“First Steps” Mild Autism Checklist

This is **practical parent-to-parent conversation about early ways to help your Child**

(Our son is now doing well: at 22 he is responsive, friendly and is studying at tertiary level.)

But some things we learned the hard way. This Checklist has been produced for you,

**so *you*** **don’t have to learn it all the hard way!**

**Tick this box**, to confirm you are now seeking advice, noticing your son or daughter (or other loved one) appears less-responsive than most children. And maybe he.she has other odd behaviour.

**The rest of this Checklist helps you understand what to do next.**

**Your instinct is to draw your Child out,** make him or her respond to you.

**Tick** the box once you admit that insisting your boy.girlpay attention to you **doesn't really work.**

Why does badgering not work? There are many reasons, that you will learn about over time.

(a) One common reason is that he.she has Oversensitivity: eg to sound, touch, smell. When strong physical intrusions make you feel overwhelmed, you naturally prefer to stay in Own World.

Can you identify which are the “overload-causers” (e.g. loud noises?) Try to reduce them!

Create an uncluttered calm place in the house/backyard for your Child to retreat from the overloads.

(b) Another reason, perhaps even more common, is that although your boy or girl may not look overactive, his or her head is buzzing with thoughts that occupy his.her attention. The thoughts may also be confusing so they take concentration to work them out. So your input doesn't get through much, or at all. In fact your instructions and questions may be adding to the confusion.

As you'll see below, there are techniques to use that can help your loved one to relax.

If you accept that you need different ways to engage your loved one, tick these boxes as you go,

 as you try more “specialised approaches”. The specialised approaches will give your Child

\* more **Self-Confidence**, **and** \* your Child will start **Trusting / Relaxing with you more**

(a) When your youngster is upset, don't try to "solve the distress" or "tell him or her what to do". **Simply be with your Child,** even if you need cotton wool in your ears to remain calm.

Your presence may not be acknowledged, but it is felt: your Child will take comfort from you.

When you are simply there*,* not demanding anything, you’re building***Trust and Calmness****.*

Your Child may respond to your offered hand, or may accept a hug after a while... 15 minutes?

**Tick** once you have tried this non-demanding "being-with" technique. Do you feel peace growing?

(b) At times when your Child is playing (even if strangely) or making noises, **Copy your Child's behaviour alongside him or her.** It may feel awkward, but do it. In this way you are approving the behaviour, *not criticising for a change*, and thus you are building up both **Trust** and **Confidence**.

**Tick** after you have tried this a few times - do it enthusiastically - are you feeling a connection starting to happen? If it takes a little while longer, try again later, don't give up at the start!

(c) “I want to reach, and teach my Child!” Absolutely, but the key for you is correct Timing.

Though sometimes you might want to immediately share or teach something you find stimulating,

in your special case you can only do it *when your Child is in his.her* *most* ***Receptive*** *state.***Tick when you realise you must wait until these times occur.** At the times that you realise your Child is somewhat receptive, slowly gain his or her attention. You may need to mute some of your enthusiasm so your intrusion does not overwhelm. Introduce your input gently. It may be received.

(d) “But I want my Child to become ‘normal’, not forever living in his.her Own World”.

Your attitude is right! In the early ages however, even up to five, your opportunity to help is limited due to the higher levels of overwhelm at these ages.

**Tick** once you are giving him.her more Structure by describing activities in the form of pictures, like setting up a daily Picture Board. Google “Autism daily schedule board” and buy or adapt one. Your Loved one gains more Confidence and less Anxiety knowing what is going to happen next.

At the beginning your Child will still be mostly in Own World while developing Trust/Openness and Confidence. The more exciting and rewarding times come when you can occasionally help your Child reach out of Own World and contact /interact with the Real World: having an adventure! These opportunities increase with age, and the opportunities increase even more with the fuel you are adding to their fire - the Confidence and Trust you are now building up!

The way to get your Child to become more aware of the world, and to learn about interacting with others, is to get them interested in playing **Games**. If your boy or girl has fun playing Games in the Real World then you are “selling” him or her the *benefits of being in the Real World*. 'Want more!'

Teaching Game-playing is the **crux of “Real World Training”** (details: [www.mild-autism.com](http://www.mild-autism.com)).

(You will learn, for example, the best first Games are to simply extend what your Child is doing.)

Realistically, you have to direct your Child in daily tasks, and stop him.her doing dangerous things. But help him.her more, because giving lots of behaviour-instructions only agitates your Child, he.she only retains the memory of your agitation etc, not the learning you are trying to impart.

**Tick** if you can acknowledge this. There will be less friction, and importantly, less eroding of Trust.

Your own stresses must be examined here too. Bringing up any kid is stressful, but your situation demands more of you. If your Child is frequently and loudly upset, (medication may be an option at severe times) you cannot help but absorb more stress. Uncertainty also increases your stress: so if your partner has different ideas about what to do in the chaos, “spirited” arguments can result..! **Tick** when you both acknowledge this happens, or is likely to happen. And be good to each other!

Don’t make big plans requiring lots of energy while your Child is very young, because the need for vigilance, being ready for unexpected upsets, will require energy enough from you. You won’t don’t hear this often – but if you work to a good plan, **your Child will improve hugely over time!**

“Change of Focus” is a good start: take pleasure from smaller successes, and from being the best parent you can be. Reward yourselves more deliberately after your extra efforts. (Note your Child is less stressed about social-failures than you, because of lack of awareness of what he.she is missing.)

And a final, somewhat unexpected comment – RESPECT your Boy or Girl’s Own World..!

Do not always try to drag your boy or girl from it, because especially in early years,

**frequent Retreat to Own World is what is keeping your loved one relatively balanced!**

**Tick** the box when you recognise this important fact. And remember, we **all** have our 'Own Worlds' that we go to when things are too much, just as often. So **we are all Autistic,** just not as much.

Indeed **before** your Child becomes overloaded, **offer** the Own-World time (eg retreat to own room). (and note that when you Copy your Child you are actually joining him or her in Own World)

Finally, you may feel there are a lot of differences at the moment, but with mild autism, there is nothing “wrong” with your Child, and this “Real World Training” will help you realise the fact!

More is available at [www.mild-autism.com](http://www.mild-autism.com) from or email me at petercole@mild-autism.com.