

Grandparenting and Asperger's – Live, Learn and Love

When you become a grandparent, you realize it is an experience unlike any other. Although the love and concern are the same as for your own child, the grandchild is not completely yours to raise as you wish. That is the responsibility of the child that you did raise and his/her spouse whose philosophies may be very different from your own. It is a delicate balancing act under the best of circumstances, but if your grandchild has special needs it can become a very thin tightrope. At ASPEN, we have heard the voices of grandparents of children with Asperger Syndrome (AS) and High-functioning-autism (HFA) and are addressing those concerns.

Most grandparents are willing to learn all they can about Autism Spectrum Disorders. While there are many articles about what AS and HFA are and are not (keyword: Asperger's AND Grandparenting), the one I found most helpful was entitled "Special Needs III: A Different Kind of Grandparenting" by Jodi M. Webb (<http://www.grandparents.com/family-and-relationships/caring-for-children/special-needs-three-a-different-kind>). In very simple terms, this article emphasizes that knowledge is power and explains the need for the grandparent to educate him/her self to learn "how to interact in ways best suited to the child." In my own experience, it has helped greatly to remain open to new ideas in education and medical and psychological treatments. It has been especially helpful to stay current on the changing interests of my grandson and his siblings who are always very happy to educate their Grandma in the ways of the twenty-first century world.

As grandparents, most of us are very willing to help out in any way we can, but sometimes we don't know how to make the first overture. It may be that we realize the child is having some problems and can't find the right language to convey our concerns. Or one or both parents are not hearing us. Or we are just not sure what our role could or should be. Here are some examples of what we can do:

- *Provide an invaluable source of support while our children are dealing with the special needs of their affected child.
- *Help support and care for the siblings.
- *Support and care for our special needs grandchild while the family enjoys an activity that might cause sensory overload for that child.
- *Be a source of comfort and support for our own child and his/her spouse when things get overwhelming.

Just like any other child, our grandchildren with AS and HFA need all the love we have to give. It is a journey that will make you laugh and cry. And you will find new

and wonderful people, places and ideas that you never would have experienced otherwise. We are never too old to learn!

To that end, ASPEN is forming a Grandparents' Network. It will be a closed Facebook forum for sharing ideas and information with other grandparents who have the same concerns. For information about how to access the ASPEN Grandparents' Network, please call 201-391-0758 or e-mail Lottie at Meshi510@aol.com. Lottie Esteban, who is both a parent and grandparent of a child with Asperger's, will facilitate.