

JANUARY 2019



# THE BLUE UMBRELLA *collective*



*inaugural issue*

# THE BLUE UMBRELLA COLLECTIVE

INAUGURAL ISSUE  
JANUARY 2019

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## OUR NAME

### BLUE:

blue is the color of trust. it is sincere, reliable and tranquil. blue reduces stress and creates a sense of calmness, it enhances communication and conveys wisdom.

### UMBRELLA:

the umbrella is all encompassing, it is a protecting force, an enveloping shelter. the umbrella is something that covers many different elements, concepts, and subjects. it is an all inclusive agent offering sanctuary for those impacted.

### COLLECTIVE:

a cooperative enterprise, an aggregate with a unified goal. people acting with combined efforts towards a shared end point. a group coming together where individuals have a unique elements to contribute.

# *collective credo*

\* WE SPREAD KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE,  
AND EXPERTISE

\* WE ARE COMMITTED TO MAKING  
INFORMATION MORE ACCESSIBLE

\* WE ARE A COMMUNITY THAT CELEBRATES  
THE HIGHS AND SUPPORTS THE LOWS

\* WE OFFER SOLIDARITY ON THE JOURNEY  
OF EMBRACING DIFFERENT

\* WE PLEDGE TO PROMOTE ACCEPTANCE  
AND AWARENESS



TURN  
YOUR  
dreams  
into  
reality



erin  
condren



MARCH  
FEBRUARY  
JANUARY  
DECEMBER  
APRIL

march 2018

26 MONDAY ☐ 6:00- Yoga

- 10:00- status meeting
- 12:30- staff lunch
- 4:00- Finance Meeting

HELL  
LOVE

27 TUESDAY ☐ Pick-up dry cleaning!

- 10:30- Team Brainstorm
- 12:00- Lunch w/ Lauren
- 2:00- call w/ John

AWESOME

TAC  
TUESDAY  
@ Restaurant

28 WEDNESDAY ☐ 6:00- Yoga

- 9:00- Dentist Appointment
- 11:00- Marketing call
- 3:30- PRESENTATION!

REMINDER

YOU  
GOT THIS

29 THURSDAY ♻️ TRASH DAY!

- 11:30- call w/ TX office
- 2:00- Department Meeting

BOOK  
CLUB  
@ 7:00

SIGNATURE *Coiled* LifePlanner™



# *publishers note*

Throughout my experiences as a professional in the field of early/childhood education and development, there has been a common thread: Everyone is looking for more. More information. More explanation. More strategies. More solidarity. More inspiration. More to help the children they've devoted their lives and careers to.

So this is more. A forum for parents, educators, and therapists to find and share knowledge, experience, and expertise in all areas of childhood development.

Through a digital magazine we can disseminate more knowledge to more people than we ever could have reached as individuals. With this digital format you can consume information in different styles; reading, listening and watching. You also get to connect with the contributors and discover what else they offer to help your littles.

We aren't just a magazine.

We are a Collective.

Welcome to our Inaugural Issue.

*-foni*



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Everyday Autism Series



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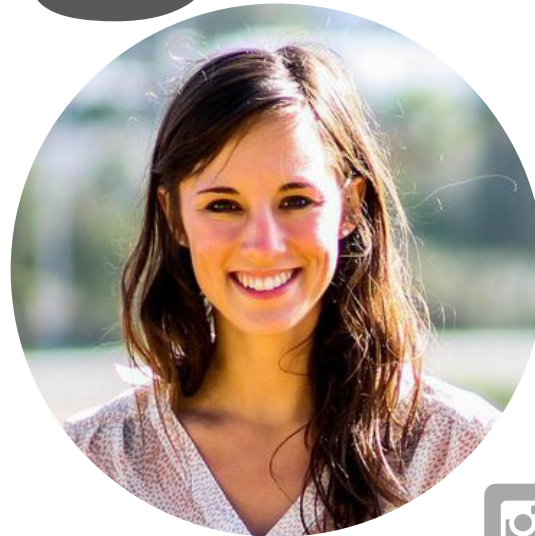


# What's in the bag



## EXECUTIVE FUNCTION GAMES EDITION

BY: HANNAH ROSS  
EDUCATIONAL THERAPY



*It's more than just a fad, your executive function is basically "the CEO of your brain."*



Executive functioning has recently become a catchphrase in the world of education. Executive functioning is the ability to organize and manage your thoughts and actions in order to complete a task. Working memory, flexible thinking, organization, task initiation, attention, planning, prioritization, self-monitoring, and impulse control are all considered executive functioning skills. Kids and adults use these skills throughout their day to get things done successfully.

Like any skill, executive functioning can be strengthened. Luckily practicing these skills can be fun for the whole family! These are ten of my favorite games to use to strengthen skills in different areas of executive functioning. You may even have some of these around the house already!

---

### *Working Memory & Sustained Attention*



#### Distraction

Players practice recall skills by taking turns drawing cards and remembering a string of numbers while being interrupted by silly questions.



#### Simon

In this classic electronic game, players have to remember a sequence of colored lights and tones. Try to beat your best score or play against your friends!



#### Cartoon It!

Memorize a goofy cartoon picture, then draw it from memory! This game not only strengthens memory and drawing skills, but provides an opportunity to discuss strategies that aid in memorization.



## Planning, Organization & Problem-Solving



### Rush Hour

Plan how to move cars strategically to get out of the traffic jam.  
Easy set up with levels for players of all ages.



### Clue

Find out who did it! Players use strategic planning to ask questions and organize information as they race to be the first one to solve the crime.



### Cat Crimes

A kinesthetic logic puzzle with four different challenge levels. Players use sequential reasoning, logic, and organization skills to find the cat who committed the crime. An added bonus is strengthening reading comprehension skills!



### Settlers of Catan

Build and develop settlements as you trade resources and earn victory points. This challenging game requires a great amount of strategic planning and logical thinking. Great for middle school age and above.

---

## Flexible Thinking



### Set

In this fast moving, family game of visual perception, players create "sets" of three cards where each feature is the same or different. This game builds logical thinking, as well as visual-spatial reasoning skills.



### Swish

Players compete to find the most "swish" matches where each ball fits into a hoop, strengthening spatial awareness and requiring players to look at shapes and patterns in different ways.

