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Inclusion and Socialization

in School and Community

Rick Clemens

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Textual Transcription of inclusion.mp3

Speakers: Ernest Priestly
Rick Clemens

Summary: In this web-based conference call, Ernest Priestly discusses the technique of *inclusion*, where children with autism are included in normal educational and social environments instead of being segregated by themselves. His guest, Rick Clemens, discusses various techniques for including children like this, specifically how to optimize your child's social and academic development in a balanced, effective way. Issues such as extending knowledge of disabilities to schools, clubs, teachers and community figures are also covered.

Full text below.

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Ernest Priestly: The call starts right now, and that is, we have here Rick Clemens. Rick Clemens is the founder of the IECP which is an organization which helps children, specifically children with autism and disabilities to be able to be included in school and also other areas in the community. Rick has been involved in this for quite a while; he has worked in various settings including schools, after school and summer programmes, homes, work programs and social programs which support individuals with disabilities. Throughout his career he has been committed and active in the integration, inclusion and socialization of the individuals he has worked with. He has worked different sides of this, actually. He was a teacher for a while. He has also developed a close relationship with hospitals, as well, to pioneer including children with autism in state hospitals and general education classrooms. Rick is a very sought-after speaker, as well, and he's going to come and help us today, and discuss all things related to inclusion in school, and areas in the community. I know that a lot of you have asked us a lot of questions so far, so without further ado, I want to say Rick, thanks so much for helping us out today. A lot of people are going to be listening to day and you can take the floor and tell us more about what IECP is about, we'll see if we can get a little more background on it than what I've read.

Rick Clemens: Great, well, thanks for having me. I've got admit to everyone, this is my first teleconference; I've been doing public speaking since 1992, and provide conferences all over the country, but this is my first teleconference so it's odd not seeing faces I'm talking to. So, if at any point, feel free, especially Ernest, to have me repeat something or if it's not clear just let me know. As Ernest said, my name is Rick Clemens, I'm the director of *Inclusive Education and Community Parternship*. We're an agency primarily based in California, supporting children with autism in inclusive settings. The neat thing about the agency is we'll only work with kids in inclusive, natural environments, because that's what our philosophy is – we believe children belong next to their typically developing friends, in natural environments. Our service delivery model is specifically geared towards supporting kids in more natural environments. The neat thing about that is we've become extremely large, which demonstrates the number of kids being included, which is the best, and then of course, the need for support for those kids when they are included. A little bit of background about myself: I've been working in the field since 1985. In 1991 I was the first teacher in Tulare County, which is a fairly large geographical county in California, to include a child with autism into a general education classroom. I didn't know what I was doing at the time, and when we look back at the old videotapes, it wasn't an ideal program by any means. But regardless of that, the child we were working with made significant progress. He went from my special ed. classroom, in fifth grade, where he'd been in special ed. classrooms since pre-school, into a general education program all day, and as I said, made tremendous progress. From there, we started to get phone calls into more and more consulting, and we currently work with thousands of kids with autisms in schools. About six or seven years, or more now, we started working with regional centers and lists of programs, and the way that worked is I'm an educator. I had no interest in expanding the agency by any means. We were plenty busy in the schools, but there were a lot of social skills programs happening with kids with autisms which were all segregated. Specialized segregated programs which were mainly clinic based. I went to the regional center, as I'd been working with them for years through the school system, on their part of advocating for kids to be included and coming to me to talk more about that, and doing training for them. So I had relationships with the regional center staff, and I said to them, "as you're doing all the segregated type social skills programs, I have two issues with that – one is, your mission statement is to be more inclusive, and provide inclusion opportunities for kids with autism and other disabilities, but also we know that kids with autism specifically have a really difficult time generalizing from one setting to the other, especially one which is completely artificial to something which is completely natural. With that, a whole host of other challenges and difficulties." They had said to me at the time, "we agree with you, but the issue is that parents are wanting social skills, and those programs are all that's out there, so why not write us a proposal?" At the time, I had said there was no way, I was swamped, but they encouraged me to, and I wrote a best-practice proposal working on social skills and play-dates, which was one child with autism and a typically developing peer from the neighborhood community, church, temple, school, et cetera, and having a real play-date – just as you would if you didn't have a disability – and then facilitating the social skills within that environment.

