

# Speaking Their Language: Teaching the Child with Autism



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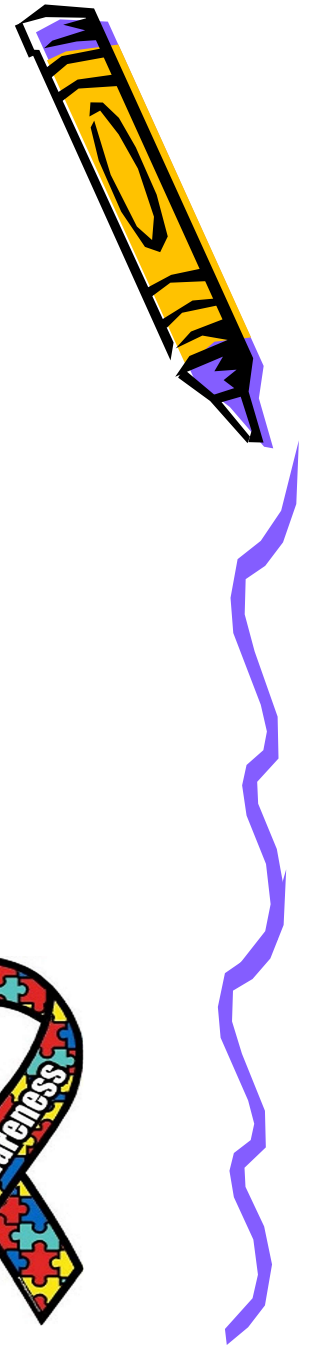
# Autism

- Incidence Rate: 1 in 88 children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, March 30, 2012)
  - Huge increase since the 1980' s



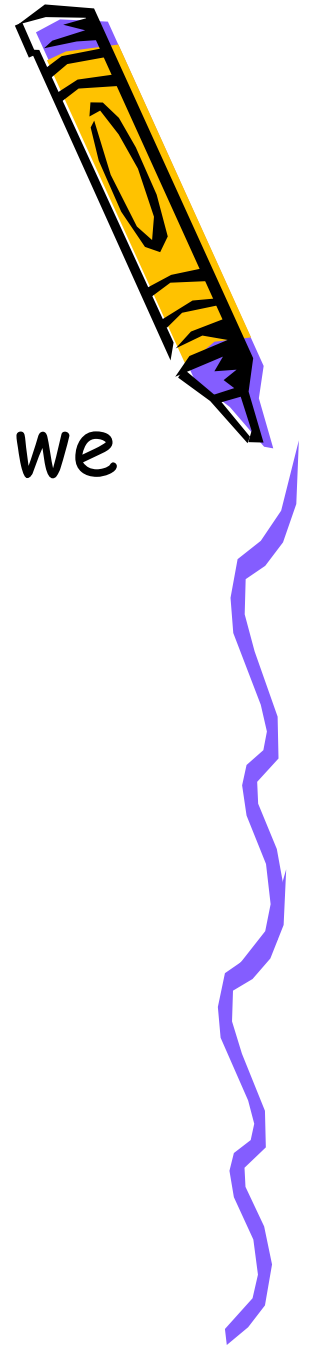
# Autism

- Spectrum Disorder
- Exhibit Deficits in:
  - Communication Skills
  - Social Interactions
  - Behavioral Skills



# Teaching the Individual

- “If a child cannot learn in the way we teach...we must teach in a way the child can learn.”
  - Dr. O. Ivar Lovaas

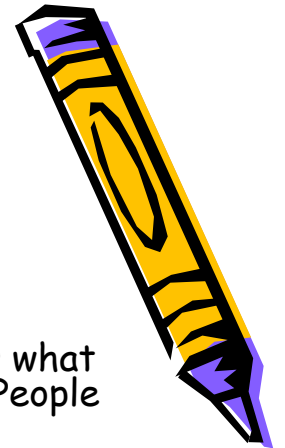


# Tips

- See the child, not the diagnosis.
- Each child is different.
- Teach visually.
- Be aware of environmental distractions.
- Avoid multiple terms for the same concept.
- Be structured, but flexible.
- Tackle one issue at a time.
- Be patient, with yourself and your student.



