

# **GRANDPARENTS CAN HELP TEACH LIFE SKILLS TO THEIR GRANDCHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM**

by

Alexandra J. Rogers, PhD

(Grandma Sandy)

## **WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT FOR GRANDPARENTS TO HELP?**

Children and adults on the autism spectrum learn differently than others and the learning does not necessarily carry over to other situations and settings. To put it simply, telling our grandchild or demonstrating a behavior once or twice will not necessarily help them learn the behaviors or remember them. This makes grandparents so very important because we can teach similar behaviors in a variety of locations, and with different people, many times. Grandparents are rumored to be patient, which makes us great teachers, because we can repeat more slowly and many more times in order to teach and re-teach and re-teach in different settings.

## **WHAT IS REQUIRED TO TEACH A CHILD WITH AUTISM?**

You will need persistence, patience, some knowledge about their style of learning and how to motivate them. The first segment educates you about how to help your grandchildren learn and retain skills, how to get their attention, and how to best motivate them. The second segment gives examples and tips on how to teach the different life skills. The third segment discusses the importance of communication.

## **WHEN SHOULD I START TEACHING LIFE SKILLS?**

Start when the grandchildren can move around independently and never stop. You will always be older than your grandchildren and will always need to teach and re-teach new things.

## **UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUR GRANDCHILD LEARNS**

### **FIRST - GET THEIR ATTENTION**

No learning will take place if you cannot get and retain their attention. You already know how hard that is. If they are verbal, to get their attention, say their name and make sure they are looking at you or at what it is that you want them to focus on. For example, "Johnny, point your eyes at me!" or "Johnny, point your eyes at the tooth brush!"

If they do not have language, or if you are going to need picture schedules or instructions, say "Ricky, point your eyes at your schedule, it is time to brush teeth". Details on why and how to use schedules are below.

If you start talking to them and they are not looking at you, even if there are only two of you in the whole house, they will not assume that you are talking to them. They talk to no one in particular all the time. Why would they think that you do things differently? All of us assume that other people learn like we do or pay attention to things that we pay attention to – until experience teaches us that it is not the case.

### **THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN TEACHING**

Kids on the autism spectrum don't have the capacity to know what you could be thinking. They have no concept of other people's feelings or thoughts, so it does not occur to them to want to please you by doing something. However, they do want attention from loved adults in their life and get jealous of attention you give to siblings. They also respond to comments like "good job" or "high 5" after they've done some task. But first you have to make sure you have their attention. Generally, they do not pay attention to you unless you are holding their favorite food or the iPad or some electronic gadget they want. Even when you do speak directly to them, they still might not be listening or paying attention.

The reasons for that could be:

- They are not really interested
- They don't know that you are talking to them
- They are not looking at what you are demonstrating
- They stopped listening to you after the first few words
- They don't have enough language knowledge to know what you are saying
- They would prefer to go to their room and be left alone
- They are focused on old movies or songs running in their head
- They are focused on their headache or stomach ache

## **WHY DOES IT TAKE SO MANY REPETITIONS IN DIFFERENT PLACES?**

This lack of attention makes teaching anything new a challenge, and requires many repetitions in different environments, in order for the lesson to stick.

When you talk to people with autism who have some understanding of *how they learn*, you may find out that learning is sequential. First *this* happened, then *the next thing* happened, then *the third thing* happened. The sequence of events is saved in memory in that specific sequence for that specific environment.

For example, your grandchild's parents may have taught him or her to clear their plate after dinner, rinse it and put it into the dishwasher. Unless you specifically teach the same behavior at your house, you will not see this behavior, because it has not generalized. It does not occur to them that a behavior learned in one place would be appropriate or required in another place, even though both places are a kitchen.

## **MOTIVATION AND COOPERATION**

Schedules seem to be the best way to keep motivation and cooperation throughout the day. Kids on the spectrum learn sequentially, and retain information sequentially and love to stick to schedules of their own making. They also love to watch the same movies over and over again much later in life than other kids. It thrills them to anticipate a favorite part, know when it's coming and when it actually happens.

