

**Parenting Older Adolescents with ASD:  
Balancing Support and Letting Go**

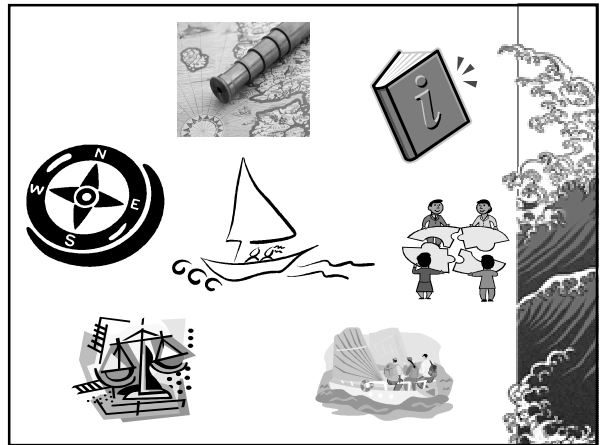


*Lisa A. Lieberman, MSW, LCSW*

**The family sailing voyage**



**Family sailing voyage “in community”**



**All parents worry about their teens!**



**Parenting non-spectrum teens**

- *Their search for identity causes anxiety*
- *Attaining milestones is taken for granted*
- *Assumption that life beyond high school will probably get better*
- *Society expects parents to let go*

## The “Empty Boat Syndrome”



**We should all remember...  
who stays on that boat the longest!**



*Adolescents with ASD:*  
**How are they the same as  
typically developing  
teenagers???**

### **Unique issues in autism parenting**

- *We don't necessarily assume things will get better after high school*
- *The social environment impacts how we parent our child*
- *Difficult to balance protecting and letting go*
- *Sensory challenges, movement differences and high anxiety levels must be respected*

### **More unique issues in autism parenting**

- *Getting judged for being an “enmeshed” parent*
- *Acting as “executive functioner” for your child*
- *Assessing developmental readiness is tricky*

### **More unique issues with autism**

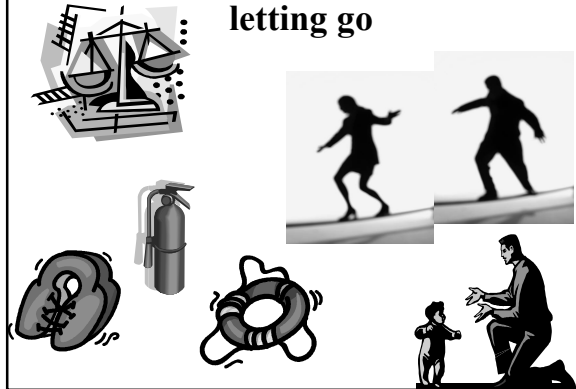
- *Over-estimating or under-estimating abilities*
- *Importance of learning self-advocacy skills from an early age*
- *Feeling sad when milestones are missed*

### Remain an “expert” about autism

- Stay current with new info about ASD
- Learn from your teen and share what you know
- Seek to understand what’s a “can’t” vs. what’s a *won’t*”



### Balance protection (control) and letting go



### Understand your teen’s perspective

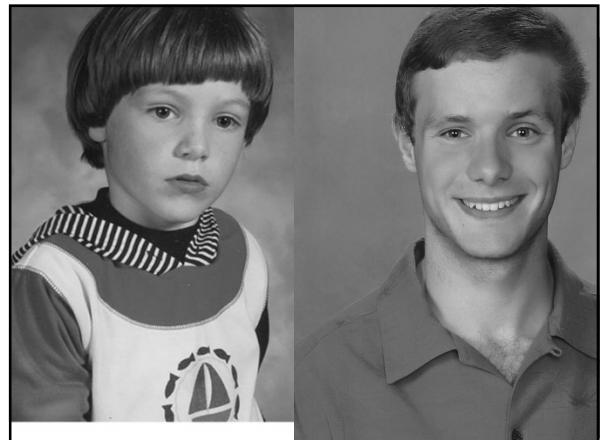
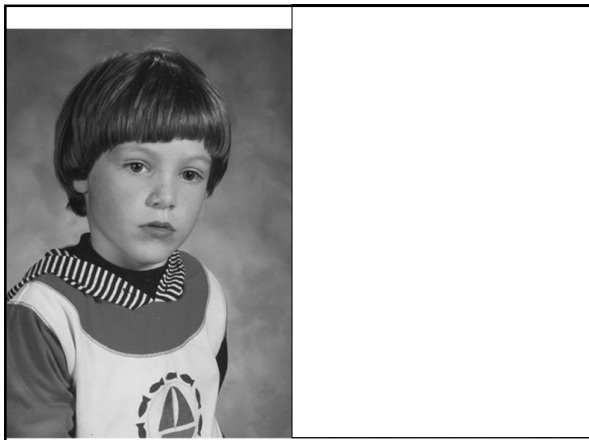
- It’s a *confusing* world!
- Things around me go *too* fast
- I am *so* distracted by my environment
- Don’t take away things that help me feel calmer
- Getting organized is a *major* challenge
- I can’t always control my movements!



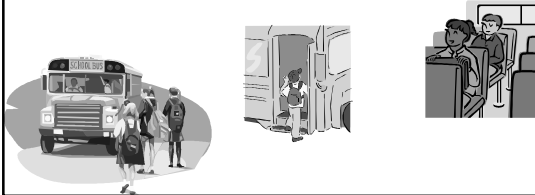
### Collaborate with your teen



- Co-create a vision
- “Nothing about us, without us”
- Open up to possibilities
- Person-centered planning



## The “Bus Driver’s Eyes”



## Parents need permission to express a range of feelings



## People who give us support



## Parenting people with autism: the gift that keeps on giving!



## A Few Recommended Resources

- **T. Bolick, Asperger Syndrome & Adolescence**
- **G. Gillingham & S. McClennen, editors of Sharing Our Wisdom**
- **L. Lieberman, A Stranger Among Us**
- **Z. Zaks, Life and Love: Positive Strategies for Autistic Adults**