# This is What Life is Like for Me...



- **Social** - I don't know the unspoken social rules: what to do, what not to do, or what gestures mean. I may laugh during a funeral and talk loudly during a concert. People are often angry with me and I don't know why.
- **Executive Function** - I'm always focusing on what others consider needless and unrelated details. I live in the present. Planning ahead never occurs to me. I have to be shown how to problem solve.
- **Sensory** - I may like a firm grip or I may not want any touches at all. Certain sounds will really hurt my ears. I may be extremely sensitive on the palms of my hands and fingers.
- **Language and Communication** - I learn English like you learn Greek. When someone talks to me I have to think about many things: looking at your face and trying to "read" your mood, listening to all your words and figuring out what you mean, thinking of what to say when you ask me a question and trying to make sure I put the words to my answer in the right order so you understand.
- **Behavior** - I don't know what "behave" means...you'll have to teach me that with rewards and praise.



# What Autism has Done to my Powers of Processing

- I have a fantastic photographic memory. I can remember what happened on July 4, 1992, can you?
- I can recite any and all of my favorite videos to you, but I'm not sure what it all means.
- I can only focus on one thing at a time.
- I don't understand most of what's said to me.
- I can learn a ton of facts, but I do not know how they relate to one another.
- I need routine and consistency to understand the world.



# I Love Facts and am very Literal.

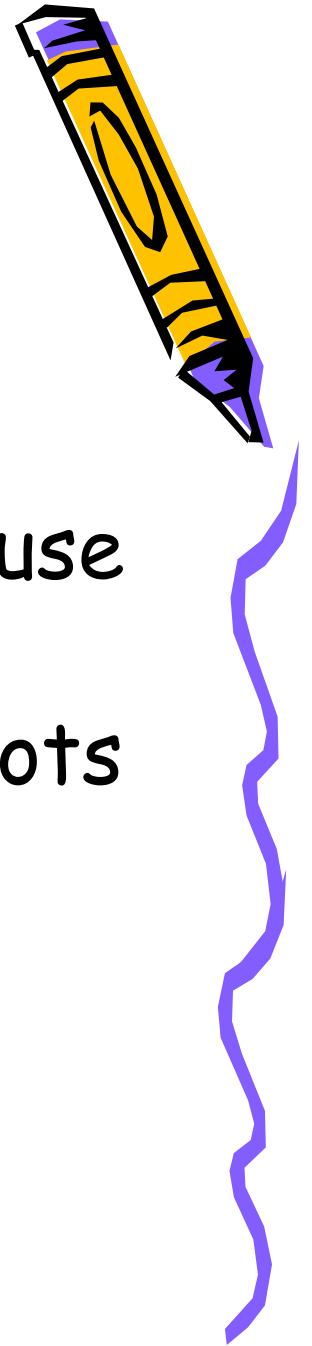
- Use a few words at first, add more as I understand more.
- Since I'm so literal, I don't get jokes or puns. I use clichés incorrectly.
- Explain subjective/abstract things to me in an objective way.
- To make sure I've understood, ask me to show you.