Many parents and grandparents struggle with the internal schedules and sequences of the kids with autism, because not sticking to a schedule will lead to much unhappiness on the part of the child or a huge tantrum / meltdown.

For example, you may have developed a habit of taking the kids to McDonalds after school, and you take a certain route to get there. Today, it occurs to you to pick up dry cleaning on the way. The dry cleaner is one street over. The meltdown might start as soon as you get off the regular route.

Another example, you tell your verbal grandson that you will stop for French fries, but first you have to go to the cleaners. After you leave the house, you decide you need to pick up some milk on the way. As soon as the boy notices that you are not on the route to the cleaners, the protest starts.

The same system that causes all this drama can be used to gain motivation and cooperation. All you have to do is make the schedule first, share it with the child and stick to it. You have them verbalize what comes next, or point to the picture of what comes next.

If they protest, you show them the schedule and say “Look, it’s time to brush teeth” or “Look, it’s time to put the clothes in the dryer”.

Try to do things without rewards, because it breaks the pace of learning, and puts the focus on the reward instead of the activity. The same thing happens if you say “good job” after each “baby step”. It gives them the idea they do not have to go on, or it’s time for a break. It is best to just re-focus them on the schedule / task.

### **VIDEOTAPING OR PICTURE TAKING AS MOTIVATOR**

I found that videotaping the kids on the cell phone to show mommy and daddy works with kids on the autism spectrum as well as other kids. I typically say, “I’m going to videotape this for mommy and daddy”, and then start the tape while I give instructions and the child is doing whatever they are supposed to do, or not, in which case I correct and redirect. Then I show the video to the child right after the task was completed. They are always interested. I show the video to the parents in front of the child, when they come to pick up the child. Since I use the cell phone while I am interacting with the child, sometimes the videos show walls or darkness if there is a spill or some other accident, but I keep the video rolling and go back to good picture framing when the crisis is over.

### **WHAT IF I CANNOT GET THEIR ATTENTION WHEN I SAY THEIR NAME?**

Sometimes, the kids are zoned out, their eyes are open but they look like they are not seeing. To shake off this state, you get them up and doing some exercises. It could be running in place, dancing, or tickling. If you cannot rouse them with their favorite activities, postpone the lesson. They have to be able to focus for any learning to happen.

### **WHY IS EXERCISE IMPORTANT?**

Unless your grandchild is one of those in constant motion, he/she will have to be prodded into physical activity. Physical activity is important for growth, strength, proper chemical distribution and manufacture throughout the body. This is true of all of us, and applies to grandchildren as well. Children who have plenty of exercise will be able to focus on what you want to teach them. So any chance you have to take them to the park, skating, gymnastics, beach, river, pool or some other water attraction – do it. ***They always say no, until you’ve taken them several times and they are used to it.***

## **HOW TO USE SCHEDULES**

I cannot overemphasize schedules or the importance of making a schedule specific to the child. For younger children or those who cannot read, you can make schedules of pictures. Please remember that your grandchild will be dependent on schedules throughout his/her life. Deviation from schedules is disorienting for people with this disorder and could lead to total collapse for the rest of the day. This could lead to extreme levels of stress and inability to move forward with anything. Think of it as a silent meltdown.

Parents and grandparents used to spend hours on making visual schedules by hand. Now, you can make them on the iPad or the computer. When you look at the websites below, you will see examples of how others use schedules. This will help you construct your own.

Here are some websites which make it easier for printable schedules.

[Visual Schedules for Autistic Children](#)

[Reminder Strips](#)

Here is an example of an electronic schedule

[Visual Schedule Planner](#)

## **WHAT KINDS OF LIFE SKILLS CAN GRANDPARENTS TEACH?**

Grandparents can teach self-care, housekeeping, traffic safety and essentials in interacting with the community. Below is a list of life skills topics.

