

voices of certain teachers...everything. I ended up having to put my head down on the desk to completely block out visual input. I still was listening, even if nobody knew it.

Of course, noticing everything can wear you out. The other E is for Every Day Tries Very Hard. I used to come home from school and fall dead asleep, every day. It's not that that day was unusual, it's that it just took me an enormous amount of effort to get through a day at school without collapsing on the floor, completely unable to function. Things that are easy for a lot of people take extra effort for me. I had to take breaks in the middle of the day to keep myself going. If someone with AS asks if they can take a break, let them. It's not about being unfair – they really need it.

How do I make it easier for me to get through a day? Routines. G is for Gets Mad When Routines Aren't Followed. When I was a little younger, I would tell people – only partially joking – that I had an internal schedule that had to be followed. If something happened that didn't match up to what I thought was going to happen that day, I would lose control. When I was in third grade, my teacher decided to team up with another teacher and play an April Fools joke. They would switch places for a day. They thought it would be funny, and I'm sure some kids thought it was. I didn't think it was funny. When I walked in and saw a different teacher than the one I was used to, I ended up in tears, no matter how many times the assistant teacher explained that it was just an attempt at a joke. I must not have been the only kid who was crying, because by the end of the day, the teachers had gone back to their usual classes and apologized.

By now you're probably wondering how I remember events that probably happened eighteen years ago. The second R is for Remembers Things Very Well. As I've said, I have a special interest in game shows. Well, I've come pretty close to memorizing who hosted every version of every game show ever made...and not just in America either! I just retain the information. That's true for a lot of people with AS. I myself remember text better than pictures, but there are people whose memories are visual – they can remember every detail of what they've seen. I remember text really well, so I frequently can quote books. One of my favorite books of all time is The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy series by Douglas Adams. That might come close to being a second special interest – I've read the books, watched the TV show, listened to the radio show, read the comic books, saw the movie the day it came out, and so on. I think they're hilarious, and frequently, when something happens that reminds me of a scene from The Hitchhiker's Guide, I'll end up quoting chapter and verse. I could probably recite most of the episodes from beginning to end.

Finally, we come to A – Always Mean Well. I've talked about things that might sound annoying – crying during school, turning off the TV at a Super Bowl party, excessively quoting my favorite book, and so on. Well, I don't mean to be rude by doing any of these things. I just don't quite realize that people are annoyed by it. It helps me when people remind me that they don't like what I'm doing, or understand that my brain just works differently. You might have experienced something like this at some point. Have you ever been in a place where it's too loud? Have you ever started talking about something you like, only to realize that the person you're talking to doesn't care? Of course people without AS can have all these feelings and experiences – people with AS probably just have it to a greater degree. Thank you for listening, and I hope that you understand Asperger's Syndrome a little better now.

Choosing a Summer Camp

by Eugene Bell

Selecting a camp for a child is often a difficult task, but it becomes even more arduous when your child has Asperger Syndrome. There are so many items to explore, so many questions to ask—with no clear path through the wilderness! However, you may find this task easier if you consider the following during your search:

- ◆ Clearly explore the mission and philosophy of each program you are considering to make sure it meets the needs of you and your child.
- ◆ Investigate how the program is structured and how the staff deliver their services to campers. How do they respond to children with extended responses who might require special handling? Are they pro-active or reactive? Are they flexible?
- ◆ Review the nature of the population served. Will other campers be similar to your child? Does the camp cater to children with a large range of issues, or do they specialize?
- ◆ Ask the camp about the opportunities for camper growth. What outcomes might you expect for your child?
- ◆ A camp should be a partner with their campers' families. Systems for communication should be reasonable and meet your needs. They should be able to explain easily how they plan to facilitate communication and respond to questions. Many camps use the web to publish photos or send a newsletter.
- ◆ What are the management and support schemes that the camp uses, and are these in concert with your youngster's needs and experiences? Are the interventions or systems easy to embrace and continue at home after camp?
- ◆ Be sure the intake or evaluation process is longer rather than shorter. Your child has some special needs and a good program wants to learn about them. Input may be gathered from your child's school or counselors/therapists. If a camp only requires a few short forms, be careful.
- ◆ What are the credentials and experience of the staff— administrators as well as line staff? Ask about their staff training program and how many of their staff have worked with them previously.
- ◆ Camp is meant to be a great place for your child. You should ask them about the fun that goes on: special events, program content, and the energy level of the camp/program.
- ◆ Ask about their health support: who distributes medication, what is the overall staffing scheme, and how do they access a physician or emergency medical support?
- ◆ Ask about their licensure: what agencies authorize the program? Many camps choose to belong to the American Camp Association, an important credential that tells you they have gone through a complete review of program, philosophy, and management areas.
- ◆ If you are considering the program for the following year, ask if you may visit them while in operation this year.
- ◆ Be sure to speak with other families who have had children in their program. The camp should be prepared to give you the names of parents who would be willing to speak with you.

A camp experience should be magical and special—certainly for your child, but also for the family. The program you ultimately chose needs to live up to its publicity and catalogs. The “product”—your child—is too important for you to settle for an inappropriate or poorly run camp. Happy hunting!

Eugene Bell is the Senior Director of Summit Camp and Travel, programs that support campers with attention issues, Asperger Syndrome, and related issues. He has been involved in special camping for 29 years, after several years as a special educator. He particularly enjoys being part of a solution instead of the problem! You can reach him at geneb@summitcamp.com.