We picked that program, which was really one-on-one; one child with autism, one typically developing peer, and then what we call a *play facilitator* – a professional facilitating and working on social skills within that, figuring that would be the best and most ideal program. Everyone said that the regional center would never agree, based on the intensity of the program, and the individuality and the one-on-one nature as far as just one kid at a time. Of course, the natural environment part they would like. Well, they loved it, and within a month we had thirty kids. Now we're up to about three hundred staff, and about a thousand kids that we're serving every year through different regional centers and school districts. So it's been quite a wild ride that way, but again it really speaks about the importance of inclusion.

That's where we are now. Currently we work with regional centers and school programs throughout California, primarily, although we do this whole thing outside of California as well, on including kids with autism into regular educational settings. Our regional center programs have grown from socially-based to three basic program models, all inclusive in natural environments.

One of them is the social play program I mentioned earlier, the other program is the community inclusion program, where we basically say if you have a child with disabilities such as autism, that the child has the right under the American Disabilities Act in the United States, to participate in any program which is available to children without disabilities. But the reality, the law states that there needs to be support to help that child be happy and successful. So we'll go into Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, YMCA, karate, dance, organized sports… any type of community activity that a parent would want their child to participate in. We help facilitate their inclusion into that program.

The third program we're involved in is the behavioral program, where we're really looking at the inclusive family. We say to a family, "what are the behavior challenges which are interfering with your ability as a family to have a more inclusive life, and to participate in the activities which you would otherwise be participating in if your child did not have a disability?" It might be something such as being able to go to a restaurant, or being able to have a time when we all sit down together and read a book, or going to parties, camping or going sailing. We work with the family, and address and conquer those behavioral challenges, so that the family and the child can participate in more inclusive type of activities that are important to the family. Again, these are behavioral strategies, rooted in *ABA – applied behavioral analysis.* So that's the scope of our regional center programs, and our school programs.

Do we want to start with a couple of questions? Do you want me to give an overview of what inclusion is? Where do you guys want to go?

Ernest: Sure, that's a good idea. And also, some people might not be familiar with the term *regional center*, if you could explain that to people.

Rick: Yeah, thank you. Regional center is a California program; it's funded through the Department of Developmental Services. Many of you, at least I saw there was some questions from out of the country, and I can't speak to that, but within the U.S., most states have a department of developmental or disability services, and that's the department which supports kids outside of the educational system. In California, we have regional centers, which is part of a law called the *Lanterman Act*, and what the regional centers do is they're under the umbrella of the Department of Developmental Services, and they provide services, basically, a whole range of services to individuals with disabilities other than educational services. So, from birth until death, regional centers are involved with children, individuals with disabilities' lives, providing everything from infant care, to parent respite, to supported living and supported work;

everything but school related services.

Ernest: Very good. And then you were going to explain the other time, which I just forgot.

Rick: Let me just tell you a little bit about what inclusion is, just so we're on the same page. Is that what you were thinking, Ernest?

Ernest: Yes, that's what it was.

Rick: Many of you are familiar with the term *inclusion*, some may be more familiar with the term *mainstreaming*. We used to say – the old term in the seventies and eighties – that we were going to *mainstream* individuals with autism or disabilities, and what that meant was the child would go into these environments and then come out of them. In a school setting, mainstreaming meant that the child's primary home was a special education classroom, and they might be mainstreamed into a regular education class for math, art, P.E. or recess. *Inclusion* means that the child's included, are part of, they belong, or have a home in general education or in the natural environment community. So when we talk about inclusion, we're talking about having individuals with autism be in that environment, not be just in that environment, but be true members of that environment. Be it a classroom, where they would start their day in that classroom, end their day there, and the teacher or students would view them as a member of that classroom – because they would be – to a church or a temple where the person becomes a part of that church or temple. Or a Boy Scouts troop, where they don't just come on special days to be inclusive, but the child actually becomes part of that troop, or dance group. Obviously, to make that successful, we need to provide support to help that individual, and the adults who are with that child whenever they're there, to be able to best include them.

We used to work from a model – and unfortunately it's come back a little bit, so some people are still using this model – which we called the *readiness model*. What that meant was if a child would be included, mainstreamed or integrated when they were ready. What we know about many of our kids with autism or disabilities is they're never truly "ready", meaning that they've acquired all the skills necessary to be in the Boy Scouts or a regular education classroom without any extra support. So, when we talk about a child being ready, what we say from an inclusion point of view is there's no such thing as "ready". The question is, is the environment ready? If not, the environment needs to do what it needs to do ASAP, to become ready for that child. The child has a right to be there; it's in the child's best interests to be there. We want children to have rich, quality experiences in the life, and to be part of life, with people without disabilities. It does not matter what the degree of their disability is; they have the right to be there, and they should be there in almost all cases. Then it's our job, as the adults in the child's world, to provide the support to help them be successful. That's probably the most simple definition of what inclusion is.

