

The Sun

Newsletter

Summer 2021

Table of contents

When inconsistent behavior is a matter of life and death
by Kyle Bryan 4

Too many moves made our grandson doubt our love
by Diane Isaacs 5

Unlearning the pattern of frustration in inconsistency
by Heidi Mizell, CPSS 6

Literal laughs..... 7

Flexible thinking
by Carla Koss..... 8-10

Inside Autism Delaware 11-12



Our mission

To help people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD)



As we all have experienced at one time or another, inconsistent messaging can create confusion and unintended problems. Sometimes, the inconsistency requires getting lost and finding our way back, as in the case of inconsistent road signage. But for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), inconsistency can stop them in their tracks, and getting them restarted takes a lot more than merely turning around at the next light.



This issue spotlights some examples of inconsistency and how the messages got turned around. Plus, an article beginning on page 8 describes flexible thinking.

To begin, Eric Endlich, Ph.D., clinical psychologist and founder of Top College Consultants®, answers questions about how he avoids or explains inconsistencies to his students. Endlich has created an extensive list of autism-friendly colleges, and guides teens on the spectrum nationwide through the college application and transition process (<https://www.topcollegeconsultants.com/autism-in-college/>).

Q Do you speak differently to students with ASD (like avoid metaphors)?

While some of us on the spectrum understand metaphors and idioms, others interpret speech very literally and struggle with this type of language. If the person you're speaking with finds such language confusing, it's best to say what you mean in a direct, literal way and avoid figurative speech.

In addition, some students I work with become very anxious in conversation, which makes it harder for them to follow what's being said. As a result, they may need to have questions or instructions repeated sometimes. They may also repeat themselves because routine and familiarity can be comforting.

Continued at the top of p. 3

Inconsistent Messaging Continued from p. 1**Q** What do you understand about their written and verbal communication processes?

A Autistic individuals represent a wide range of language abilities, including those who speak minimally but understand spoken speech well and communicate effectively through keyboards or other means. Hari Srinivasan, a student at the University of California, Berkeley, who writes for his university paper and is a student instructor, is a well-known example.

People on the spectrum who are visual thinkers process information better in forms other than speech. Temple Grandin, perhaps the world's most famous autistic person, has written on this topic extensively. For an example, see her book *Thinking in Pictures* (<https://www.amazon.com/Thinking-Pictures-Expanded-Life-Autism/dp/0307275655>).

Likewise, I find that I have a much better memory for things I read versus things I hear. As a result, it can help to present information in more than one form, such as providing a written summary of the conversation afterwards or an illustrated social story about important concepts.

In addition, many autistic students struggle with aspects of executive function, such as organization and planning; as a result, writing can be one of the most difficult tasks for them. I spend many hours with students, helping them organize their ideas for essays on their college applications,

Eric Endlich's recommended resource

Is That Clear?: Effective communication in a neurodiverse world, by Zanne Gaynor, Kathryn Alevizos, and Joe Butler (2020). Acrobat-Global, publisher. Available at Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/That-Clear-Effective-communication-neurodiverse/dp/1916280021>

and we often go through many revisions. Just as with conversation, anxiety about writing can lead students to "freeze" and have difficulty getting started.

Q Do you give the students a list of steps to take if they get mired down in the written or verbal language of their college application process?

A It usually helps to break things down into smaller, simpler steps. My approach is to just take this one step now and we'll tackle the rest later. There's a lot of jargon in college admissions, and I take the time to explain terminology and direct students to useful articles.

Q Do you take any special steps with students on the spectrum to help them communicate better through the process?

A Patience and flexibility are key. I get to know each student to understand their unique style of connecting and communicating. I supplement my spoken words with written messages (for example, Zoom chat or email) and visual demonstrations (for example, showing them useful information online).

I know it will take longer for some students to understand a conversation, process my instructions, or write an essay. I'm here to help them for as long as it takes.

Inconsistency affects us all Continued from p. 2

And Lorraine has responded favorably to the change to a new routine. I think she has adapted so well because she has an excellent, caring, and patient job coach. POW&RSM direct support professional (DSP) Victoria Peh has eased Lorraine's transition back to work with gentle guidance.

Another reason Lorraine has responded favorably to the change: She was already experienced at shredding. Not only has she been doing that work at home for quite a while, but she is also personally familiar with the Public Defender's Office! (There wasn't much of a learning curve in performing the work to be done.)

The takeaway from all this: COVID-19 has affected us all. As an inconsistency in our everyday lives, it forced us to face difficult changes and adapt to them. It's been rough, but I can see light at the end of the tunnel.

The good news is, Autism DelawareSM remains a strong, robust organization. And POW&R continues to reach out to new community partners so that we can continue to provide help to families and people affected by autism.

If you need help or can offer help as a community partner, call us. The new statewide phone number is (302) 224-6020.