- Morning routine – brushing teeth, brushing hair, washing hands
- Getting dressed independently
- Potty training
- Evening routine – brushing teeth, taking bath/ shower/ washing hair
- Setting the table
- Clearing the table
- Simple food preparation and cooking
- Feeding and Serving oneself
- Cutting food and using utensils to eat
- Picking up toys, books
- Sorting laundry, washing it, drying it and putting it away
- Making a shopping list (written or pictures)
- Shopping, staying by your side and following the shopping list
- Finding the items and putting them in the basket

- Paying for the items and budgeting
- Putting the purchases in their proper place at home
- Teaching to use indoor voice (quiet tones) indoors
- Teaching turn taking
- Teaching about when and how to ask for help
- Locating public restrooms
- Teaching swimming and water safety
- Giving directions when walking/driving to the park or the store
- Teaching how to cross streets safely
- Teaching about stop signs, crosswalks
- Practicing riding public transportation
- Practicing driving skill
- 

### **MORNING ROUTINE – BRUSHING TEETH, BRUSHING HAIR, WASHING HANDS**

Check with the child’s parents what the morning routine is. If there is one, follow the same routine, make picture-schedules if needed. Older children may be comfortable with written schedules. If you are the first one establishing a routine, discuss with the parents about how this routine should proceed and what they want to be part of the routine. Then the child will have the same routine at home and at your house. Once the routine is learned well, you can make changes.

### **GETTING DRESSED INDEPENDENTLY**

Your grandchild has to learn to dress and undress independently. For best results, find out how the parents teach the dressing. If you are the first to teach independent dressing and undressing, let the parents know how you do it. It helps if the child has consistent expectations, so they have to memorize only one sequence. If the teaching is laborious or not sticking, you can make up a picture schedule of what comes first, second and third – this will make the process smoother and the same schedule can be used at the parents’ house. What you will discover is that this process requires great patience on your part and is tedious, as the child zones out or gets distracted by something. You’ll have to stand there, keep telling them to focus and point their eyes at what they are doing. Eventually, you will be able to tell the child that it is time to get dressed, and they will do it. This is a test of your endurance that can pay off handsomely in the end.

## **POTTY TRAINING**

There are videos that show potty training to the children. Cartoon types are best. The hard part is keeping the child on the toilet, or the potty. You still want to teach. Make sure that the system is the same at your home as it is at the parents' house. Keep them busy with their favorite books or electronic gadgets while you are waiting for something to happen. Make sure that your attempts coincide with the child's voiding habits. Generally children will go to the same place in the house when they are filling their diapers.

**IMPORTANT!** When the child successfully goes in the toilet or potty, do not make a lot of noise, it scares them and makes training harder. Simply say quietly, "Good job", wipe the child and show the child the production and let them flush. By then, they are expert toilet flushers.

Wiping themselves comes later, and is also a challenge. Flushable wet wipes can be most helpful. Again, check with the parents so the same system can be used at home.

## **EVENING ROUTINE – BRUSHING TEETH, TAKING BATH/ SHOWER/ WASHING HAIR**

Evening routine could be put into a picture schedule, and again should be the same as is followed at parents' home. Brushing teeth can be taught in front of a mirror. It is best to have the child count to ten as they are moving the toothbrush back and forth along the left back teeth; ten for the right back teeth, etc. If you use the same system all the time and everywhere, there is a better chance that the child will do it like that when you are not around.

Because of the children's many sensitivities, bath time might be a wonderful event or it can be a trial. Sometimes, the child may have been OK with taking a bath, and suddenly it's not OK and no one knows what triggered the change. Washing hair could also become a problem after it was previously OK. You don't want to make bath time a contest, but the child still has to wash. If they do not want to sit in the tub, you simply soap them up while they stand in the tub and rinse off with a bowl. The aversion will go away.

