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things you can do to help your child's teacher.

Have realistic expectations for your son or daughter and their teacher:

There are 480 special needs children with IEPs in the Yankton School System alone. The district has to provide for all of those children. Realize your child is not the only student in the class. Your child's class may have one or more children who may have their own learning disabilities. That's why your involvement is vital! There is also a professional library at the Yankton School District and they are willing to loan out books — utilize them.

Don't limit your child by the term Autism. Schools try to integrate children with Autism, but the Autism Spectrum varies so vastly. There are those that are severe and those that are high functioning. There is not a one size fits all method.

There is no cure for Autism, but there are strategies in helping them to grow in life skills. Know that your child is different. If we lived in a perfect world, our children wouldn't have autism and people wouldn't make fun of them because they are different. Face it... We're not in a perfect world.

Communicate: Talk to your teacher. Talk to other children. Talk to the parents of students in your class. Talk to your family and friends. Remember: The role of the teacher and parent are different. While the end goal is the same, the same map cannot be used to get there.

Meltdowns are going to happen. You can't prevent them, but with the right help, they will learn how to deal with their emotions when they are feeling overwhelmed.

Stay positive. Recognize his/her weaknesses and emphasize his/her strengths. Find the things they do amazingly well, such as

their memory skills. Consider, they could be the next Einstein! Our son gets sick to his stomach when middle school football starts because he is afraid due to his physical ability. So while he still needs to exercise we work with our school, maybe he can be the waterboy, or statistician. This keeps him involved with his peers, but also keeps him safe both physically AND emotionally.

It's alright to grieve the fact that your child has a disability, but don't let that grief overwhelm you. You have no reason to feel guilty for your child having Autism. It is what it is and there is no cure for it. Until you can realize that, you cannot move forward.

Some really good books I have, I've given to the teachers and we read to the students in my son's class are:

*Can I tell you about Asperger Syndrome?*

A guide for friends and family by Jude Welton.

*Annie Books Series*®

Experience Attention Deficits Through the Eyes of a Child  
Written by Michelle Fattig

*My Best Friend Will* by Jamie Lowell and Tara Tuchel

Don't get me wrong, I've had my moments of desperation not knowing how I'm going to get through the next day and worrying about what our son's future holds. Thankfully, I have this amazing support group of family, friends, co-workers, and educational staff that listen. Maybe that's the key, having a strong support group. If you don't have a support group, please feel free to e-mail me.

Last but not least, love them for who they are, not who you think they should be. All that gets thrown out the window with an autistic child.

*Thank you to Joyce Wentworth, Director of Student Services for the Yankton School District.*

■ by Heather Heimes  
[heather.heimes@yankton.net](mailto:heather.heimes@yankton.net)



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