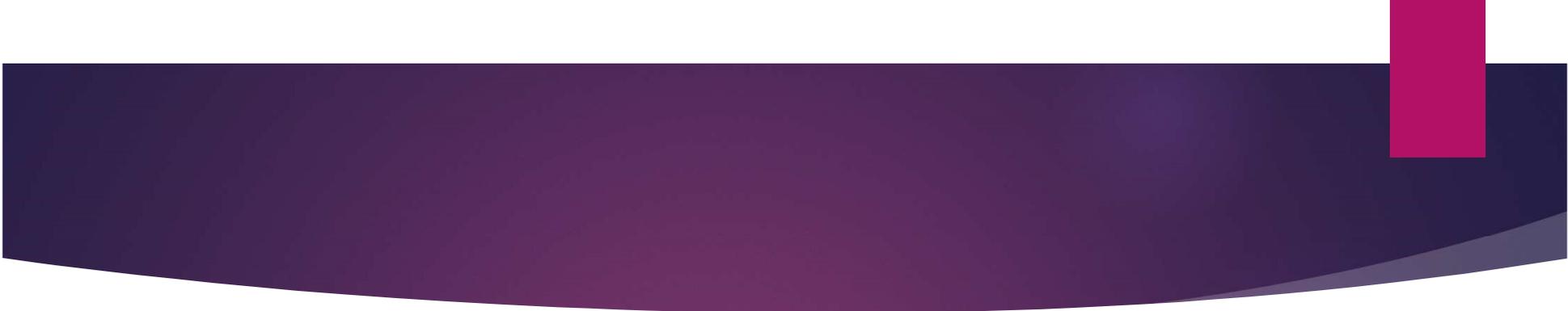




# Homeschooling a Child on the Autism Spectrum



# What We Will Talk About Today

- ▶ A note about “identity first” language.

- ▶ Signs of Autism

- ▶ Our Story:

- ▶ Our Beginning

- ▶ Regression

- ▶ Search for Help

- ▶ ABA Therapy

- ▶ School Years & Homeschool Year

- ▶ Things I’ve Learned

- ▶ Questions and Answers

# What is “identity first” language?

- ▶ This means referring to a person who has autism as *an autistic person* instead of *a person with autism*.
  - ▶ Ex: “My daughter is autistic,” instead of, “My daughter has autism.”
- ▶ I’m occasionally chastised (by a neuro-typical person) for saying that my daughter is autistic instead of calling her a person with autism. But many autistic people choose to refer to themselves as autistic people because autism is a huge part of who they are.
- ▶ Why refer to her as autistic anyway? Why not just say she’s my daughter?
  - ▶ I’ve found that, rather than being a “bad” thing, referring to my daughter as autistic often helps people understand who she is and why she behaves as she does. It helps people know why she’s different and (usually) helps them feel more comfortable around her.
  - ▶ If people aren’t knowledgeable about autism, it allows them to ask questions and get more information without feeling like I’ll be offended.

## Signs of Autism

- ▶ It can be hard for parents to know whether their child's behavior is normal or if it might be an indication of a problem.
- ▶ On the next slide are some questions to ask yourself if you're trying to determine if your child might be on the autism spectrum.
- ▶ These signs do not necessarily mean that your child has autism, but I suggest having your child evaluated by a professional if you see the majority of these signs/behaviors.

# Signs of Autism

- ▶ Has your child regressed?
- ▶ Does he/she respond to speech/language?
- ▶ Is your child able to pretend?
- ▶ Is he/she able to understand pointing?
- ▶ Does your child play with other children?
- ▶ Does he/she enjoy showing/giving you things to make you happy/proud?
- ▶ Can he/she imitate you or others?
- ▶ Does he/she have self-stim behaviors?

## Beginning & Regression

- ▶ When Hannah was born, she seemed healthy and fine except for a problem with sleep apnea.
- ▶ Regressed at about 15 months.
  - ▶ Lost language.
  - ▶ Lost eye contact.
  - ▶ No longer understood what we said to her.
  - ▶ Stopped interacting/playing/etc.
  - ▶ Became a different child.

# Search for Help

- ▶ There wasn't much help for autistic children back then, so I set out to find out how to help her myself.
- ▶ Some of the more widely-used therapies available now are:
  - ▶ ABA Therapy (Applied Behavioral Analysis)
  - ▶ Verbal Behavior Therapy
  - ▶ Cognitive Behavior Therapy
  - ▶ Floortime
  - ▶ Social Skills Groups
  - ▶ Physical and Occupation Therapy
  - ▶ Speech Therapy
  - ▶ PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)
  - ▶ Communication Devices



# Picture Exchange System



# Communication Device

This interface is divided into three main sections: General, Planning, and Talking About. The General section includes icons for 'Whose turn?', 'Why?', 'Like', 'This is so fun!', 'My turn', 'Play again', 'That was the best game ever!', 'Don't like', 'I don't want to play again.', and 'Your turn', 'Stop', 'I am tired of this one.'. The Planning section features a calendar icon. The Talking About section features a speech bubble icon. A sidebar on the left contains navigation options: TOPICS, QUICKPHRASES, QUICK PHRASES, CORE, WORD LISTS, KEYBOARD, and DASHBOARD. At the bottom, there are buttons for TOPICS, GAMES, and GENERAL.

