

Ten Things Your Student with Autism Wishes You Knew

This year I have added a new book to my range of resources: *“Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew”* by Ellen Notbohm. Below is Ellen’s 2005 article, Ten Things Your Student with Autism Wishes You Knew, which became the basis for her 2006 book by the same title

1. **Behavior is communication.** All behavior occurs for a reason. It tells you, even when my words can’t, how I perceive what is happening around me. Negative behavior interferes with my learning process. But merely interrupting these behaviors is not enough; teach me to exchange these behaviors with proper alternatives so that real learning can flow. Negative behavior usually means I am overwhelmed by disordered sensory systems, cannot communicate my wants or needs or don’t understand what is expected of me. Look beyond the behavior to find the source of my resistance.
2. **Never assume anything.** Without factual backup, an assumption is only a guess. I may not know or understand the rules. I may have heard the instructions but not understood them. Maybe I knew it yesterday but can’t retrieve it today.
3. **Look for sensory issues first.** A lot of my resistant behaviors come from sensory discomfort. One example is fluorescent lighting, which has been shown over and over again to be a major problem for children like me. The hum it produces is very disturbing to my hypersensitive hearing, and the pulsing nature of the light can distort my visual perception, making objects in the room appear to be in constant movement.
4. **Provide me a break to allow for self-regulation before I need it.** A quiet, carpeted corner of the room with some pillows, books and headphones allows me a place to go to re-group when I feel overwhelmed, but isn’t so far physically removed that I won’t be able to rejoin the activity flow of the classroom smoothly.
5. **Tell me what you want me to do in the positive rather than the imperative.** “You left a mess by the sink!” is merely a statement of fact to me. I’m not able to infer that what you really mean is “Please rinse out your paint cup and put the paper towels in the trash.” Don’t make me guess or have to figure out what I should do.
6. **Keep your expectations reasonable.** That all-school assembly with hundreds of kids packed into bleachers and some guy droning on about the candy sale is uncomfortable and meaningless to me. Maybe I’d be better off helping the school secretary put together the newsletter.
7. **Help me transition between activities.** It takes me a little longer to motor plan moving from one activity to the next. Give me a five-minute warning and a two-minute warning before an activity changes – and build a few extra minutes in on your end to compensate. A simple clock face or timer on my desk gives me a visual cue as to the time of the next transition and helps me handle it more independently.
8. **Don’t make a bad situation worse.** I know that even though you are a mature adult, you can sometimes make bad decisions in the heat of the moment. I truly don’t mean to melt down, show anger or otherwise disrupt your classroom. You can help me get over it more quickly by not responding with inflammatory behavior of your own. Beware of these responses that prolong rather than resolve a crisis, for example: Raising pitch or volume of your voice. I hear the yelling and shrieking, but not the words.
9. **Criticize gently.** Be honest – how good are you at accepting “constructive” criticism? The maturity and self-confidence to be able to do that may be far beyond my abilities right now.
10. **Offer real choices – and only real choices.** Don’t offer me a choice or ask a “Do you want...?” question unless are willing to accept no for an answer. “No” may be my honest answer to “Do you want to read out loud now?”

The last word: believe. Believe that you can make a difference for me. It requires accommodation and adaptation, but autism is an open-ended learning difference. There are no inherent upper limits on achievement. I can sense far more than I can communicate, and the number one thing I can sense is whether you think I “can do it.” Encourage me to be everything I can be, so that I can continue to grow and succeed long after I’ve left your classroom.

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I think this is a book every parent, extended families and teacher of a child with an ASD should read.

Recommended books to support understanding

Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew: By Ellen Notbohm

Framed with both humour and compassion, the book defines the top ten characteristics that illuminate the minds and hearts of children with autism. Ellen’s personal experiences as a parent, an autism columnist, and a contributor to numerous parenting magazines combine to create a guide for all who come in contact with a child on the autism spectrum. A gift of understanding.

CODE B43 \$35 (incl P & H)



Behavior Solutions for the Inclusive Classroom: By Aune, Burt & Gennaro

See a behaviour. Look it up!

This book is a must have for every special needs and inclusive classroom. The easy to use format allows teachers to quickly look up an in-the-moment solution and learn about what the child is communicating, and why. This book illuminates possible causes of those mysterious behaviours, and more importantly provides solutions!

CODE B36 \$35 (incl P & H)

