by doing them yourself.
- Be conscientious and purposeful about making decisions and setting goals when your child is around. Make these processes clear and explicit to your child by verbalizing your decision-making or goal-setting process. Model the skills you want your child to use.
- Show your child how to ask others for help. For example, if you need help doing a computer-related task, say out loud, "I'm having a hard time with the computer. I'll ask someone who knows a lot about computers for help."
- Take care of yourself, so you are better able to support your child.

Additional Resources on Self-Advocacy & Self-Determination:

Carter, E. W., Weir, K., Cooney, M., Walter, M. J., & Moss, C. K. (2012). Fostering self-determination among children and youth with disabilities: Lessons from parents. *Exceptional Parent*, 42(3), 13-17.

Robison, J. E. (2011). *Be different: Adventures of a free-range Aspergian*. Doubleday Canada.

Community Resources & Events

Free Parent Support Group

Dr. Dan Shapiro, friend of CASD, will be offering a free parent support group, every Monday at 1 PM EST. To register, [click here](#). [See his website for more details.](#)

New Study at the Kennedy Krieger Institute

Dr. Amy Keefer and colleagues at the Kennedy Krieger Institute are seeking children with suspected autism spectrum disorder and anxiety to participate in a study. [See the flyer for more details and contact info to get involved.](#)

Visit Children's National Hospital's COVID-19 Resources

Resources on Racism/Supporting Black People

[Spectrum Support's Social Stories on Racism](#)

[ASAN's What is Police Violence?: A Plain Language Booklet](#)

[@TheMorganCruise Worksheets for Black Children](#)

COVID-19 Safety Resources

[Behavioral Directions LLC's Safety Teaching Protocol](#)

COVID-19 National and Local Government Resources

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[World Health Organization](#)

[DC Department of Health](#)

[Maryland Department of Health](#)

[Virginia Department of Health](#)

[U.S Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\) Part C Dispute Resolution Procedures](#)

[U.S Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\) Part B Dispute Resolution Procedures](#)