I would say I have a basic premise that I work under: it is imperative that children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder have quality experiences in inclusive environments, and positive interactions with neuro-typical children of a similar age. So, if we are saying they should be in those environments 100% of the time, or just part of the time, the bottom line is that kids with autism need to have quality experiences with individuals without it. It's an imperative part of their quality of life as well as their behavioral treatment. That's basically what we're working under.

The other thing to understand about inclusion is that there's really no "cookie-cutter" approach to inclusion with ASD or autism spectrum disorder. There are conceptual understandings and principles to be applied, but there's not a cookie-cutter approach. It's not easy to say "Johnny has autism, I'm going to put him in a third grade classroom, and this is what it's going to look like." There are some basic principles we work under, but each child's program has to be based individually, because every child is different and every environment is different. It makes it a very difficult program. It's definitely doable – by no means is it not – we've seen thousands of kids be extremely successful in ways nobody ever thought they would be – but it's challenging, and the key is that the children do need the support, and adults working with the children need the support.

Another basic premise I would work under, that I would comment for people, is understanding – call this more of a prerequisite – if you're going to include a child with autism, you need to have this prerequisite of understanding – that children with autism spectrum disorder can learn incidentally, and will model from their peers given the right learning environment and interventions. When this occurs, a world of learning becomes available to the child. So, if you believe that a child with autism can only learn when being directly talked to, then inclusion wouldn't be the most appropriate environment. But I would argue very strongly – I've never met a child with autism that, put into an environment which is comfortable, invitingly reduced, thought out, with interventions in place, who can't learn incidentally or learn from modeling of their peers.

There was a study done in the earlier seventies, or late sixties. It was one of those instrumental studies in understanding autism. What they did was they took kids without autism into a clinic, and brought them into a room – one at a time – where they'd never been before. In the room was an adult, and as soon as the child walked in, the adult would start bouncing the ball, and on the other side of the room would be another ball. The adult wouldn't say anything to the child, and the typically developing child would look at the adult, walk over to the ball, and start bouncing it. The adult would then bounce the ball off the wall, and the typically developing child would to the same. It was concluded that children without autism can learn incidentally, or learn from modeling.

They brought children with autism into the room, one at a time, into the room where they'd never been before, with an adult they'd never seen before, not knowing what was going to happen – no priming, no transitional prompts. The adult would start bouncing the ball, and the child with autism would withdraw; escape, turn to the corner and engage in self-sensatory behaviors. What was concluded by that, in the late sixties or early seventies, was that children with autism could not learn incidentally. Obviously, that was thirty or so years ago, and what we learned since then is that study did not tell us that kids with autism can't learn incidentally – but kids with autism, when put into a novel situation without familiarity, will have extreme increases in anxiety, and will seek a way of avoiding or minimizing that anxiety or discomfort. What we've seen is if we were to prime the child, bring them to an environment they've been in before, with a familiar person; if we had a picture schedule or social story of what was going to happen ahead of time – so we lowered the anxiety with familiarity – the child would have done much better. We see that in natural environments all the time – when the kids are familiar to the child, when they've been taught how to interact with the child with autism, when they know what the schedules and activities are going to be for the day, the children are in a much better place to be able to model from their peers, because their anxiety is lower. It's a big area of autism we're really looking at now. We're kind of late on this, but we've been going for years, and there's research currently being done at UCLA on this, that autism in many ways, from the behaviors that we see, are anxiety behaviors. So the child with autism who has a difficult time processing the world around them is much more prone to having issues with high anxiety which make it difficult for the child to function naturally and effectively within the community and environments in which they are.