Eventually, you will teach them to soap themselves by naming body parts as they count, five times back and forth for the arms, five times for the front of the neck, five times for the back of the neck etc. This will teach your grandchild the names of body parts, and the counting will help them focus on what they are doing.

## **SETTING THE TABLE**

It is important for the grandchildren to learn to set the table and to participate in family life. Like with all the other skills. You might need a picture schedule, and consult with the parents about the sequence. Make sure that the sequence is the same or very similar.

## **CLEARING THE TABLE**

Some people use dishwashers, and some people wash dishes by hand. It would be helpful if the child learned to clear the table and rinse off the dishes, in any event. This way, when they are living independently, the sequence will be in place, and they will not end up with food caked on their dishes. Again, check with the parents about the sequences you want to establish, and have the child do it in both households.

## **SIMPLE FOOD PREPARATION AND COOKING**

If you raise the children to be served, they will grow up with that expectation, and will not learn how to make their own food. They will go into the kitchen and get their favorite foods, such as cookies or crackers, but they will not make dinner. For example, a teenage boy with Aspergers and his older brother were left by the parents for the day. He was hungry, but did not eat anything until his brother came home and opened a can of beans and warmed it up. When asked why he did not get the beans for himself, he said he was waiting for the brother to come home. This young man had language, and was mainstreamed academically, but did not have the life skills and the expectation of doing things for himself.

In teaching food preparation, check with the parents, and make sure that the same skill is practiced at home and at your house. Start with the child's favorite cooked food to increase interest and motivation. Make picture schedules for what comes first and second. Repeat the teaching over many times, in the same sequence. I found really good videos on YouTube of cooking and redirecting:

[Let's Cook! Life Skills/ Kids with Autism INTRO](#)

[Let's Cook! Life Skills/ Kids with Autism WAFFLES](#)



## **FEEDING AND SERVING ONESELF**

Many parents and grandparents put off teaching feeding and serving oneself and pouring milk and drinks because it seems easier – with less mess to clean up. However, if you do not allow the child to do it, they will not develop the necessary hand eye coordination to execute these tasks properly. You have to start sometime - now is best. Again, consult with the parents so that the child has the same expectation at home and at your place. Make picture schedule, also make video of the child doing it, and show it to the child and then the parents.

## **CUTTING FOOD AND USING UTENSILS TO EAT**

If left to their own devices, all children will eat with their fingers. Whether you are teaching to eat with a fork or chopsticks, use the same method at home and at grandma's house. When the child is older, you can teach to cut with a knife. I use the phrase: "Stab and cut". This stands for stabbing through the food with a fork and cutting with a knife. Then you have to be vigilant and make sure that the food goes into the mouth with the fork. Some of the kids will try to take the food off the fork with the other hand to put in their mouth. Start the training when the children are really hungry, and with their favorite foods, until they learn the sequence.

## **PICKING UP TOYS, BOOKS**

Many kids on the autism spectrum have relatively clean rooms because they do not play with their toys. At times, you will find that your grandchild likes to flick or scatter things. This would be an opportunity to have them clean up. You say: "Time to clean up" and then help the child - taking turns. You pick one item up, and the child picks one item up to put away. Then you take a turn, then the child.

## **SORTING LAUNDRY, WASHING IT, DRYING IT AND PUTTING IT AWAY**

You want to start the training early, by having them put the clothes in the clothes' hamper when they are undressing or changing clothes. It is easier to do all that yourself, but remember, you are trying to instill life-long habits. Make a schedule for using the washer and dryer. When it is time to do laundry do the sorting out loud, "The whites go with the whites, the dark colors go here." Have the child help with the sorting, even if they are too young to reach the washer and dryer controls. When the child is able to reach the controls, start teaching the sequence of putting the clothes in, putting the soap in, closing the door, and set for the wash. Have them move the clean clothes to the dryer, and set the dryer controls. Then have the child take things out of the dryer, fold them or hang them.