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## Impulse Control

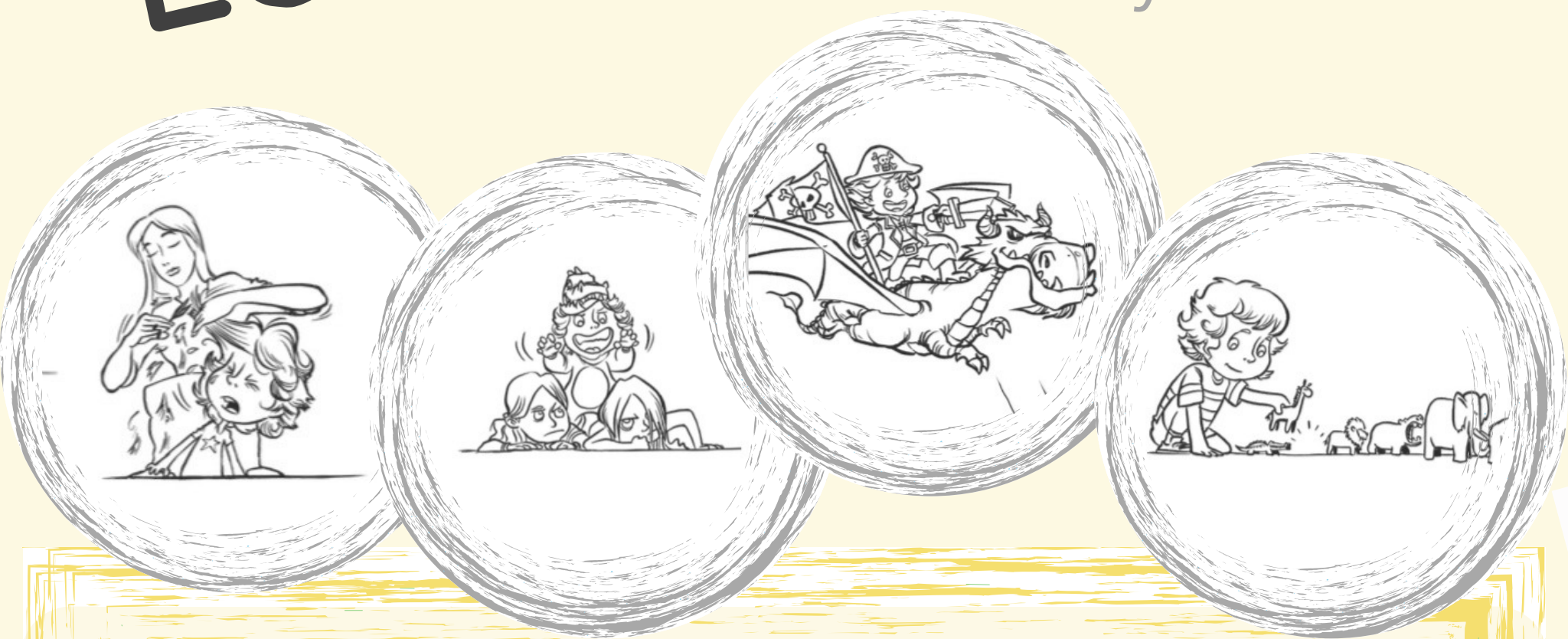


### Jenga

This classic game requires turn-taking and patience as players work collaboratively to make the tallest tower. Add some academic skills to this game by writing math facts or sight words on the individual wooden pieces.

Curly haired Thomas is very independent. He has a creative imagination and loves to explore the outdoors, but he is confronted by a lot of heightened sensory responses that affect how he responds to noise, crowds, and change in all other aspects of life.

# LOOK at the world through Thomas's eyes!



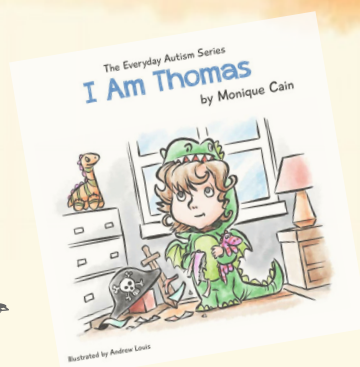
"These books help us to explain autism to our students in a very practical and caring way." -Gill Wright, Principal

## The Everyday Autism Series by Monique Cain

I have a gift that they call autism  
But I hope that you will see  
That I am a person just like you  
And I'm happy being me.

I am Thomas.

*click here to  
shop!* →





# TIPS & with TRICKS

COR is an ABA and Autism Service provider in NY, NJ & MO. They offer ABA, parent training, early intervention (ei), multidiscipline training, center-based programming, and these fantastic videos!



*click to watch*



*Communicating with Healthcare Providers*

— THE COR —  
BEHAVIORAL GROUP

**Autism Services, ABA Therapy, and Adaptive Fitness**

[www.corbehavioral.com](http://www.corbehavioral.com)

# TRENDING STEADY

LOOKING FOR AVENUES TO CONNECT?  
WANT TO FIND AN EXPERT ON A CERTAIN TOPIC?

WE'VE CURATED A FEW OF OUR FAVORITES WHO ARE  
CLIMBING THE CHARTS. FOLLOW, JOIN, FRIEND, OR  
SUBSCRIBE TO THESE ACCOUNTS AND GET TO KNOW THESE  
AWESOME PEOPLE!

*instagram*



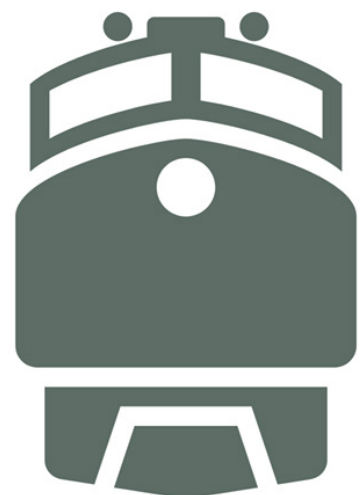
@HOLDINGMOONBEAMS

Hollyce Hammond shares beautiful photos of her "specially blended family". Hollyce's posts show little H's winsome character and the love from older siblings, T&E. Hollyce also commits herself to sharing current information about Down Syndrome and sends followers to other accounts featuring the T21 community.

FINDING COOPER'S VOICE

Kate shares snippets of life with her son, Cooper, who has nonverbal autism. Kate provides strength and support for so many others who are on this journey. Her gift for the written word touches readers and her videos show you what words cannot. From Kate's perspective we see Cooper as the fun, silly, amazing boy he is!

*facebook*



## blogger



### DOUBLING DOWN MOM

The Prescotts. A blessed family of 6, sharing their beauty with the world. Annette and Charlotte, affectionately known as "Nettie" and "Lottie", identical twins with Down Syndrome, will capture your heart. Their mom, Rachael, will inspire you with her strength, faith, and honesty. Even dad, Cody, shares his extraordinary family on Instagram @doublingdowndad

### THE DYSLEXIA QUEST PODCAST

Elisheva Schwartz has devoted her career to Dyslexia. She hosts a weekly podcast featuring guests with expertise in all areas related to Dyslexia. Elisheva's passion is evident in her shows as she empowers her listeners whether they experience Dyslexia personally, or as a parent or educator.

## podcast



## pinterest



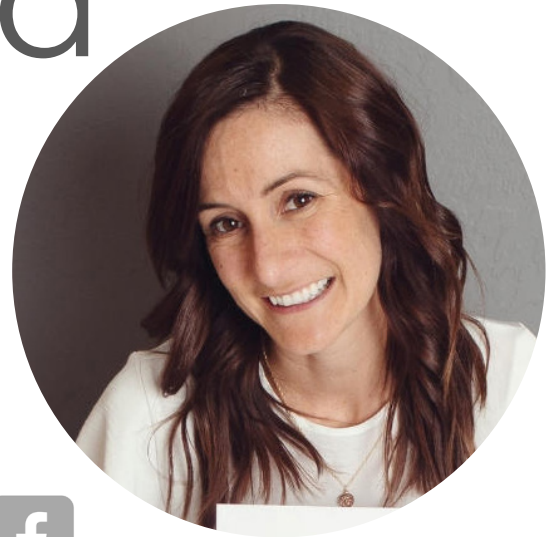
### MAMA OT

Christie became a mom and an OT around the same time 8yrs ago. Each role gives Christie a unique perspective and allows her to evolve as a mom and a therapist. On pinterest, Christie has great inspiration boards for parents, educators, and therapists alike! Also, don't forget to check out Christie's blog for more information and freebies.



# How To Get Your Child To Behave

BY: STEVIE CLARK  
EDUCATION OPTIMIST



## A well-behaved child... What does this really mean anyway?

We all have a different idea of what well-behaved means, so let's start by looking at the definition of behavior, "the way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially towards others."

Misbehavior can quickly overwhelm us as parents and teachers, but it's important to take a step back. As a Montessori educator and parent, I view a child's misbehavior through the same lens as myself as an adult. What causes adults to misbehave?

### BECOME A DETECTIVE

Much of the time, the root of misbehavior is due to a specific need not being met. For example, if you don't feel valued at work, you may rebel or at the very least not give it your all. Maybe you find yourself getting into small arguments with your partner when it doesn't feel like they're listening or it feels like you're never a priority.

Well my friends, I've spent years watching, observing, and guiding children, and I can tell you the root of their misbehavior is not much different than ours.

However, my strategies are never a one-size-fits-all, and only you know your situation and your child

the best. If you think you may need to seek medical help for an issue you are navigating through, by all means you should follow your motherly intuition.

But if you just keep finding yourself scratching your head wishing you had more strategies, read on.

### A CALL FOR HELP

Throughout the day, our little ones can find themselves hungry, sleep-deprived, unsure of boundaries, overwhelmed with a task that's just beyond their skill set, and wanting love and attention. We as adults are really not that different from our children.

So when your child starts misbehaving, try to take a moment to think about their needs.

*-Do you need to give them a little more one-on-one quality time?*

*-Do they need a snack?*

*-Are they struggling because they're tired?*

If you feel all of these requirements have been met and you're still getting behavior you don't appre-

ciate (aka you're on the verge of losing it), the next place to look is at yourself. Yes sweet mama, I'm talking to you. I'm guilty too..

### IT STARTS WITH OUR ENERGY

Sometimes I get so frustrated with my child's behavior I want to pull my hair out and I forget to look at myself. How is my energy? Am I in a good mood? If you think about a time where you went to work and your co-worker was in a really rotten mood or your boss was really "on one" and you just really didn't want to get in their way, then you'll have a good idea of what your child is experiencing when you're not centered, balanced, and in a calm mood.

### WHAT ARE YOU MODELING?

Now before you start to panic, this does not mean that we have to be happy, perfect moms 24 hours per day. There is even merit in modeling to your child how to get through a bad mood. What we can do is to continually check-in with ourselves and our needs. Are you continually putting yourself last? Are you continually doing everything for everyone else? Do you often talk yourself out of doing something for yourself, because you just don't have the time?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, I'd highly encourage you to explore some internal work to find your balance. Once you find your balance, it's likely your child will too, and that misbehavior has a great chance of melting away.

## Kids Crafts for a Cause



[littlelovinghands.com](http://littlelovinghands.com)  
KIDS' CRAFTS SUPPORTING A PHILANTHROPIC CAUSE

Kids Crafts for a Cause

[Start Crafting »](#)







loog

Kids' Guitar Reimagined





# The Inside Scoop

## RHYTHM OF YOUR DRUM



THU BORJAS  
RHYTHM OF YOUR DRUM



*An Inclusive Special Needs program incorporating drums, music, and movement to facilitate social and communication skills.*



### **C: What is Rhythm of Your Drum?**

**Rhythm:** Rhythm of Your Drum is a socialized education program that helps facilitate communication skills, social skills and functional access skills in kids with special needs.

### **C: What is your background that led you down this path?**

**Rhythm:** I really believe in the divine timing of things, professionally I am a special education teacher, I have an educational specialist credential in moderate to severe disabilities. I've been in the field

for about 11 years.

In 2013 I started feeling that I wanted more, and the more that I did research, the more I wanted to implement different things in my classroom and because I worked at a non-public school we were told to follow the curriculum, do not deter from it. That did not feel good to me, I needed that creative freedom. I remember saying out loud, is there something more meant for me? I need some sort of sign.

That year, I was about three months away from my wedding,

and, my engagement ring was stolen. I see it now as a blessing in disguise, had it not been for that, I would have never left the classroom, because I loved my program, I loved my students. I ended up resigning from that position realizing that I wanted something more, and this was the exact something I had been asking for to push me in another path.

During the summer of 2013, I was put in contact with a gentleman in the field, and I fell in love with his passion for using the drums as a way to help facilitate communica-

tion. He said why don't you come out to the training, it's in Santa Barbara for 3 days, and at the end of it he ended up offering me a job in LA. I thought to myself this is perfect, it was so eye opening, being able to help facilitate communication in kids who are completely nonverbal, seeing the light within them, there is something so powerful about that. 🎧 That is what ignited my passion. I already had it in me in my classroom, but I wasn't sure how to spark that because I didn't come from a music background, most of my experience is in using ABA which is the complete opposite of what I am doing with music. I really believe that all that led me to building what I have now. I used to be really shy about saying what I do, when parents ask me "Are you a music therapist?" I found myself really hiding because I thought I don't have a music credential, who am I to say this? But now I can say with a full heart I am an educator, I use music, rhythm and the drums as a way to help facilitate communication. This is what I know and this is what I love, and I do it because I love it. 🎧



**C: What does a typical session look like for you?**

**Rhythm:** Typically about 45min, we start off with a song, often I get a musical request like Taylor Swift. As a way to get the blood flowing, we identify our body parts,

we practice our imitation skills, I have everyone find their names on their drums and I refer to our visual schedule. I have found the visual schedule has been so helpful in alleviating anxiety and tantrums. We review events, and move through our activities of the day like movement, calendar, drums, colors, letters, name recognition, and social interactions like eye contact, greeting others, and responding to others.



**C: How do you keep parents involved? Are the parents shy, or are they ready to dive right in?**

**Rhythm:** Most of the parents I tend to attract, they are ready to go. They want to learn, they want to really do everything, all things for their kid. I find that kind of energy is so inspiring, it's so easy to connect with a parent and say ok let's try this and once they say "Okay, I'm open to it", that's my in. There's times when I find a student isn't really engaging in the drum so I have to start thinking outside the box. We may start off with the drum, and if it's not engaging for him, I pull out my magical box of techniques and strategies I learned while in the classroom.

**C: Where are your classes offered?**

**Rhythm:** Right now I offer my classes in centers and I also offer private one on one sessions in home.

**C: Who do your classes serve?**

**Rhythm:** Most of the students that

attend my classes are between 4yrs and 12yrs, some of my pre-school level students don't have a diagnosis, but there may be a language impairment that hasn't really been diagnosed. Other students have the diagnosis of Autism, Down Syndrome, CP, or ADHD. So most of my students are students with special needs as well as children at the preschool level learning foundations of academics, being able to follow directions, match colors, sequencing, etc.

**C: What skills do your classes target?**

**Rhythm:** Imitation skills in terms of following the rhythm, social skills, being able to say hello to the peer sitting next to you, asking for their name, saying it's your turn, waiting their turn, following directions. Following a schedule.

**C: What is your why?**

**Rhythm:** My intention in creating this program is to help create the environment where students can find their voice, however they communicate whether it's using sign language, whether it's using an adaptive device, I want it to really help students to find their voice and know that they have a voice that matters and they are worthy of being loved and seen. 🎧

Something that I find so powerful is when a student knows the value of using their voice, it can be life changing. Whether it's using PECS, or any other type of communication. I really want to create this space where they feel safe, that they feel included, that they have a sense of belonging, despite how they communicate, that they matter, that they are valued. 🎧

**C: What is your favorite part of your job?**

**Rhythm:** All of it! If I have to choose one thing it would be seeing the confidence and the joy in each one of my students.



C: What is your favorite quote to live by?

Rhythm: "Do all things with great love" -Mother Theresa. Saying it out loud, I feel the energy that comes with those words, there's power in them.

click to watch





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# TOP *five*

WITH EASY SPEECHIE



## Activities to Get Your Little One Communicating

JULIA MORA  
EASY SPEECHIE

A simple fact of life is that communication is easily one of the most important and most basic human rights. But unfortunately, it doesn't come as easy to all of us.

If I've learned anything from my experience working with children, it's that they are all completely different. What works for one child won't always work for another, and unfortunately, there is no cookie-cutter method of teaching to ensure they learn when and what you want.

So, how can you get your child to communicate with you?

First, they need motivation. If they're not interested in what you have to offer, chances are they won't have anything to say about it. That's why it's important to spend time with your child and get to know their interests. Try experimenting with different games, activities, and materials to see what catches their attention most. Introduce them to new toys and learn about their likes and dislikes.

Once you find out what works, use that knowledge to your advantage! Here are the top five most effective activities that I use in my therapy sessions.

### ONE

#### CAUSE & EFFECT

Cause and effect toys are a great place to start for language development because it helps children realize that their actions have an effect on their environment, similar to communication (pointing or using words to get something). Before using language, kids need to understand this concept in order to learn that they can control their environment with their words. Depending on the toy or activity, you can use words like "want," "more," "push," "twist," "open," "close," "in," "out," "bye-bye," "up," "down," etc. The goal here is to match cause and effect activities with language, and then generalize it to other areas!

### TWO

#### TOY SETS

(Such as car/train sets or doll houses) - This is definitely one of my favorite activities for both boys and girls, because they are filled with so many language opportunities! First, start off with keeping the toys in a box closed tight enough so your child won't be able to open it on their own. Before opening, knock on the box a few times and say "open". Prompt your child to do the same or to request "help" before opening it. Once open, have your child request the individual pieces before giving it to them. Model what you want your child to do/say (for example, "car," "more," or "want"). Using simple sign language also counts as communicating!

Start off very simple, with single words before moving on to two words. Cars and trains are also perfect for learning colors, counting, and working on environmental sounds “choo choo” or “beep”. Say them while playing, the sillier you sound the more likely your child is to attempt it!

## THREE BUBBLES

I’m not sure who likes them more: me or the kids. But I do know that most kiddos are extremely motivated by them! Use them to have the child request “open”, “blow,” “more,” or “my turn” and to say “pop, pop, pop” when popping them. Bubbles are also a great way to work on increasing utterance length. For example, once the child is able to say “more” independently, prompt them to say “more bubbles,” then “I want more,” and then “I want more bubbles please”. Very simple and so much fun!

## FOUR FOOD

Who doesn’t love a nice sweet treat every once in a while? I love using edible reinforcers in my sessions since they are a huge motivator, and perfect for requesting “more,” “I want,” or “yummy”. Treats are nice, but this can also be practiced during regular meal time! In addition to naming food, talk about the color, smell, temperature, and texture of what they’re eating. This also works for picky eaters by allowing them to play with the food and feel it with their hands. Once your child is done, or if they’re not interested, cue them to say “all done” or “bye-bye” before taking the food away.

## FIVE MUSIC/SINGING

Not only does music make my sessions way more fun, it also keeps kids engaged! I play a preferred song on my tablet and encourage my kids to sing along. Every few seconds, I pause the song and have them request “more” or “go”. Another good idea is to have them play along with toy instruments. This adds many more vocabulary opportunities (“bang,” “loud,” “quiet,” “play,” “shake”). After listening and singing along with a song, sing it acapella again, slowly, so they can hear each word clearly. Also, try pausing and having them fill in the missing word. Be sure to pause long enough to give them enough time to process!

Keep in mind that activities don’t need to be tangible. A simple game of “peek-a-boo” or turning on and off the lights can also get your child excited and babbling! It’s also important to note that all children are different and will reach milestones at their own pace. Being patient and consistent is key!

# made of

MADE TO BE simple,  
safe and transparent









# wiser over time

I am the mother of two very special children: Madi and Thomas.  
Every parent knows that their children are special... But ours really are!  
They are both beautiful, and they are both autistic.







BY: MONIQUE CAIN  
THE EVERYDAY AUTISM SERIES



At the time our first child was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, in early 2012, we had absolutely no idea what it was all about or to the extent it was going to affect all of our lives. Our lives then took another major turn and our hearts were broken again, when our second child was also diagnosed with ASD in early 2014. Autism then pretty much consumed our whole lives... We had to learn, develop and adapt different strategies to survive.

*ignore societies unwritten  
rules and appreciate all the  
little things in life*

- Monique Cain, Everyday Autism Series

The last 7 years have been extremely mentally challenging. We have experienced a vast range of emotions. Over that time, we have learned to think differently, lower expectations, ignore societies unwritten rules and appreciate all the little things in life and reassess what is really important to us and our family.

Every child is different. Every parent is different. We certainly haven't done everything right or probably possible but we have done the very best that we could at the time.

I truly believe that time is a major factor, on so many different levels. Giving your children more time to feel more comfortable in this world, in their surroundings and in their own skin. More time given to learn, to show their strengths, to find what they are good at or what they actually love.

My daughter Madi is now 9, reading at probably a 6 or 7-year-old level, but this is from a little girl that was still pretty much non-verbal and struggling to speak a few years ago. Nor did she have the attention span to even have a book read to her when little, now she is reading to us...

For a special needs parents, it can take more time to really get to know your children's likes, dislikes and triggers. Like cutting the seeds out of watermelon, putting their socks on inside out and cutting off the tags from their underwear.

It takes time to get to know how and when to push or expect more.

Time to work out what to do, who to see. Over time things change and then you need to reassess your situation.

When the kids were first diagnosed, I wasn't at the point where I could bring myself to read a lot of helpful information, nor was I comfortable attending any sort of presentations. It would have been extremely beneficial, but I just wasn't ready

mentally or comfortable in those settings.

Now I try to attend as many as I can when possible. I always gain valuable knowledge from each seminar I attend. Even if I have heard a lot of similar information before, it is a good reminder and reassures me that we are on the right track and doing the best that we can.

I attended an 'I Can' seminar recently, with an organisation that focuses on what children can do rather than what they can't. The organisation is run by people on the spectrum, so it was very interesting and insightful.

Two things really resonated with me. The first was to make sure your child has a good support network, apart from their parents.

We have been so lucky to have both sets of grandparents that have been so loving, supportive and hands on, so the kids are very comfortable with them. Both kids have also had extremely caring and invested therapists and aides along the way, that have been reliable and special people in their lives too. Initially, it was hard to let go and trust other people to take care of your child, especially when they were experiencing intense meltdowns but everyone involved needs' support.

The second thing was to follow and encourage your child's loves and interests regardless of how strange or left field they may seem. Which I also feel like we have done, especially with my daughter singing and dancing.

In the beginning, she didn't have the attention span to follow dance classes and had extremely limited speech, let alone sing, but we persisted. Every year she is continuing to improve and is clearly loving it!

**Another thing we have learnt is to always be prepared.**

Make sure you have a plan and a back-up plan in case things don't go as planned. Have a 'survival backpack' with your child's favourite toys, snacks, a change of clothes, wipes, I pad, anything that calms them down, can distract or entertain them if need, everywhere you go! You just never know when something may trigger an unexpected meltdown or behaviour.

Both kids, but in particular my daughter Madi, have gone through many phases of challenging behaviour that have been really hard to deal with. In time, thankfully the majority of them have passed too.

It is important that you really take the time to get to know your children. To be more sensitive and have more empathy as to how they may actually be feeling. Everything is heightened for them... Try to identify the real reason behind their behaviour and address the underlying issue. Learning how to manage that behaviour, predicting when it may occur or attempting to prevent it from even happening as much as possible is beneficial for the whole family.

Madi has had major sensory issues in regards to clothing, hair, socks and shoes. We have slowly built up tolerances over time for her to be able to cope and have adapted different strategies to compensate. She accepts wearing underwear if we are out, but we are more relaxed at home. I put both kids' socks & shoes on in the car park when we arrive school. As soon as I pick them up, they are off. Madi instantly takes her hair out, dress, socks, shoes and underwear all off and I have a spare dress in the car for her to change in to, so she feels totally comfortable again.



**Never give up & try to be patient.** Ask and ask again, in five, ten minutes, next week or the next year but keep trying with them. My son Thomas did not want to ride his bike at all in the beginning. For years, at different stages we kept persisting and now he loves it.

For us, communication has been one of the most difficult, frustrating and complicated elements of Autism. It has taken a lot of time to build an interactive relationship with our children, learning different strategies, thinking outside the box, remaining patient and persisting.

Speak very slowly, clearly and not too loud or complicated. The way you speak can really affect how they respond to you. We use uncomplicated, basic language, in a softer tone, repetitively. My son especially, gets extremely emotionally if we raise our voice or use the word 'No!'

I would suggest trying to remove the word 'No' and temptations for "No" situations and use alternative language or reasoning. Try putting a positive spin on things and turn them around by explaining what they could do alternatively. Praise a small part or something else that they have done well instead. Continue to prompt correct language and responses, even if they initially don't respond back because one day you may be pleasantly surprised and they will!

There tends to be a lot of noises to contend with which makes it hard for children on the spectrum to concentrate or focus on one particular thing at one time. ASD kids are not very good at multitasking and can't deal with a lot of thoughts all at the same time. So, being aware of these facts and taking all that into consideration, will help to be more understanding.

ASD kids are predominantly affected by various external sensory stimuli to differing degrees. We have created a home where our kids can feel comfortable, safe, free and have relevant sensory releases. We have the essential outdoor activities including a trampoline and swing, a sandpit or water options are great too. Inside we have an exercise ball they can bounce on, a little exercise trampoline, a couch that Madi loves, in a separate kid's play room that includes an indoor sensory swing. After school we let them chill out and relax to watch movies and give them space to wind down after a sensory overloaded day coping at school.

In a classroom setting, it may be easier to interact with ASD kids in a smaller group because it tends to be too overwhelming with too many people and noise. Ideally, it would be best to have a quiet place, where your child could have a break from all the chaos if need be. Also, if possible a sensory relief room or objects to use for release or relaxation purposes. Now, I'm actually not that worried if the kids don't really have a lot of friends because they are happy in their own com-

pany, they actually like it and need that quiet, down time.

We try to stick to a basic routine because ASD kids thrive in a structured environment. They love to go straight home after school and if I differ from that routine and say attempt to go to the shops, it will more often than not result in erratic behaviour.

Reinforcing appropriate behaviour or achievements is really important to help encourage them to repeat it.

We set some personal goals or rules for ourselves to follow and abide by to help when we were out at parties or public occasions, where the kids would tend to get overwhelmed. We would aim to stay for an hour. If an incident happened and we felt we had to leave, so be it, we tried. Initially, if we reached that hour goal set, we would then leave before anything may potentially occur and again, we had made the effort to go. Eventually, we may stay longer if the kids were comfortable and play it by ear, but as soon as they looked a bit restless we would retreat.

**It does help to speak to other special needs parents.**

Although it is very emotional and every situation is different, they can relate to most of the things you are going through and more than likely, experiencing similar scenarios. It helps to feel that you are not alone and talk to someone else that knows how hard life can be. If that is not enough, a trained professional will help.

After both kids were diagnosed, I was in a really bad place for a long period of time. I couldn't talk to anyone about the kids without breaking down in tears. I was kindly offered some counselling and looking back now, it was definitely a turning point. She encouraged me to write and that has become a major form of therapy for me...

A lot of the seminars I have attended have emphasized the importance of working on your own happiness because that can affect your children too. I don't think it's a complete coincidence that since I have improved myself that my children have also improved too...

It is seriously depressing to think and then accept the fact that you need a whole team of people and professionals to help you look after your own child/children. We have been so lucky to have such supportive family and friends but they knew as much about Autism as we did, which was nothing. It was obviously important to have that close network of people but we needed so much more than that.

If you are unsure about what to do in regards to therapies or schools, my advice is to try everything and continue with whatever is working best for you and your child at the time. If you feel something is not working well, you can always change. Every child is different and responds to different things in different ways, so do whatever works best for them and follow your gut feeling.

Listen to everyone's advice, personal or professional and take on board what applies to you and your child.

I found it really helped once I learned to accept that I wasn't the perfect parent with the perfect kids, who were bathed, fed and in bed by seven every night, there is no such thing as perfect.

Trying to find a healthy balance in life has been really difficult. Your life becomes consumed by your child. Trying everything you can to help them. Dealing with all your emotions and grief. Feelings of guilt for even thinking about doing something for yourself. The kid's speech therapist said to me, 'Your whole life can't be one whole therapy session'. That has really resonated with me because that is certainly how it has felt most of the time.

Adjusting your way of life, what you do, how you speak,





*every child is different and  
responds to different things in  
different ways so do whatever  
works best for them and follow  
your gut feeling*

- Monique Cain, Everyday Autism Series

working everything around them and what they can and can't do. You feel guilty when you are not doing something to help them and feel like you should always be doing more. You feel bad if you just want to have a rest.

I have tried to keep up with work and regular exercise, as guilty I felt. I think it's been really important to try to continue to do things for yourself. An hour or two escaping, releasing endorphins and trying to enjoy something other than your kids. So, you still feel like a person rather than just a special needs parent but obviously you need help and support to be able to do that too.

Hopefully everyone will believe that all children can learn but sometimes it may just take time... That we can all communicate in different ways. That there are logical reasons for what may otherwise be judged as odd behavior. Certain elements and surroundings may affect us. Hopefully teachers will embrace different ways of learning and incorporate alternate forms of inclusion. I hope to give parents and other families knowledge and inspiration that all kids can progress and interact and to never give up.

With knowledge, support and time, you just never know what may be possible...

Check out Monique Cain's books in The Everyday Autism Series, which feature her daughter Madi and her son Thomas.

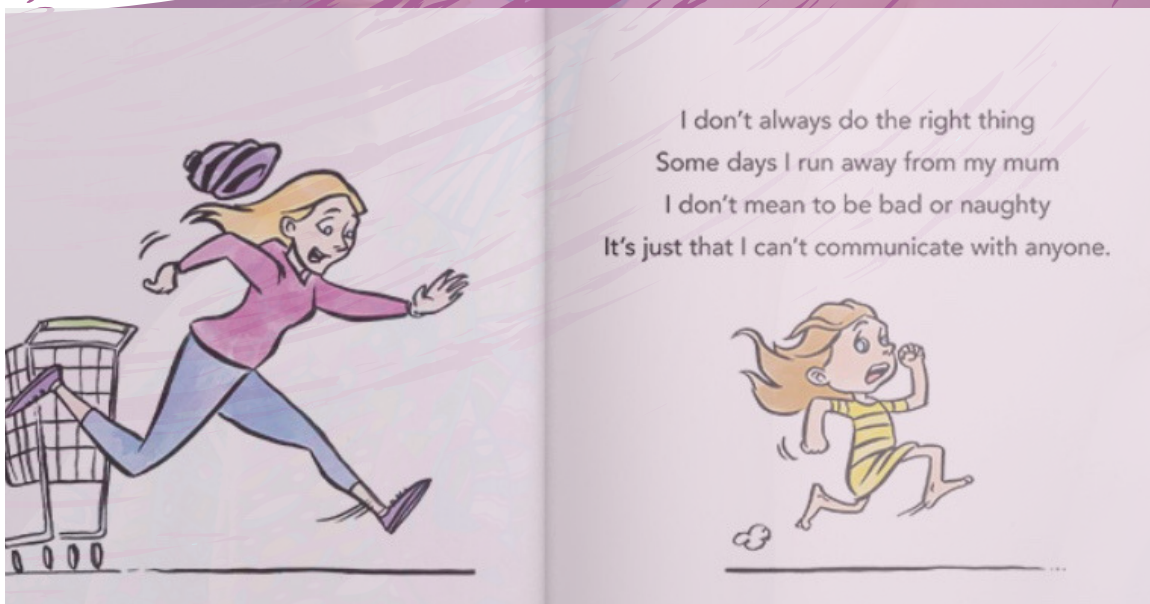
Look for more from Monique in our next issue!

Blue-eyed Madi has a difficult gift.  
She is different, she has autism.

## The Everyday Autism Series

by Monique Cain

*great for parents, teachers,  
and friends of people  
with autism*







**SHOP NOW!**





# SENSORY ACTIVITIES

## DIY @ HOME



BY: NEKOLE EATON, OTR/L SWC  
KIDS OT HELP



Hello fellow Mamas (and Dads)!

My name is Nekole, and I am a pediatric Occupational Therapist. In my 5 years of working with kiddos I have seen my fair share of beautiful kids with various diagnoses. In the years spent helping these kiddos reach their goals it became increasingly clear that so much of a child's success in Occupational Therapy can be credited to the parents; as practice in the home is truly what makes the difference. So, it has become my mission (through my YouTube channel "Kids OT Help") to empower, educate, and inspire parents with fun, easy, and motivating activities that can be incorporated from the comfort of your own home - while helping your child reach the next developmental milestone. This particular video is focused on some fun DIY sensory activities that will help develop your child's sensory system. I hope you enjoy it! For more information and free resources, check out my website!

*Nekole* OTR/L, SWC

*click to watch*



# 5 Ways to Support Your Child When They Experience anxiety



BY: SAMANTHA HEARNE  
A HAPPY MIND



**"Remember- reassurance by disregarding or diluting their problem, won't reassure them at all."**

Anxiety in children shows up in different ways than anxiety would for an adult, for many reasons; their emotional maturity, circumstances they are impacted by, and stresses of their every-day environment.

## 1 THEIR SHOES

The first thing to remember is that where your child is right now, is as bad as it can get for them. Reminding them of how much this scenario won't matter when they leave school, get older, have to pay bills – won't make them feel any better in this instance and if anything, will just exacerbate the anxiety further. So meet your child where they are at. Get to their level and ask questions. Find out (do your best to get inside their mindset) why this situation has caused such anxiety for them. Remember – reassurance by disregarding or diluting their problem, won't reassure them at all.

## 2 REMINDERS

Children need reminding. Children and teenagers get lost in the moment. They can become caught up in the dramas and chaos of the 'problem.' With this in mind, don't feed that thinking and allow them to think of the worst. Focus on reminding them of how they have gotten through things like this before. If it is exam stress, remind them of when they did Mock exams or end of unit tests and got through them. If it is about a friendship and arguments, remind them that they have other friends and how they have made friends again and things worked out. Make an effort to remind your child of all of the times they have worked through the things that seem impossible and how they have overcome what seems too difficult.



### 3 EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE

It can be so easy to become emotional with your child when they feel anxious and distressed. Of course, this is a natural reaction when your child isn't happy.

But from a coach perspective, as well as a teacher, the best way to support your child is to remain emotionally strong and offer them support, without feeding the emotions even more.

For instance, if your child is crying or unhappy, crying with them because you know how much they are hurting, just makes the unhappiness grow. It allows your child to continue to focus on the tears and crying, because now you are crying too.

The best thing to do is ask questions. Questions allow the child the chance to regain control and also find their own answers.

Answering questions gives your child power again and that is something that anxiety takes away.

- What can we do to change your thinking?
- How can I help right now?
- Is there anything else that is adding to the anxiety?
- Where did it first trigger today?

These might seem like you are forcing them to focus more on the anxiety, but in fact it will allow your child to start to rationalise and understand what they actually need and want to find solutions, and this will be a great strategy that your child will begin to build up as they mature.

### 4 COMPARISONS

Avoid saying 'when I was your age' or 'when this happened to me' because in their anxious state they could just become frustrated and retaliate with 'it's different now' or 'you don't understand.'

Unless they directly ask you about your experiences, try to avoid bringing your own experiences into the mix. Focus on them and their current situation and try your best to keep your focus there. This will also give your child the reassurance that your attention and energy are 100% with them and fully involved in their emotional needs.

### 5 DON'T JUDGE

This may sound obvious, but the judgement can be just as hard for your child to worry about. Worrying about how you may react or what you may think of them is a huge worry for a child and teenager, and sometimes, the reason they don't open up.

When they share something with you – no matter how difficult it can be to hear, focus on getting them back to happy and calm. Don't focus on your instinct of 'why were you doing that?' 'how did you get there in the first place' etc (all valid questions) but in that moment and when anxiety is playing a part, your priority is to make sure your child can feel stable and comfortable to come to you for support. When they feel that, you will also feel more connected with your child and much more a part of their life and experiences. Be as open as you can and listen without placing judgement as much as you can.

Finally; anxiety can cause your child to catastrophise and generalise. Things can't get any worse. This is the worst thing to happen. Ever. 'I'll never get over this.' When this happens, focus on using the 5 steps as often as you can. This is a natural reaction for someone who feels anxious and these are the techniques that I believe will have the best outcome and longevity to changing their mindset.

There is more to follow on this in my recent book and podcast – I hope to connect with you there soon!





Meet

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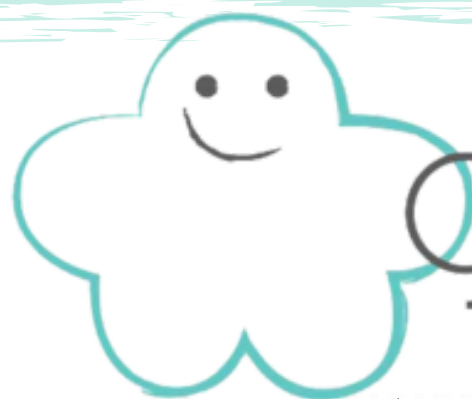
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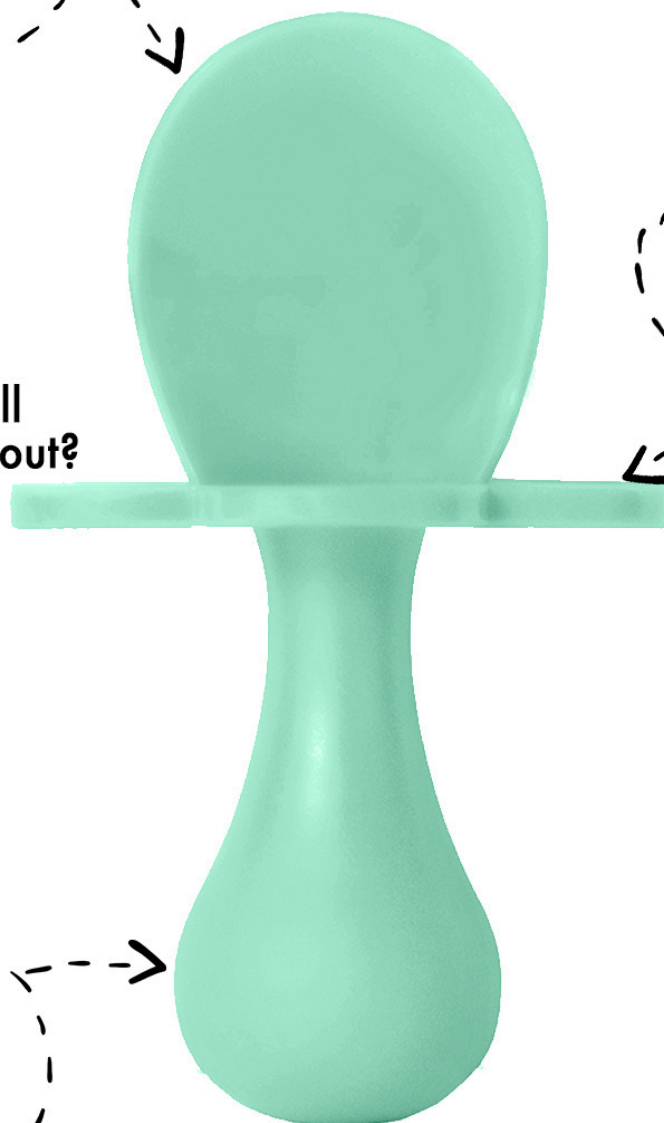
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Allows baby to easily  
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What's all  
the buzz about?

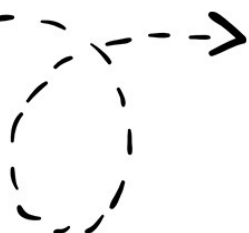


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fine motor skills





“

*My 5yr old is writing her letters backwards, should I be concerned?*

-Jessica L.

## COLLECTIVE COLLOQUY

*siobhan milos*

DYSLEXIA SPECIALIST TEACHER



Short answer no. It is not uncommon or unusual to see children under 7 years of age reverse letters. Directional confusion is the reason for reversing letters. There are some ways in which you can help your child.

1. Establish a visual memory or “picture” of each letter along with the letter name and sound.
2. Teach directionality.
3. Prevent reversals from occurring by teaching proper letter formation and grouping letters with similar stroke patterns.
4. Create little pictures out of the letters they get mixed up as personalising it will help them to remember.



*cheri dotterer*

DYSGRAPHIA CONSULTANT



*click to watch*



ELEMENTARY TEACHER



click to watch

*toni rozzi*  
EDUCATIONAL SPECIALIST

At 5yrs old the child is still in the preoperational stage of brain development and most likely in the emergent or transitional stage of writing, at this stage reversals are expected. If reversals are still occurring into the next stage of development (7-12yrs), seek specialized assistance for your child.



*nancy amar*  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

This is one question I get asked ALOT! Although children with dyslexia do tend to reverse letters, it is not the only element. It is absolutely normal for children in PreK to 2nd grade to reverse letters, however, if this persists past the age of 8 or 9 years old, it's time to look into any other learning challenges your child may have and seek professional help.





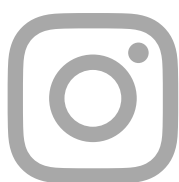


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*less mess. more fun.*

SHOP NOW!



# primary strokes

## A LOOK INTO UNDERLYING HANDWRITING SKILLS

*We must take the time to teach children primary strokes and how these combine to make a letter.*

BY: NANCY AMAR, OT  
MISS MANCY



When a parent sees that their child is reversing letters or words, I get that panic call: "Is my child dyslexic?!" Although children with dyslexia do tend to reverse letters, it is not the only element.

Let's clarify something before moving further... reversals are a NORMAL part of learning how to write. Many skills go into learning handwriting. Let's take a look at skills that need to become integrated for handwriting, how to help your child master these skills, and when is the time to address reversals as a reflection of a true learning challenge.

### THE RESEARCH

An important finding in the research shows that reversals are NOT always caused by poor visual processing. Rather reversals are due to working memory difficulties. By pinpointing a child's specific memory challenge, we can prevent reversals by TEACHING handwriting the way they learn best!

The following are some underlying skills to master when children are learning handwriting (especially if your child is reversing letters):

### EFFICIENT PENCIL GRASP AND CONTROL

School children are being given pencils very early on. As a result, their little hands and underdeveloped muscles use compensatory ways to hold pencils. This can be inefficient and result in a very static grasp that makes it difficult to control pencil strokes.

Ensuring that children hold their pencils correctly is an important first step.

### ESTABLISHED HAND DOMINANCE

It's very important that children establish hand dominance as they start learning handwriting. This helps them become efficient writers by strengthening muscle memory. If a child switches hands during writing/coloring they are more likely to have difficulty using the correct strokes to form letters correctly.

### PRIMARY STROKES & HANDWRITING INSTRUCTION

We must take the time to teach children primary strokes and how these combine to make a letter. The primary strokes are vertical, horizontal, circle, and diagonals. This is especially important for children who have motor planning difficulties. For instance, they may look at a letter E and know that you want them to copy it but don't realize that it's the combination of one vertical stroke and 3 horizontal strokes. They can't innately break down the motor steps to produce the final letter. Teaching letters by honoring the developmental sequence of learning strokes is really important.

Instead of teaching letters in the alphabetical order, programs such as Handwriting Without Tears follow the developmental progression and therefore reduce the likelihood of reversals. It is also beneficial



to teach letter formation using a multi-sensory approach that includes as many senses as possible ie: tactile, auditory, visual, kinesthetic so that it appeals to the learning strength of your child.

**CROSSING MIDLINE SPONTANEOUSLY**

This is a crucial piece of the handwriting puzzle. The midline is an invisible vertical line from the top of our head straight down, separating left and right. During handwriting, there are many letters that require us to spontaneously cross the midline in order to be formed correctly. For instance, a child that does not cross midline will draw a cross with 4 separate strokes top to center, bottom to center, left to the center, right to the center (instead of 2 strokes that cross each other in the middle). The same goes with forming the letter C, you have to cross over to the left to form this letter. When crossing midline is not yet mastered, a child will have great difficulty with letter formation, resulting in reversals.

Let's face, a lot goes into learning to write! Imagine learning to write a whole new language with unrecognizable strokes such as Chinese, how challenging would that be?! Now let's throw in the fact that you are 4-5 years old and are just learning to hold a pencil correctly, draw strokes, learning to trace, to copy and to color. These are all new skills!

**WHEN TO BE CONCERNED**

It is absolutely normal for children in PreK to 2nd grade to reverse letters, however, if this persists past the age of 8 or 9 years old, it's time to look into any other learning challenges your child may have and seek professional help.

Now that we looked at the components of handwriting (and there are many more I didn't mention), we have a newfound appreciation for all the learning that takes place when our children are starting to write. Reversing b,d,p,q (that frankly, is the same letter flipped in 4 different ways) is really not that alarming after all!





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