The last thing I'll say on that note about inclusion of kids with autism is a recognition that inclusion can occur everywhere – in school, across the grade levels, at play-dates, in community activities such as camps, sports, scouts, community associations such as churchs or temples, community events such as concerts or carnivals, family functions, work – really everywhere. The idea of inclusion is that just because the child has a diagnosis doesn't mean that they are not able to participate in the same aspects of life as those without a disability. It becomes our job as the adults to help that child to be successful. I think I said this earlier, but there's a quote from Judy Montgomery from the early nineties, which states: "Inclusion means you belong with your age-appropriate peers, and the adults in your world will provide the support you need to stay and learn with your friends." It means, basically, that it's our responsibility to make this a reality for the kids. We're the adults, we're responsible for the child's wellbeing, and we need to make sure that they are able to have those opportunities in life which they would otherwise not have, if we were not providing the support and the impetus that makes sure kids are included.

I'll share with you one more quote, something I wrote in the early nineties, which is: "Inclusion means belonging. It means being a part of. It means making friends, smiling, laughing, learning, crying, caring for others, growing and experiencing all the many facets of childhood. It simply means being a kid." Many of you who are listening know, many children with autism, based on their disability, end up not having the opportunity to just be a kid. There's actually some work that's being done from Barry Prizant and Amy Weatherby, where they're stating that the exclusion of children with autism from typical developmental experiences is creating a secondary disability which the effects of are perhaps greater than the negative effects of the primary disability of autism. It makes a lot of sense – what they're saying is that we take these kids with autism at a very young age, and we provide a heck of a lot of therapy in isolated settings. Don't get me wrong – I'm not saying that intensive therapy isn't good for kids, but the question is: can we provide that intensive therapy in more natural settings, and I believe strongly the answer is yes.

Anyhow, the idea is we take kids with autism at a young age, and we take them out of the typical experiences, and give them a lot of therapy in a lot of clinics – hours and hours – and we have to recognize that by doing that, there's only so much time in a day, we're taking away those opportunities to have more typical experiences. The result of that is that children with autism aren't having those typical developmental experiences which help in the development of typically developing kids, and we know that if you take a child without autism – a neruo-typical child – and you give them a very low-stimulus life, in the early years they enter kindergarten without the same level of skill sets and maturity in their development as those children with more intensive experiences in terms of pre-school, or mommy-and-me classes, or head start programs. Then you take a child with autism, who already has a difficult time taking in the information around them, or getting the most from the environmental stimuli that's out there for them, and we don't give it to them. It only makes sense that they are not going to reach the same development milestones are neuro-typical children who are having those experiences. So I believe strongly that we need to always be looking at how we can best include children and how can we get those needs met – physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech/language therapy or behavioral therapy – in a more natural environment. There have been some extremely innovate people out there who have created some great strategies and great ways of making sure those kids are getting the supports in the natural environment without the need for artificial types of settings.

Ernest: That's a really, really great explanation. How would you like to get started with some questions?

Rick: That would sound great – give my voice a break here, it sounds great!

Ernest: I think there were a couple of people that submitted questions beforehand – I'll hit some of those, but we had about another twenty that came in while you were speaking.

Rick: I read them over, and they were all fine questions, so if you just want to read them out while I take a breather, while you read the question, then I'll go ahead and answer it.

Ernest: Sure. I'm going to start one – Elizabeth from Concorde. "My son with autism is in high scool. Electives are the courses where he should have a choice. Unfortunately, the kids in the special ed. class were rejected in several mainstream classes due to a lack of staff for chaperoning. My son was given only two options: teaching assistant, or Art 101, which he took last year. He is not interested in T.A. and does not want to repeat the course. We were told the classes like dance, food, art/design and yoga are full. What can we do, as parents, to fight for our kids' inclusion in certain classes? Regular students get to choose their electives the prior semester; our children have to wait until we see what classes are not full, or what teacher is willing to take them."

Rick: Is that the end of the question, Ernest?

Ernest: Yes.

Rick: Do you know if that call came from the United States?

Ernest: It says *Concorde*, so that sounds like a U.S. name of some kind.

Ernest: Yeah, there's a Concorde in the Bay Area of California. The answer to that question is – first of all – a simple answer. The situation is extremely unfortunate. Under IDEA, the federal law protecting children in educational programs, as well as under the American Disabilities Act, kids with disabilities, autism included, have the same right to participate in those electives as any other child. So really, you have a couple of options. One is just to tell the school that you get a choice, and make sure they recognize that and give you that choice like they gave anybody else. The next thing, if they refuse to do that, is to let them know that you believe it's a violation of that individual's civil rights. Sometimes you need to start nicely, sometimes you need to raise the ante a little bit, and then make sure you follow through if they don't comply.