## **MAKING A SHOPPING LIST (WRITTEN OR PICTURES)**

To keep the kids entertained at the store and to teach them how to shop, make written lists or picture lists. Have them participate in making of the list, if they can read and write, have them write the shopping list, otherwise have them look for the pictures of the items to shop for and make a picture shopping list. All this takes much longer, but it gets them into the habit of making their own shopping lists when they get older. As they do get older, teach them to go through the pantry and the refrigerator, to see what needs replacing and what foods they are low on, to put on the shopping list.

## **SHOPPING: STAYING BY YOUR SIDE AND FOLLOWING THE SHOPPING LIST**

Many adults have problems with the kids staying with the cart (shopping basket). Kids on the autism spectrum do not have a developed concept of “with”. By that I mean, that they do not pay attention to what other people are doing and do not adjust themselves to do things with other people. You will see them at the store either way in front of the cart or way behind, either zoned out, or super-focused on some display. They have to be trained from early age to stay with the cart. This is a long, frustrating process. The earlier you teach it, the sooner the child will learn it. If you leave them at home or stick them in the cart because it’s easier, the child will not magically learn it, and you will end up with a much larger child who is harder to catch and hold on to. You and the parents can decide if you want the child to hold the cart or hold your hand, and be consistent as you are training them. Later in life, you will want to train them to walk with you without hanging on to you or the basket.

## **FINDING THE ITEMS AND PUTTING THEM IN THE BASKET**

Teach them about where to find the foods and have them take you to the place where the foods are stocked. Teach that the fresh fruit and vegetables are in a special section. Teach where the cold foods are kept etc. Use this as an opportunity to teach new words for foods. Whenever possible, have them select the food, bag it, and put it the basket. As you are shopping, have them cross off the items on their list which they have put in the basket. This will help them to focus on the task of shopping.

When they get older, you can have them push the cart and have them search for the listed items in the store. You can also teach them to identify who works in the store and how to ask them where the items are. Always, have them bring a list and cross items off.

When they get better at all this, you can take them shopping, and give them half of the shopping list to shop on their own. Set up a meeting place, (in front of cashier #1, or aisle # 2) to make sure that they can navigate by themselves.

### **PAYING FOR THE ITEMS AND BUDGETING**

It is increasingly common to pay for things electronically. However, you still want the children to know about money, and what it all means. So practice counting money at home. Have the child make a small purchase using their own money.

For the older ones, teach them about budget, and to write down and keep track of all the receipts. It is easy for us to overspend when using credit cards, so a person on the Autism spectrum could go through their money really quickly and then have nothing. All this has to be taught, over and over again until it sticks.

### **PUTTING THE PURCHASES IN THEIR PROPER PLACE AT HOME**

Do you get to plop down in front of the TV when the shopping is done? Teach the child that when you come back from shopping, all the food has to be put away. Use schedules if necessary to instill this very important habit.

### **TEACHING TO USE INDOOR VOICE (QUIET TONES) INDOORS**

If you find that your grandchild has a problem modulating their voice, or engages in squealing or other noises in public places. Teach the child the difference between indoor voice and outdoor voice. Make sure to correct them each time, by saying: "Johnny, use your **quiet voice** inside". If there is no change in their behavior, face the child, hold them by the wrists and then repeat. If the child becomes louder or gets upset, hug them and tell them they are OK and then repeat about using **quiet voice**. Don't worry about the looks or comments you get from people around you. If you keep the child at home or in the car all the time, they will not learn how to behave in the community. It is their anxiety which makes them act like that. If you give in to their fears, they will never learn and never get over their fears. The sooner you start, the sooner they will be comfortable and you will have a happier and more engaged grandchild.

## **TEACHING TURN TAKING**

You may find that your grandchild has no concept of turn taking. Turn taking is very important in walking with other people, conversation and playing games.

Walking side by side is something we all take for granted. It is a skill that develops naturally in most people - not our grandkids. You will find them falling behind or wandering off somewhere. This is because they are lost in their own thoughts and do not pay attention to what goes on around them. This game is a fun way to train turn taking in walking.

Use a hallway or some other place like a narrow sidewalk at the park on a quiet day. You tell your grandchild that you will be playing "follow the leader". Explain that you will be the leader and they have to walk next to you. Have them copy your steps while saying: "left, right, left right".

When they get the concept, tell them that now they are going to be the leader, and you will follow their steps exactly. Then you will be the leader again, and they have to follow. Then the grandchild will be the leader, etc. When I use the word follow in this paragraph, I mean that they are to walk next to you - not behind you. Once they get the game, you can practice many more times, and eventually practice it every time you are out in the community.

If you have a grandchild who is hyper-talkative and will talk on and on without paying attention whether anyone is listening, you have to teach them, to say three sentences and then stop and wait for a comment from whoever they are talking to. If you do not teach this skill, your grandchild will be able to "talk at people", but not to people. These are the children who gravitate toward adults because adults will tolerate this behavior, but the other kids will not and will avoid your grandchild. As you work with them on this skill of conversation, you will notice that they have a tendency to go back to their favorite topic or "lecture" when they are nervous and do not know what is expected of them.

## **TEACHING ABOUT WHEN AND HOW TO ASK FOR HELP**

Your grandchild's life will be frustrating if they do not learn to ask for help. I would teach this skill even if they cannot use language. Have them practice in the grocery store. For example, if they cannot find the milk, teach them to identify the employees, and ask; "where is the milk?" or have them point to their milk picture on their shopping list. Then help your grandchild to understand the answer. If they employee says, "It's in the back of the store", or "Next aisle over," teach the child what this means. Then practice those phrases many more times.

If they have to go to the restroom, have them ask: “Where is the restroom?” Then help them understand the answer. Many people will simply point in a direction. Your grandchild will not pay attention to the pointing, unless you tell them ahead of time to pay attention if the person is pointing in a certain direction.

### **LOCATING PUBLIC RESTROOMS**

It is best to teach them how to look for public restrooms at an early age. This way, when they are grown up, they will have that skill well ingrained. You might want to look for the public restrooms every time you go into a store or restaurant. This way when your grandchild really has to go, they will know that there is a restroom, and where to look for it, or how to understand the directions.

With boys, you have to teach restroom etiquette because of the difference between how men and women conduct themselves there.

### **TEACHING SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY**

Did you notice how your grandchild loves water? They tend to love pools and the ocean because it has a relaxing effect. Some of the children might wander off and a neighbor will find them in their pool.

Make sure that you teach them not to go into the water without an adult around. Secure all pool areas. As you teach them to swim, you will notice, that they might love the activity for months or years, and then suddenly refuse to do it. Do not push them to do it, just offer and then they will eventually go back to swimming and jumping into the water.

### **GIVING DIRECTIONS WHEN WALKING/DRIVING TO THE PARK OR THE STORE**

Many parents and grandparents assume that the children on the spectrum don’t know how to get to destinations, because they act oblivious to their surroundings. However, that is not the case. Also, you want to train them to pay attention so they can find their own way around before they move out on their own. You teach the difference between left and right, so they can tell you which way to go. You also teach about green light red, light, crossing signs, stop signs, and crosswalks.

Then you practice with the child by saying: “We are going to the park; you tell me which way to go.” Have the child point in the direction, and say the word, or you say, “Straight, left or right”. If the child makes a mistake, you point and say the direction. It’s best to start

with places that you normally walk to, because you can take your time, and you can see what the child is pointing to.

### **TEACHING HOW TO CROSS THE STREET SAFELY**

Street safety is very important because it could mean the difference between life and death for your grandchild. Since they are paying partial attention, or no attention to what is going on around them, they are at risk of being injured by a vehicle. I recommend that you teach street safety in very structured way. Teach the child to stop before crossing the street, to look to the left, for ***moving cars***. Look to the right, for ***moving cars***. If no cars are ***moving***, you can cross. If your grandchild does not look where they are supposed to, try using the phrase, ***point your eyes to the left and look for moving cars***. At the start, you might need two adults to do this, so one of you can tell if the child is actually looking where they are supposed to.

I tried to work with my grandson, myself. He was taught by his parents to stop at the corner, look both ways and their dog was supposed to sit and stay. When I asked him what he was supposed to do at the corner, he told his dog to sit and stay. He did not have the looking both ways sequence down yet. I asked him to point his eyes to the left and tell me if he sees cars. He said, "Yes, I cars". I realized that I failed to say ***moving*** cars – all the cars on that street were parked. It will not be easy, but has to be taught.

### **TEACHING ABOUT STOP SIGNS, CROSSWALKS**

You want to teach the looking both ways concept first, because you want them to look both ways even at a crosswalk, or stop sign. There are no guarantees that the driver is focused on the road. You can teach about stop signs and pedestrian crossings. The learning can take place at home using children's books and practiced outdoors, while walking.

### **PRACTICING RIDING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

Your grandchild may or may not be able to drive a car. It is best to get them accustomed to riding public transportation at an earlier age, just in case. First you want to get them used to just getting on the bus/subway and sitting still. So you start on days when it is not so crowded. This will be a disorienting experience for them because it is so loud and smelly. However, eventually, they will be focused enough to practice paying the fare. Then you can attempt to do trips at rush hour times. Then you teach, to pay attention to where the bus is going, and how to know when their stop is coming. ***Make a conscious effort to travel to***

*different places on different bus routes.* You do not want them to start insisting on a familiar trip. As they get older, you teach them how to map their trip and how to time it, so they can get to their destination on time. Start out with trips to their favorite places. This will make it a happier experience for them.

## **PRACTICING DRIVING SKILLS**

In some parts of the country, the public transportation system is underdeveloped, and the parents want their kids to learn to drive, so they can be independent. Driving is difficult and scary to people on the autism spectrum because of their tendency to become lost in thought and their lack of attention to their surroundings.

However, if the parents insist, and the young person is agreeing to learn, try to find an instructor who specializes in driver's education for handicapped persons. That person will have experience and will be able to evaluate the progress of your grandchild. Despite disabilities, your grandchild still has to become a safe driver, or they will be unable to get a license and keep it.

The grandparents can help by finding places to practice that are practically deserted, like parking lots on Sunday morning, or streets in industrial complexes on the weekends. After your grandchild has a learner's permit, you can take them to an empty parking lot. Let them drive in the parking lot and practice parking straight between the lines. Have them practice accelerating and then slamming on the brakes, to get the feel of the seatbelt when it grabs the body. You can practice turning and looking in both directions before a turn is executed. It's all about establishing hand eye coordination and automatic reactions. If your grandchild does not develop the automatic skills necessary, driving will be so stressful and frightening, that they won't want to continue.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION**

When your grandchild cannot communicate, they will become easily frustrated. So if the language acquisition is not working successfully, or if your grandchild has a tendency to destroy the picture cards, you can try the newer electronic communication Apps like [Proloquo2go](#), available for Apple iPads. There is nothing like a bright shiny electronic display to attract your grandchild's attention and motivation.

## **OTHER ON-LINE ARTICLES ABOUT TEACHING LIFE SKILLS**

[Autism Life Skills: 10 Essential Abilities for Children with ASD](#)

[Teaching Important Life Skills](#)

[Grandparents Can Make A Difference!](#)

My special thanks to [Donna Williams](#) and [Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay](#) - adult persons with autism who took the time to write books about their lives; books which included descriptions of how they think and how they experience the world around them.