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3-13-07

I am both a special education administrator in the public schools and a parent of a teen on the autism spectrum. I speak to you with my experience of both in mind.

The needs of high functioning students with autism spectrum disorders are easy to overlook from a "data point of view". My son, for example, met the goal on his CMTs and CAPT, he has been on the honor roll in high school for 3 years and has not had a disciplinary referral since we learned of his disability. At home, he vacuums, walks the dog, does his own laundry and makes a lot of his own meals. You might reasonably ask, why this student would need services after graduation from high school...Because...

People with autism have enormous difficulty maintaining awareness of things and people around them, appraising situations and responding in an effective and socially appropriate. Let me give you a few of examples:

--When my son started 9th grade, he knew promptness to class was important. His response to this was to push his way out of class, head down trailing his lap top case, and plowing through the crowds, rolling over the VP's shoes and banging into lockers. He was always on time to class but oblivious of the impact of his behavior. Other students watched, shook their heads and wondered if he was weird or just rude. Either made him a target for teasing or retaliation. We had to explicitly teach him to hold up his head and pick his way through the crowded halls. We had to teach him to be aware of how it felt to bang into someone with his case and then to say "sorry" or "excuse me".

--In order to develop a greater awareness of how to get around town, I have been asking my son to give me directions as we drive. One day, we came to a stop sign and sat and sat... until, he "came to", looked around, saw that I was starting to recline my seat and eventually said..." I think we go right..."

--In one of his classes, a couple of students had consistently been unpleasant to him: saying weird things to his face, taunting him with questions about girl friends and yelling at him. Then one day he reported to me they were unexpected friendly. He said to me sweetly, "They want to be my friends now. They asked me to get up in front of the class and show some dance steps before the teacher started." We all know they were setting him up to be mocked and made fun of...but he didn't.

What my son needs more than anything is someone to help him to figure out what is going and how to respond. He is a very capable learner but...negotiating the real world is very challenging. So, he tends to keep to himself and limit his activities to those he knows he can do successfully.

As a special education administrator I watch capable young people graduate with remarkable transcripts. They and their parents are proud and relieved that the ordeal of high school is ended successfully. They head off to college, technical schools and job placements. And then wind up at home not sure what happened that caused them to lose a job or fail in college....They have good skills and many talents but failed in negotiating the real world opportunities and problems that situations presented.

The point is that with a modest amount of assistance at critical times, my son and others like him could be successfully contributing members of society. Without is, they may be left dependant on others, at home, unemployed or grossly underemployed and subject to loneliness and rejection if not being preyed upon.