One of the worst things you can do to anybody is file a civil rights complaint, as far as the amount of paperwork and time it takes to clear that up, or to deal with the ramifications if you're proven to have violated civil rights. That is clearly a violation of civil rights. If the child is participating and is enrolled in that school, they have the right to participate in those electives. If they are saying that the kids without disabilities get first choices, it doesn't sound like they're saying, to me, that it's not educationally appropriate – which could be an educational argument – what I'm hearing is that the other kids get first choice and we'll give you what's left. That's an absolute violation of civil rights.

What I would do in that situation is make sure that the principal of the school knows, and the director of special ed. knows that it's not acceptable to you. If that doesn't fix the problem, then let them know it's not acceptable and you believe it's a violation of your child's civil rights, and you will file a complaint if they don't fix it. If they don't fix the problem, the third thing I would do is file a civil rights complaint. That's a pretty black and white one – civil rights would probably pick it up in a second, and the ramifications of that would be the school would have a full system change to make sure they're not violating civil rights of anybody at that school – which isn't a bad thing, when they're doing things like that. It sounds almost like the culture of the school which is not understanding the importance of making available everything to all kids. So the end thing would be – the very last one which I believe would be effective – would be to go to the office of civil rights and file a complaint. I'd give the school the opportunity to fix it before you did that because it's quite extreme.

Ernest: This comes up quite a bit with many of our parents. Some of them say "I don't necessarily have money for an attorney but I want to know the next best thing I can do." So you can certainly file a complaint with the civil rights office, but also to talk to the principal in a way that gets them to be on your side – I think that's what most people want to do.

Rick: Exactly. The first thing you want to do is be a team player, be collaborative, even if somebody's upsetting you, and creating a situation which is harming your child. Lots of times we get angry – which we should, it's understandable – but the first thing is to give them the opportunity to correct it and the next thing is to give them the opportunity to realize what the consequences will be if they don't correct it. The nice thing about filing a civil rights complaint is it's free – you don't need an attorney as they have their own attorneys which look into that for you. Several issues with the school – if the school is in a difference of opinion as to what's educationally appropriate, that most likely wouldn't be a civil rights issue, but in this situation it sounds as if they're making a blanket statement that kids in a regular education program get first choices, and kids in special ed. classrooms get second choice, and then you've created a second-class system which is absolutely an issue of civil rights.

If you said that you wanted your child to participate in a woodshop, and they said it wasn't appropriate for safety issues, or educationally relevant to the child, that would fall under IDEA, which is the *Individual's Disabilities Education Act*, which is much harder and more subjective.

Ernest: Sure. I want to say that you're a hero to Elizabeth today, because she just posted a note on the message board here, and she says "Yes, I'm from California. Thanks for answering my question, Rick. I have been told I will open Pandora's box, but I am going to do it. We are setting up an appointment with the principal."

Rick: Excellent. I like these teleconferences! Hey, if we can get immediate feedback like that, I'll come on here every week, Ernest, that's great.

Ernest: Yeah, it's really interesting. We've got a couple of comments from people; as a matter of fact, we're up to 44 questions now as we go along. Let's see here. Maybe I'll mix up a question that just came in. Here we have Kim McLean from Long Beach, Californa, and her question is, "Can you request an extra-curricular activity for elementary school children?"

Rick: Let me answer that the way I think that's being asked. There are two kinds of extra-curricular activity, if we put these into categories. There's school-sponsored and non-school-sponsored ones. Regarding school-sponsored ones, meaning that the school is organizing the activity, then absolutely, you can request that the child participates in that, and receives the support necessary to help them participate in that, through the school. Now, what's important to recognize is just because something's happening on the school campus doesn't mean it's school based activities. An example: if there's a football group or dance group that practices after school, even though the school might have assisted by sending out flyers, and even though it might be occurring on the campus, the school district may not be involved in the operation or oversight of it, which would make it a non-education extra-curricular activity. In that sense, your best bet of getting support would be through the regional center. Again, under the American Disabilities Act, the child has the right to participate in that activity, but they may not be able to without the appropriate support, and coming from Long Beach, you'd call Harbour regional center – or in general you'd call a regional center or the Department of Developmental Services – and look for support to participate in that. If it's a school-based activity such as science camp, if your child is in sixth grade and going to science camp, that's very much a school-based activity. School dancers, sports games and school football, basketball or water polo teams, et cetera, are school based. In that situation, the child should be able to participate and get support to be able to do that.

