



Helping Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders Get Off to a Good Start

By Cathy Pratt
Courtesy of Indiana University Newsroom

As fall approaches, parental concerns such as, "Will my child be successful in the new school year both academically and socially," and "Will his/her new teachers command a good understanding of autism spectrum disorders (ASD)," seem magnified with all the unknowns that the new school year brings. At times, parents might know staff and have a good working relationship with them. Other times, staff is unknown.

Cathy Pratt, director of the Indiana Resource Center for Autism at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University, offers tips to help parents become a proactive and positive advocate for their children.

— **Many teachers may have had limited or no experience with students with autism spectrum disorders.** Parents need to proactively educate but not overwhelm educators

with too much information. Identify your special education planning district's autism leader, who might be able to assist with training or support.

— **Staff will need information** about how autism impacts your son/daughter. List specific information about learning styles, communication systems, medical issues, behavior supports and other topics. Make sure to describe the student not only in terms related to their ASD (e.g., sense of humor, kind, gentle, smart). Ask that information be shared with relevant staff including cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, the school secretary, the school nurse, and administrators. Specific items to list include:

My son/daughter has the following strengths, gifts and special interests (fixations); these are struggles or difficulties at home or in previous school settings; these strategies don't work (e.g., creates boredom, increases anxiety, leads to behavior, decreases learning); more information that is important for you to know (e.g., diet, eating habits, toilet training, sensory issues); my child communicates in the following way; these are my top three priority goals for my child on the

autism spectrum; my son/daughter receives programming from these professionals outside the school district; these strategies work best with my son/daughter (e.g., increases motivation, interest, learning and success).

— **Request information** about the school routine and resources. This can include bus schedules, parent teacher organizations, and available resources such as counselors, social workers and nurses.

— **Alleviate the unknown.** Before beginning the school year in a new school, parents can take steps to alleviate any anxieties they or their children might have about the new setting. Preparation for this move can be facilitated by obtaining a map of the school, a copy of the students' schedule for the fall, a copy of the student handbook and rules, and a list of

The ultimate goal is to promote a successful experience for children and parents

clubs/extracurricular activities. Ask to take a tour with your son/daughter before the school year begins. Request a list of school supplies, locker combination, and clothes needed for physical education. Practice getting up in the mornings and eating breakfast.

Visit the lunchroom. Parents can help their children learn how to navigate the lunchroom, where to sit, and the rules of the lunchroom. Work with the staff to develop a social narrative or visual task analysis if needed.

— **ID a mentor or helper.** Ask the school to identify key people or identify a mentor the student can contact if she/he is having a difficult time adjusting or understanding a certain situation. Ask for the name and contact information for this person. This is especially important if your son/daughter is in middle or high school.

Pictures. If possible, obtain pictures of your student's teachers, staff, bus driver, cafeteria workers, etc.

— **Classmates** of the new student also may need information. This should be provided in a respectful manner and without stigmatizing the student on the autism spectrum. Talk to the

teacher about how classmates will be informed.

— **Establish a communication system.** At the very beginning of the new school year, establish methods and a schedule for communicating between home and school. Suggestions for maintaining ongoing communication include journals, daily progress notes, mid-term grades, scheduled appointments or phone calls, e-mails, informal meetings, report cards, or parent teacher conferences. Inform teachers of the method of communication that works best for you. These forms can be used to facilitate home school communication.

— **Be clear and proactive** about your expectations for the school year. When parents and school staff collaborate, the students are the ultimate winners. At times, rumors can circulate about a district, school or

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Finding Back-to-School Deals

By Joseph Pisani
AP Business Writer

Stores are going all out to pull you in the door for back-to-school shopping.

That's because every retailer wants a piece of the \$83.8 billion that the National Retail Federation expects Americans will spend

avoid getting sucked into buying stuff you don't need.

Greutman suggests putting a list of everything you need and sticking to it. If school hasn't started yet, check the school's website. Many schools post a supplies list early. If not, call and ask.

Do some research before you head out shopping to see which retailers are offering deals. RetailMeNot, the coupon website, updates its site with back-to-school deals several times a day at retailmenot.com/backtoschool. If you have an iPhone, you can also download RetailMeNot's free app to keep up with new deals while you're out shopping. Experts say you can expect back-to-school deals to continue until the middle of September.

To get you started, here is a selection of some of the better back-to-school discounts big retailers are offering:

CLOTHING

Teen retailers are cutting prices on their jeans. All of American Eagle Outfitter's blue jeans are \$29.99 for a limited time, as much as \$20 below regular price. At Abercrombie & Fitch, all jeans are \$39 until Aug. 21. Regular priced jeans at Abercrombie can cost between \$70 and \$90.

Sears is offering 15 percent discounts on clothing and shoes at stores in states that have tax holidays. Check to see if your state has an upcoming tax holiday.

Kmart is taking off 5 percent of purchases that are put on layaway. But keep in mind that Kmart's layaway plan costs \$5.

The free haircuts at J.C. Penney are for kids during August and only at stores that have a salon. You

need to book in advance.

If you're looking for school uniforms,

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this year during the back-to-school season.

J.C. Penney is offering kids free haircuts, Microsoft is giving out a free Xbox if you buy a computer and Abercrombie & Fitch is selling jeans for half-off their regular price.

Sound tempting? Put your armor on.

"They're trying to get you in the store and keep you in there and spend more money," said Lauren Greutman, deal expert at coupon website Savings.com and founder of savings site IAMThatLady.com.

In order to actually save money, you need to focus on getting the deals and

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