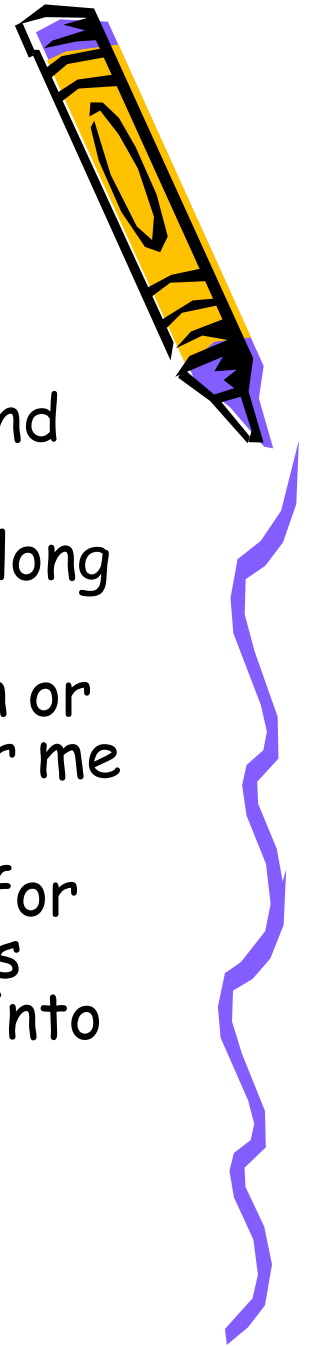
# I love Rules...Especially Ones that don't Change.

- Begin with absolutes.
- Use musical vocabulary that I will use as an adult.
- Teach one concept at a time with lots of repetition and practice.
- Keep the lesson routine the same every time.



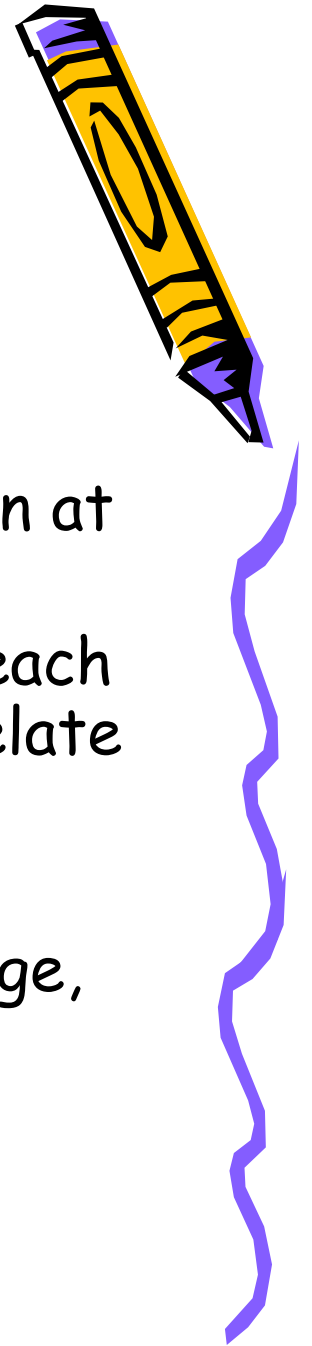
# I learn Best with Pictures.

- I memorize what I see, so pictures, posters and charts help me learn more than spoken words.
- Pictures help me know what to expect or how long the lesson or practice will take.
- Pictures can show me what I will do in a lesson or practice, then can serve as “menu options” for me to design my own practice session.
- Since most concepts have to be broken down for me into smaller “steps” that I can do, pictures help chain the individual steps back together into a task.



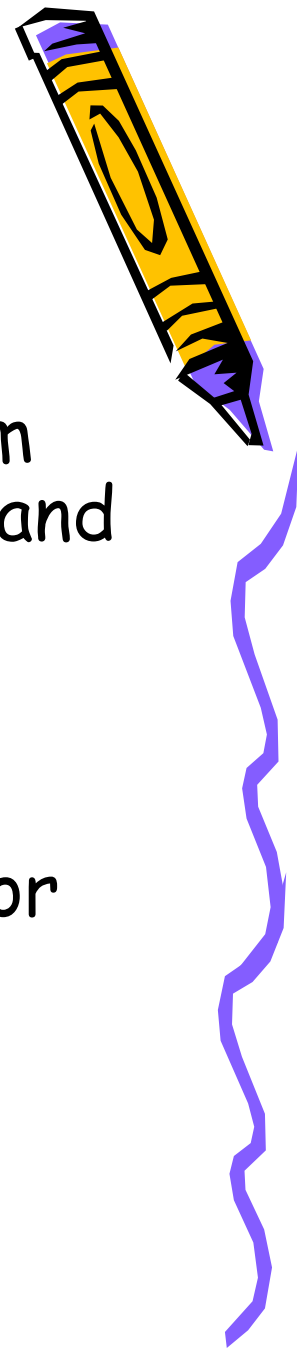
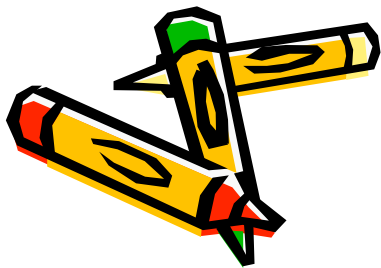
# I will “file” as you Teach.

- Teach me in a structured, systematic way.
- Make sure that what I do today will be built on at next week's lesson.
- I need to know how all the “parts” that you teach me fit into the “whole”, and how the pieces relate to one another.
- Once I understand how the parts relate, what always stays the same and what can change, then I can learn to build in flexibility.



# Don't be Afraid of my Fits....

- When I tantrum, run away, or hide, I am not hurt or upset, I'm just frustrated and I don't know what else to do.
- Teach me what I should do.
- Make sure I do it.
- When I do what's expected, praise me or reward me so I can memorize the rule. Then I'll know what to do next time.



# What People Need to Know about Me:

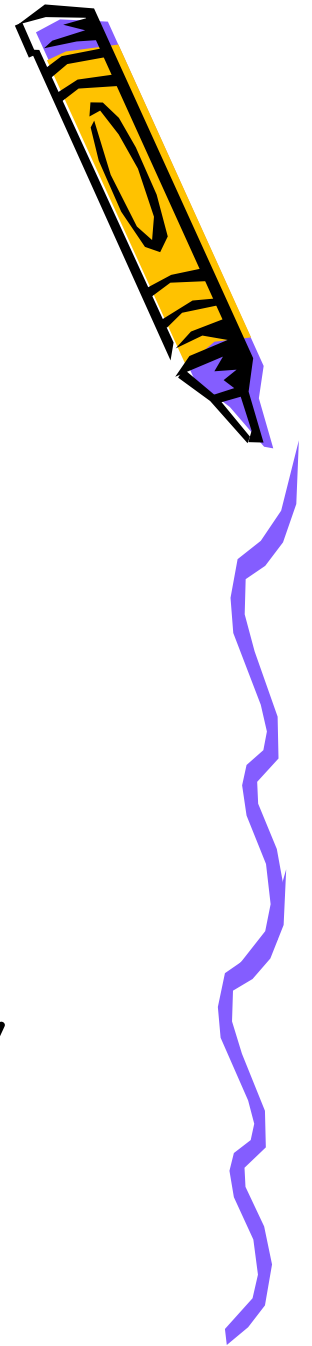
- I am always learning, always growing in my cognitive skills, but it just takes a little longer for me.
- I am limited in learning only by lack of opportunity, not ability.
- I am aware of my feelings and can express them appropriately if I am taught.
- I need task analysis: it may surprise you how much you have to break things down for me.
- Once I learn a skill, I will have to know that the same concept applies to other pianos, other music, etc.
- Meet me where I am, but don't leave me there....help me become successful in the real world.