Ernest: Very good. Let's see here – I've got a question here from a woman named Holly who I spoke with today. She's from Michigan, and her question is, "My son, aged six, has ADD/OCD/Asperger's. His IQ is one less than genius. He is bored stiff in kindergarten – he is reading and they are learning their rights and lefts. What can be done to keep him stimulated?"

Rick: Well, I guess there could be several reasons why he could be bored. It could be because the curriculum is too simple for him, or that he just has no interest in it. There are different answers to those. If he's bored because it's too easily, basically, he already knows how to do those things and there's no challenge to it, then what any teacher should do is to provide some higher level thinking on top of that. When we look at gifted intelligence programs in the schools, there are two kinds. There's the kind that pull the child out – kind of the opposite of inclusion on the other end of the spectrum, there. And there's those where the teacher does what's called differential instructions – meaning the teacher meets the individual student's needs by providing higher level types of thinking embedded with the curriculum. So by pulling him out of the kindergarten classroom, the teacher would give him some – if they feel he's clearly mastered the material and doesn't need to work on it – they would give him some higher level type of thinking to target that creative intelligence as a way of keeping him interested and keeping him learning. It's not just a matter of keeping him interested but keeping him learning.

If it's a matter that he's bored because it's of low interest for him, which is common for many of our kids with autism, there are two sides of that. One is to try and embed interest into the curriculum, or any activities that are going on in the classroom, but we also need to teach people the manner of functioning in the world, that they need to do those tasks even when they have no interest in them. All of us have to do parts of our job we just don't like. For example, I absolutely love my job – I love what I do – but there are parts of it I'd rather not do. But I need to, it's just part of the job. For kids to learn that is important, and so to help with the motivation it might just be building in some motivational behavioral strategies to help the child to do those things that are of low interest. Again, to summarize that, one would be to embed more interest into the activity – for example, if they kids were working on their penmanship in kindergarten, and perhaps he had a real interest in an activity such as baseball, then perhaps he could work on his penmanship by writing letters related to baseball, or spelling the word *baseball*, or filling in a visual activity which was related to a baseball game, with those letters they were working on. We call that curriculum adaptation. The other side of the motivation would just be behavioral system to motivate the child to do that – perhaps a reinforcement system where the child completes a task, or is on a path to completing it, they get happy faces. When they get ten happy faces they get to go and read their favorite baseball magazine, for example. Motivation to get them through that task.

Ernest: All right. Let's see here, I've been flipping through a couple of questions. One here from Tammy; her question is, "Is it good for kids with Asperger's to sit in a designated seat, separate from the other children in the inclusive classroom? What are the social implications of this for a child who wishes to make friends with others in the class?"

Rick: Wow. I would say – to give a blanket answer, of course it depends on the individual child – I would say no, it's not good for the child to be isolated within the classroom. The idea of inclusion is the child is part of the classroom. This is one of those long answered questions, just to warn everybody here, because I'm going to elaborate on this one.

The most common thing that we see, that I see when I go into classrooms, is a lot of our kids tend to have one-on-one assistants or aides. You walk into the classroom and, let's say the other kids are sitting in table groups with four kids at each table group, and the one child with autism is at their own table group with their aide. The aide becomes the person who gives them directions, who gives them redirection, who disciplines them when they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing, who teaches them the skills they need to learn. In that sense, the aide becomes the child's teacher. In doing that, the child is no longer a part of the classroom. The rest of the class is sitting in their table groups working with the teacher, and Johnny, who has autism, is in the back of the room with the aide working outside of the typical classroom. I tell people all the time is that he might as well be in a special ed. classroom at that point. If you're not part of the classroom activities or the classroom culture, our kids would do better in a special ed. classroom. Then there would be less stimulus, distraction and less feeling different than being in a classroom and having a totally separate activity going on. What inclusion means is that the child is a part of the activity, a part of the classroom and they belong in that classroom. We make the accommodations and modifications to help them be successful.