This interface shows a grid of words and phrases. The top row includes a 'SPEAK' button, a 'DELETE WORD' button, a 'CHAT' button, a 'SEND' button, and a 'CLEAR' button. The grid contains the following words and phrases: what, I, is, want, need, not, a, an, Personal, who, you, can, like, know, more, and, at, Places, where, it, do, go, come, stop, the, because, Feelings, when, he, have, help, let, take, that, but, All Forms, People, why, she, will, put, feel, think, this, for, Actions, how, we, give, get, find, see, to, from, Date & Time, which, my, make, tell, say, read, with, of, All Word Lists, how many, me, might, try, eat, drink, in, or, ?

## Decided to Use ABA Therapy

- ▶ After researching my options, I decided to use ABA Therapy to get her ready for school.
  - ▶ I taught her:
    - ▶ To sit in a chair
    - ▶ To pay attention
    - ▶ To take turns
    - ▶ Imitation skills

## ABA Therapy

- ▶ As she made progress, I moved on to teaching her:
  - ▶ Letters
  - ▶ Colors
  - ▶ Numbers
  - ▶ Objects
- ▶ Once I thought I had taught her enough that she could function in a classroom setting, I sent her to school so “the experts” could teach her.

# School Years

Classroom for “severely and profoundly disabled children”

- Happy beginnings
- Behavior
- Attitude
- Resistance to doing school work

Regular-ed class with an assistant

- Boredom
- Lack of motivation
- Frustration began to carry over to home environment

# School Years

- ▶ I began to realize more and more that the “expert” Hannah needed was me!
- ▶ If I'd known how hard it would be or the trials I would face, I might have chosen not to homeschool, and I would have missed out on so very many blessings along the way!
- ▶ I had no idea how hard, humbling, and scary it would be. I also had no idea how wonderful, rewarding, and life-changing it would be for the whole family!

# Homeschool Years

- ▶ Did I feel confident that I could do a great job teaching Hannah at home?
- ▶ Did I feel like I had the time to teach her at home?
- ▶ Did I feel like I knew enough to teach her at home?
  
- ▶ The answer to all of these questions is no.

# Some of the Things I've Learned over the Years



There are certain things that most autistic children need in order to learn successfully. And there are things we as parents need to know in order to successfully homeschool them.

1. They need to be taught in a systematic, clear, engaging, repetitious way.
2. They may never be on the same academic or social levels as their neuro-typical peers. They may. But they may not.
3. It can take them weeks or months to learn what a neurotypical child can learn in hours or days.
4. They need to learn in a low-pressure environment so they can enjoy learning and feel successful.
5. They need to learn in a gentle, loving environment.



6. They need the freedom to take breaks and de-stress. (And so do we.)

7. They may need the freedom to move around and be active during learning time.

8. They will often live down to low expectations! We have to show them that we know they are capable of learning.

9. They don't all respond to the same kinds of teaching and learning situations. I will give ideas and suggestions, and you have to figure out what works best for your child.

10. You cannot teach the autism out of your child.

▶ 11. Negative consequences often don't work well when teaching autistic children.

▶ 12. It's usually more helpful to focus on increasing the behaviors and outcomes you DO want and less time focusing on decreasing the behaviors and outcomes you DON'T want.



# Advantages to Homeschooling

- ▶ Even though it's not easy, there are advantages to homeschooling your autistic child!
  - ▶ It's easier to work around appointments and therapies.
  - ▶ It allows you to spend time enjoying your child.
  - ▶ It allows your autistic child to be part of the family—especially if you homeschool the other children.

# Questions and Answers

What curriculum is best for children on the autism spectrum?

How do I teach my non-verbal child and know if he/she is learning?

What if my child refuses to do school work or gets frustrated by it?

What about ABA Therapy? Does it cause PTSD? Is it a good idea or a terrible idea?

How much should I work on academics and how much should I work on self-help skills?

How do I teach a non-verbal child to communicate?

How do I prepare my autistic child for group work or co-op?

- 
- ▶ How much do you worry about grade level and speed of progression?
  - ▶ How do you handle teaching your autistic child and your other children and give all of them everything they need?
  - ▶ How do you take care of yourself while homeschooling and caring for an autistic child and other children?
  - ▶ Can you get services through the local public school if you homeschool?