

# USE YOUR IMAGINATION TO GET YOUR CHILD MOVING

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means that when trying to find a way to motivate your ASD child, you may have to try many different approaches and, above all, think outside the box—after all, when you're working with a child who has autism there is no box is there?

## TRY EVERYTHING

At one particular conference while talking to some parents, a woman pointed in my direction and said, "It's him, it's him!" I looked over both my shoulders to see what celebrity was behind me—but this grandmother of a child with autism was actually pointing at me. She subscribed to *Autism File*, and recognized my photo from an article I had written for the magazine titled, "The Exercise Connection."

She had read the article and was inspired to find some activities that would benefit her grandson's health, sensory needs, and future as an adult. Physical activity was not a part of their daily routine, so she wanted to find something that would be fun and motivating. She did it via membership at the local pool, and they both loved it. It was time spent together that strengthened their bond,

I have talked with families and professionals at conferences all around the world, and have been inspired by stories about their children, and the ones with whom they have worked. Because I'm an autism fitness specialist, I asked about the children's involvement in physical activity—and as you can imagine, I heard many diverse stories! But the million-dollar question they all asked me was, "Dave, what can I do to motivate my child?"

What can I tell you? Only that I've scratched my head, walked in circles, tapped my chin thousands of times trying to get a child excited about exercise and have them successfully complete an activity. The key is never giving up and believing that your child can do it and you can be the leader he or she needs.

## THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

We all know that if you've met one child with autism, you've met only one child with autism. Autism affects each child differently, meaning there isn't a cookie-cutter approach to working with any child on the spectrum. And that

## GET INVOLVED

I believe firmly that if you are going to "talk the talk," you must "walk the walk." Many people understand the benefits of physical activity—it reduces the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and obesity; and in children and adults with autism, it can help reduce maladaptive behaviors and increase attention span, on-task behavior and levels of correct responding. Exercise also can help rid the body of toxins and boost the individual's mood, which may ease anxiety, depression, and mood swings (common hindrances for children with autism).

The easiest way to teach is by example. Children of all abilities learn by observing those closest to them. When working with your child you need to be able to model activities, and try different sports or exercises. You need to be flexible, agile and healthy if you want the same for them. Even so, doing it yourself may be a challenge! Try to keep in mind that getting involved gives you another chance to engage with your child. You're also performing the vital function of instilling a behavior in his or her life and routine that we know can positively affect health and outlook for a lifetime.

Sometimes it takes one person, moment, teacher, organization, or team that changes your day and sometimes your entire life. You can be that inspiration for your child, and/or the children with whom you work.

## THINK VISUALLY

If you work in sales you may use pie charts and graphs to convey the benefits of your product and why the people should buy it. Your child may need a visual, too, of the exercise or activity you want him or her to perform—it can be as simple as stick figures or photographs cut out of magazines.

with the bonus that she'd so far lost 10 pounds and felt that her own health was improving.

It goes to show that we all have it inside of us to lead our children to a physically active lifestyle. Grandma did it—now you go do it. I lost Grandma's contact info, somewhere between the tears and hugs that we shared as she told me her story. Grandma, I want you to know that since that day your story has inspired me to want to educate more parents, guardians and professionals and reach more children. Thank you for sharing your story with me! When we meet next I will tell the people around me, "It's her, it's her!" ◀

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