First of all, I'm going to talk about aides a lot. We really want to minimize the use of aides and make sure we're careful with their role in the classroom. They should not be hovering over the child, or sitting next to them, but I'll talk more about that in a second. We want to be careful with that. The child should be sitting in a place which is most effective for them – clearly we want to try and have that be, if the kids are sitting in table groups, we want Johnny to be in a table group. We want to provide the behavioral support and the teaching support to help him be successful sitting there. If there's an aide in the classroom, our rule of thumb – and I have a lot of behavioral therapist assistants that work with me, in classrooms as support – and our number one rule of thumb is that the person never have a chair next to the child. We have an acronym we use called *MISGO – Move In, Squat, Get Out*. Meaning, if that child needs support, you move in, squat next to them, you provide the support they need, and move away. Why squat instead of sit in the chair? Because if you're squatting, you're more likely to want to get out of that position sooner than later, and you're likely to not sit there. If you have a chair, we found that people end up sitting there for a much longer period of time than needed – we don't want to make our kids overly dependent – we want to provide the support they need, and then we want them to be with their friends, and we get out of there as soon as possible. People say to me, “What if the kid's a runner?” I go into classrooms all the time for work, and see aides sitting next to kids. They say, “The kid's a runner, I need to sit next to him.” My answer to that is always, “Aren't you going to be faster getting the kid on your feet, especially as you get older and your knees get a bit weaker?” So as a rule of thumb I tell people to make sure the aide is not next to the child – the child should be in the classroom with everybody else, in a seat which is most appropriate to their learning. We should provide this behavioral support to help that be successful.

I went on a sidetrack there with the role of the aides. It's such a pet peeve of mine. If I had to choose the biggest area of challenge in the inclusion of kids with autism, it would be the overuse and misuse of the instructional assistant in classrooms. The assistant really should be facilitating the child's independence in the classroom, and should not be encouraging the child's dependence on them. What I like to tell people now, on IEPs, is that we never have one-on-one aides anymore – the aide is not there for the child, the aide should be there fore the teacher. The teacher is responsible for that child's education and the aide is there to support the teacher in supporting that child. If the teacher needs that aide to go and help that student for a little bit, the aide can move in and help. If the teacher needs the aide to take over the rest of the classroom so they can work with the child, they should do that. If the teacher needs to the aide to go to the workroom and adapt the curriculum and adapt the curriculum so the child with autism has work at their independent work level, that's a big thing they should be doing. But we need to avoid this one-on-one or separation in the classroom.

Frequently, when the kids are separated from the rest of the classroom, they have an aide next to them who is becoming their teacher, and that's not appropriate. If they're just sitting in a different seat, outside of the parameters of the rest of the kids, I would say that's inappropriate. It's not just inappropriate for the child with autism – and again, every case is different, there might be a reason for this that I'm not familiar with – but generally speaking, that would be inappropriate. Not just socially damaging for the individual, but the impression it leaves on the other kids in the classroom regarding people with autism, and regarding that child with autism. It's negative. We need to model for that classroom that children with autism are not bad, they're not weird, they have some differences in the way they view the world and process information in the world, and they have strengths and challenges just like the rest of us do. By modeling that they can be in the classroom like everybody else with different types of support just like everybody else gets, we built better understanding, tolerance and acceptance of these differences. By segregating within the classroom where this becomes a real, visual, symbolic separation, I would be afraid that we would create a really negative impression on the part of the neruo-typical children.

Ernest: That's very true. I think kids tend to be mode accommodating if they have compassion for someone they're sitting right next to; that they're part of, as opposed to not seeing that so they're not accommodating other students that are different to them.

Rick: There has been lots of research done on teacher acceptance and modeling, and what we know is that the teacher who accepts the child as one of their students, who treats them like they treat the other students in the classroom; the other kids then get the same perception of that child as the teacher. Meaning, if the teacher acts as if it's just another kid in the classroom, the kids view them as just another kid. If the teacher views them as separate, different or isolates them, the kids will do that same thing.

Ernest: Sure. Let's see here, we have a couple more questions that have come in. One of them is from Diane from Minnesota. Her question is, "What about kids with Asperger's in high school. Any suggestions to help with social skills in a high school setting?"

Rick: Yeah, a couple of interesting… you know, I'm out here in California, so I just have to say real quickly, because I have to get my political spiel in here. I got a phone call from Minnesota and a phone call from Michigan… it's important that you guys get out there and vote. It's a big election as far as the effects on education… and I'm not going to tell you who to vote for, but as an educator, clearly we need to recognize that in the early 2000's, when Clinton lost the office, we had a surplus of money that even some republican senators were saying we should be using to fund IDEA, which has never been fully funded. I think the most was 18% or so where Congress promised 40%. Senator Jefferson, from Vermont, I believe, actually became an independent because he argued to the Bush administration that the money should be used to fund IDEA and not to give tax breaks to people who really didn't need them. So, to recognize that the election coming up is an important one, especially with the financial times we're having and what kind of funding we're going to get for kids with disabilities, and to recognize the importance of that. Especially in states such as Michigan and Minnesota.