# Tyler

Tyler: Low functioning, great ear

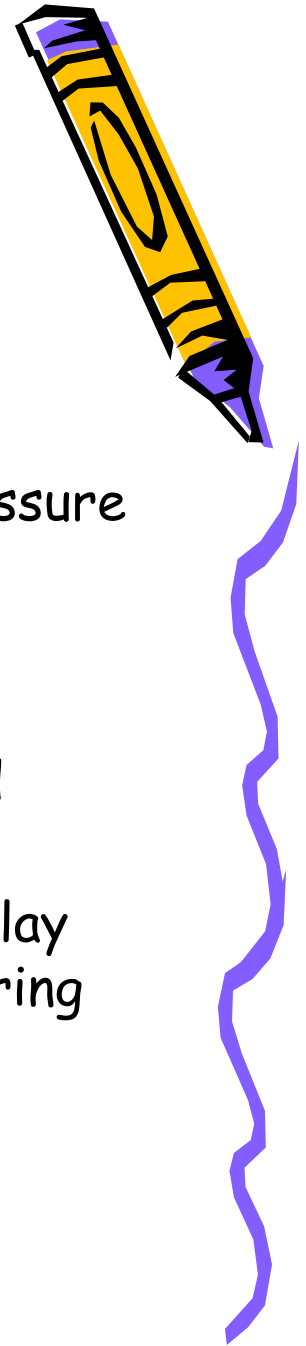
- Setting up the studio
  - Minimizing distractions
- Behavior
  - Parental involvement
- Lesson planning
  - Lesson board: routine and predictability
  - “Free play”



# Tyler

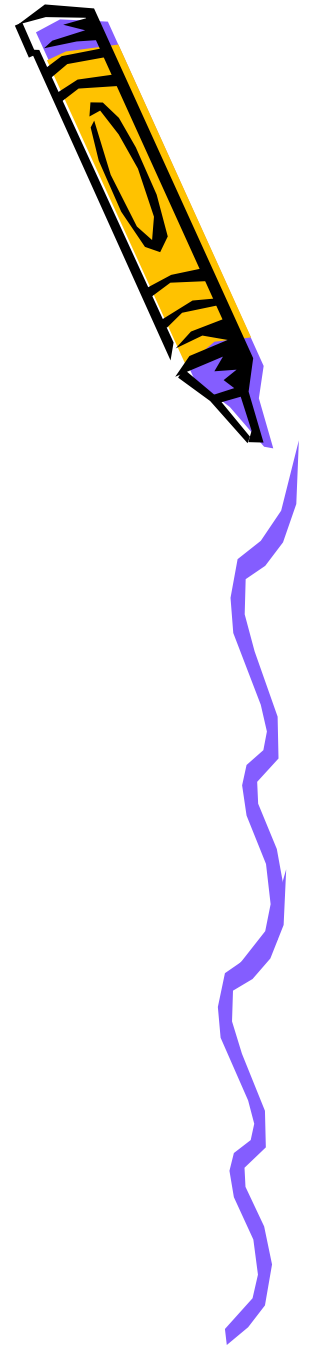
## Teaching by rote

- Providing opportunities for success without the pressure of reading
- Shadowing of hands allows time to correct his hand position while he focuses on reproducing the sounds
- Technique exercises: reinforcing good fingering and hand position
- Recognizable children's songs: encouraging him to play single line RH melodies which reinforces good fingering and hand position



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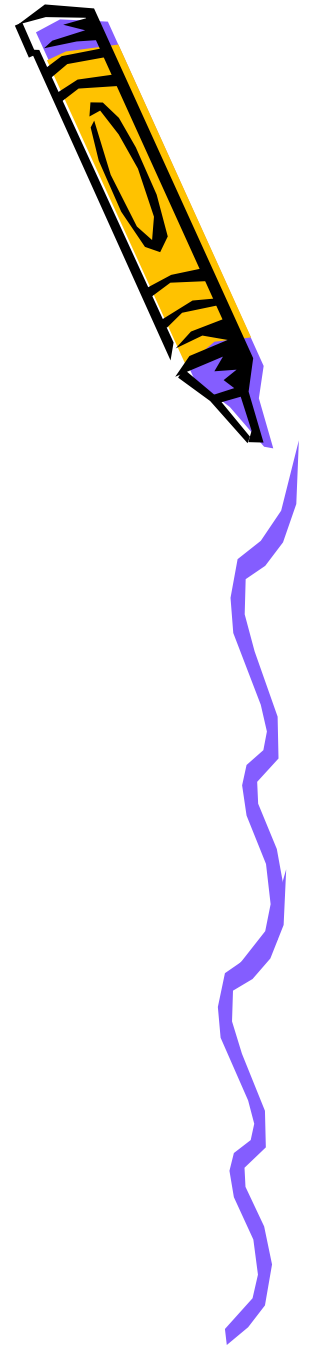
- Teaching reading
  - Being specific when naming and attaching only one name to items
  - Preparing music and minimizing visual distractions





# Tyler

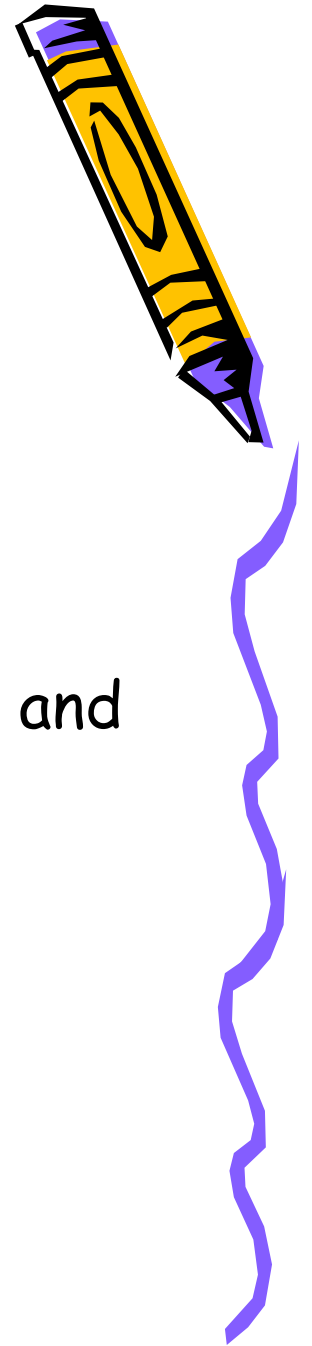
- Performances: opportunities for success
  - Preparing for the distractions of an audience



# Josh

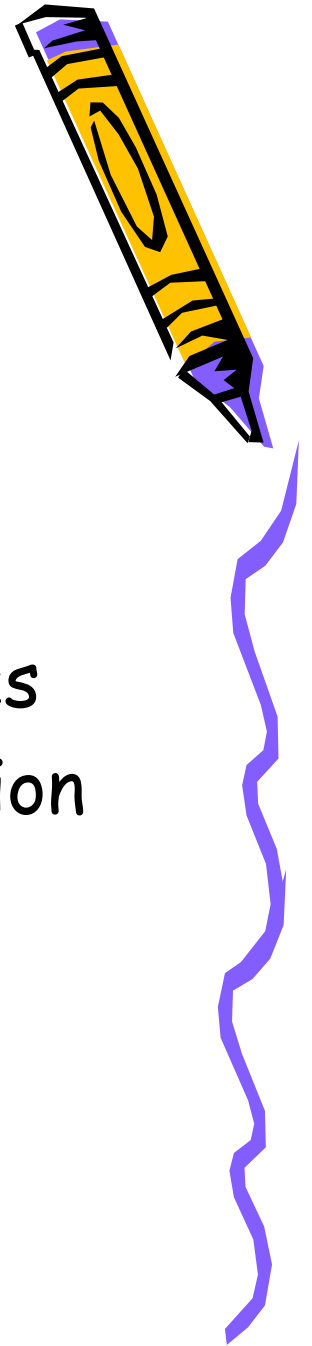
Josh: High functioning, great ear

- Setting up the studio
- Behavioral modification
  - Social skills, following instructions, change and fixation
- Predictability, schedule
- Being clear with feedback
  - Detailed notes for home practice



# Josh

- Teaching musicality
  - Phrasing: being specific with dynamics
  - Monotone speech and musical inflection
- Performances: opportunities for success



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