

Advice for Parents Raising a Child on the Spectrum

Murphy Lynne



My name is Murphy Lynne, and when I was 13 years old I was diagnosed with PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified). I was not exactly sure what that diagnosis meant, but I was glad to have a name for what I was experiencing. As I have gotten older, I have become more aware of my diagnosis and continually look for ways to adapt better to the world around me. When I graduated high school, I knew I had a story to tell. I recently completed my book, “Am I Invisible?: Things I Wish Teachers Knew.” This book is to help parents and educators understand individuals on the spectrum, individuals who walk a different path and the parents who are walking with them. Since I often felt invisible in school, it made all the difference to have parents who were consistently supportive and encouraging. Every child has his or her own unique voice, and children on the spectrum need their parents and caregivers to help bring that out in them. Encourage, support and love your child through the challenges. Do your best to learn and grow as a parent. This is vital to your child’s success. If your child is still in school, below are some tips on how to help the road be a little less rocky from someone who has been there.

Grieve the Vision You Had for Your Child

An expectant mother often imagines what her child will look like. Will her child have blonde hair and brown eyes or blue eyes? Often this includes a vision of her child’s personality. Will her child be outgoing or shy? Will her child be the popular kid or the video gamer? All of these exciting questions go through the expectant mother’s mind throughout the pregnancy as she patiently waits to see if her vision is correct. The last thing a parent really thinks about is the possibility of the child having autism or another disability. It is perfectly normal to grieve the vision you had for your child. As a parent, it is important to deal with your feelings and the grief that come with the diagnosis so you can better embrace and advocate for your child. After acceptance comes the joy of getting to know your unique child.

Give Children the Space to Express Themselves

I was very lucky that my parents always gave me the space and freedom to express myself. From tolerating my stimming behavior when I was little, to supporting me in my writing and accepting my overall quirkiness, they have always supported me as much as they could. Some parents may be confused about why their child is stimming or engaging in odd behavior. It actually is necessary for autistic children to stim. Think of it as the nervous energy you sometimes have that leads you to go for a walk or even a run after

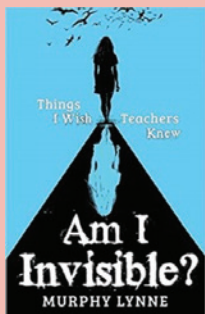
a stressful or frustrating event. Your autistic child does the same thing, just in a different way. Allow your child to dig deep into his/her interests. I have a wide variety of interests, and my parents always embraced them even when I was talking their head off at the kitchen table. Putting children in activities that you are not sure if they will enjoy could actually lead to their fondest memories. My mom signed me up for cheerleading even though she was not sure I would enjoy it. It was actually one of the greatest memories of my childhood. Autistic children need to have some sort of outlet, and having parents that understand this fact makes all the difference.



Advocate for Your Child in School and Public Spaces

I would not be in the place that I am today were it not for my parents, especially my mom who advocated for me in school. School was very difficult for me. I felt extremely vulnerable and would often shut down in classrooms. This made it difficult for teachers to get to know and understand me. During my Individualized Education Plan meetings, I needed my mom to advocate for me because I was not comfortable expressing my needs in a school environment. If most children with autism struggle to communicate what they need on a day-to-day basis, it is even more challenging in a school setting. As a parent, you need to let your child's teacher know about your child's autism diagnosis and personality. After I was diagnosed, I asked my mom to let all my teachers know about my diagnosis. These became key conversations to help my teachers understand and teach me in the best way they could. For many years, my teachers had to guess what they thought was best for me, which often made matters worse. Putting a name to a behavior made a world of difference for me as teachers could then find resources to help me.

Thank you for always being there for your children. Even though we may not have the words to express how we feel verbally, we feel it on the inside and couldn't be more grateful.



Originally from Wichita, Kansas, Murphy Lynne is a twenty-something writer who, after graduating high school, had something to say, wanting to help teachers of kids who are different, parents of those kids and the kids themselves. She divides her time between completing college, spending time with friends and family, and playing with her dogs (wishing she had a cat). After all, all cats are on the spectrum!

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