My vote in California obviously doesn't mean as much, just because we're clearly leaning in a direction which we believe would benefit education. Anyhow, let me say to that question – the nice thing, and I can't speak to Minnesota, but I have worked in high schools throughout the country, and most of them have opportunities which are great for social skills for kids on the autism spectrum. That's a thing we call social clubs. Most high schools have a list of social clubs, and these are clubs that meet at lunchtime, after school, or weekends. They're clubs which revolve around an interest area, so for example you might have the young democratic club, or the young republican club – or high school students for Obama club, or high school students for McCain club. You might also have things such as a sports club, a sailing club, a horseback riding club or a reading club. They just have huge, huge lists of clubs at many of these high school campuses. What those clubs revolve around is a shared interest. The important thing to recognize regarding social relationships in individuals with autism, or for everybody – social relationships are based on shared interests. We have people that we socialize with based on sharing a similar love for the arts, certain kinds of music or political affiliations. These are the things that we talk about and engage in. For kids with autism, they tend to have more limited interests, so it's hard to find those opportunities for people who have shared interests.

So, these clubs are rooted in shared interests, so if you have them in Minnesota, or anywhere else if you have a child who's going to high school – or middle schools are starting to do more of this, too – is, most schools will have a list of their social clubs. Get that list, and work with your child on the ones that would be most interesting to them. Work with the school staff to make sure they go to those clubs to see what they're about. What we find is that "wow, these are all kids that are interested in the same thing I'm interested in", and these clubs, although they might only meet one week at school, the friendships come out of there and the kids end up doing activities far beyond the organized club time. So, where elementary schools generally don't offer those, high schools generally do. What we have found, contrary to popular opinion where people think that elementary is going to be an easier place to facilitate socialization, we've actually found that through being able to go directly to a place where kids have the same interest that I have, we've been able to do a much better job of facilitating socialization.

Again, if you don't have those clubs – and hopefully you do – I would look at what are the social activities kids are doing after school? Are they enrolled in other types of activities, through other communities, through church or temples? Have them engage in that. What we know is that kids who hang out together in school are more likely to hang out together outside of school, and vice versa. So it's really beneficial, to have our kids who already have social challenges, to hang out and participate in those activities after school which those friends or kids from school also participate in, as opposed to doing something totally separate. If a bunch of kids go to the local bowling league after school, or participate in a park and rec. club after school, or a teen group through church, and those kids are also going to the high school, then we want to encourage our kid to do that as opposed to if your own church group are in a different community and might not go to your high school. That might not be the best group to participate in – it might not be bad, but would not be as good as participating in a team group with kids that also go to the high school.

Ernest: Hey, let's take a question here from India. It's Himmah, and she's listening in online, and you probably saw the initial questions she asked as she inputted this much earlier. She wanted to know how to teach her child ABCs, and how she can help her four year old son, who has autism, make friends. You talked about various clubs, but for a four year old, what does a parent do? This might not be your area of expertise but maybe you can shed some light on it for her.

Rick: The challenge to answering that question, again, is not understanding Indian culture as much as the US, or the options that are available in India. But I'll do my best, based on what we would do in the US, and hopefully she can extrapolate on that based on what's available in India.

In terms of making friends for a four year old, that's very much the program we have which is the social development program. The key to that opportunity, and to find that opportunity, is what we tell parents all the time – do you have kids from the neighborhood, from church or temple, from family friends, that we could arrange play-dates with? We always say: start with the one-on-one play-date. Larger groups are typically more challenging for kids with autism. Start with one-on-one, and facilitate that play-date and make sure you make it a positive experience for both kids. Do high-interest activities for both kids, really be a cheerleader and really make it fun. But the real question is, where do you find those kids? And in the U.S., if the child is four, I would really encourage the family to enroll in a typical pre-school, be it a private one, a head start one or a state-sponsored one with typically developing kids. Try and facilitate play-dates with those kids outside of school. The other option, I would say, is community activities where typically developing kids go to. Maybe there's a young kids' drama group, or there's so many art classes, sports classes, Boy Scouts or after-school programs. