

Amazing Parenting Tricks for Raising Aspergers Children

Amazing or not, raising a child with Aspergers will take a few "tricks of the trade" that you wouldn't need to have "up your sleeve" were you raising a "typical" child. If you are at your wits end - and need a few fresh ideas in dealing with behavioral issues, then take notes:

1. When it comes to getting your Aspie to do chores, consider the "hiring a substitute" method. Your child may choose to hire someone to do his chore (e.g., by paying a wage of \$1.00 he has saved from an allowance), or mutually agree to trade chores with a sibling.
2. Have your Aspergers child rehearse new behaviors. In addition to telling your child the correct way to do something, have him/her rehearse it (e.g., dealing with bullies, not slamming the door when entering a room, walking through the house rather than running).
3. Ignore behavior that will not harm your Aspie (e.g., bad habits, bad language, arguing with a sibling). It's hard to do nothing, but this lack of attention takes away the very audience your youngster is seeking.
4. Many Aspergers children have trouble with transitions. Discuss in advance what is expected. Give plenty of warnings. Have the youngster repeat out loud the terms he just agreed to. Some kids need to negotiate for that "can I have one more minute?" A little extra patience on the parent's part may help avoid a useless meltdown.
5. Parents can be decisive. Some parents have always been indecisive about what course of action to try with their child. They jump from one parenting technique to the other without giving any one technique enough time to be effective, or they try a new parenting technique once and then give up in frustration because it didn't work. Some parents will say, "We've tried everything and nothing works with this kid." What I usually see is parents floating from one parenting tool to another without sticking with one particular tool for a significant period of time.
6. Parents can practice humility. When you are wrong, quickly admit this to your child. This will model (a) making amends and (b) that it's safe to make mistakes. "Admitting your mistakes" teaches your child to respect others.
7. Parents can use 'reverse' psychology. For example, "That's not like you ...you're able to do much better." This line works because your kid will live up – or down – to your expectations.
8. Parents can use humor to deal with family-stress. For example: Instead of reacting to your kid's temper tantrum, start singing, "The hills are alive with sound of music..."
9. Post a list of jobs that need to be done, such as washing the car, weeding the garden, etc. Let your child choose a "work detail" as a way to "make up" for rule violations.
10. Remember that Aspergers kids want structure. Most Aspies are actually starved for structure – it helps them feel safe.
11. Sometimes (depending on the child's temperament), one of the worst things a parent of an Aspergers child can say is, "If you do that one more time, you'll be disciplined." You may find that your youngster will be irresistibly drawn to do just that, at once -- whether because you've set an impulse in motion, because he can't deal with the stress of waiting for the other shoe to drop, or because he gets stuck on what you've said. Instead of specifying "one more time," try saying, "I have a number of times in my head, and you're not going to know what that number is. But when you hit that number, you will get a punishment." This gives your youngster a few extra chances if he seems to be trying without going back on a threat, and it gives him a little comfort zone to know that he can slip-up once or twice. Some children will dislike the uncertainty of this approach, and for them, this might not be the best strategy. But if certainty is more pressure than your youngster can handle, this trick may be helpful in most cases.

12. Tell your youngster your predictions regarding the negative outcomes of his poor choices (use labels when needed). For example: "If you continue to steal, people will call you a 'thief', and when things come up missing, they will blame you." -- or -- "If you continue to lie, people will call you a 'liar', and even if you tell them the truth, they won't believe you." When your predictions come true, your Aspergers child will begin to trust your judgment.

13. The life of an Aspergers youngster can often be overwhelming. The treatment for his over-reaction is to defuse the situation, not inflame it. When tempers flare, allow everyone to cool off. Remember, the parent may have to cool off as well. Serious discussion can only occur during times of composure. Remember: "bad" behavior usually occurs because the Aspie is spinning out of control, not because he is evil.

14. Think of your Aspergers youngster as a train with an "anxiety speedometer." When that speedometer reaches 70 mph, it's going to take a long time to stop that train. The goal is to keep your child from coming anywhere close to 70 mph. Now, imagine you enter the room when the youngster is at an anxiety level of 50 mph. For your Aspie, the stress of the current situation is getting to him. What can you do to slow that train down before it gathers momentum? Laugh, divert, distract, negotiate, or anything else you can think of – and the speedometer comes down to 30 mph (assuming you have cleverly disguised your intervention).

15. Tie what you 'want' to what he 'needs' (e.g., "When you come home from school on time, then you can have a friend over").

16. When behavior starts turning ugly, redirect to a positive direction rather than criticizing the "misbehavior" (e.g., if your youngster is fighting with a sibling, then suggest a new activity like having a snack, rather than handing out a consequence).

17. Do not shield your Aspie from the results of her choices unless it puts her in danger. For example:

- Child doesn't go to bed on time >>> she gets up and goes to school anyway even though she's tired and sleepy
- Child doesn't study for her math test >>> she fails
- Child doesn't maintain her bicycle >>> it falls apart and she walks thereafter

18. Consequences can be by parental design. For example:

- Child leaves her toiletries in disarray throughout the bathroom each school morning >>> after forewarning is ignored, parent confiscates all items for a period of time (technique works with clothes and toys as well)

19. Parents can rearrange space. Try creative solutions. For example:

- If school notes and homework are misplaced, assign a special table or counter for materials
- If chores are forgotten, post a chart with who does what when

20. Parents can use adjustment. Here are several ways to adjust:

- Realize the same discipline may not work in all situations because of the unique features of Aspergers
- Try to blend a combination of several parenting tools to create a more effective discipline
- Don't believe it when your child seems unaffected by discipline. Aspies often pretend discipline doesn't bother them. Continue to be persistent with your planned discipline, and consider yourself successful by keeping your parenting plan in place. When a child pretends a discipline doesn't bother him, parents often give up on a discipline, which reinforces the child's disobedience. Remember, you can only control your actions, not your child's reactions.