

Paula's Pointers for Parents/Teachers to Ponder

☐ To parents/guardians:

"Having a child diagnosed on the Autism spectrum can be gut-wrenching. I can't understate the worry and fears and challenges. I can, however, say that no parent can do this alone. You need family support, therapeutic support, school support, and spiritual or other personal support. You must learn to advocate for your child and, hope, that one day that the child, depending upon level of severity, will be able to be his or her own advocate and recognize the ability in disability is what defines him or her."

☐ To teachers/school officials:

"Being educated about exceptionalities is a must. Great teachers not only know about individual differences, differentiated instruction, universal design and so on, they believe in and practice effective teaching strategies for all children. Patience and forgiveness are required! These children can anger and enchant you, sometimes within moments. They can sense quickly whether you like them or not. Your influence often determines whether the child succeeds not just in your class but in their overall school and life success. I cannot thank enough those teachers, school administrators, and staff who believed in my child and to whom he and we owe all."

Other commonsense tips:

- ☐ You can't discipline Asperger's out of a child.
 - ☐ You are expected to be the adult; when a child is having a meltdown, discipline/confrontation will prompt escalation. Learn to take deep breaths, "walk away," and deal with issue once child is under control.
 - ☐ We are not saints. Our patience has limits. Seek the help or "break" you need so you can nurture/teach the child more effectively.
 - ☐ Don't take a child's hurtful remarks personally. Remember, these outbursts are symptomatic of the disorder. If you hold a grudge, all is lost.
 - ☐ Teachers & parents/guardians must not become adversaries. Communicate, cooperate, support. However, if either party becomes a negative influence on the child, classroom, or home environment, seek professional, medical, or legal advice as needed within the school, district, or community.
- ## ☐ Teachers:
- ☐ What do you know about the child's home life? Challenges faced by parents or guardians?
 - ☐ Consider tone and format used for correspondence sent home or during school conferences.
 - ☐ Reconsider why and how much homework is assigned and how a child's understanding of material is assessed.
 - ☐ What happens in your school/classroom culture to value differences and model acceptance?
- ## ☐ Parents:
- ☐ What have you done to help support the teacher, the school?
 - ☐ How do you communicate your concerns or questions? Your child's medical/social history? Strategies that have worked or failed at school or home?
 - ☐ Do you attend IEPs? Have you sought resources available to you and your child?
 - ☐ While I have long-term goals and desires for Taylor, such as independent living, I have learned to set short-term goals. Otherwise, the worries and concerns can become paralyzing. In pre-school, it may have been one hour without spitting or biting. In college, it's passing courses during a semester. All add up to continued progress. When someone asks me about Taylor, my response has always been: "He's perfectly Taylor." I know I have become a more understanding and better teacher because of our family journey.
 - ☐ No child is alike; although research-based behavioral and academic strategies provide a foundation, be prepared to improvise!
 - ☐ I found the books by Ross Greene, *The Explosive Child*, enormously helpful in dealing with behavioral issues.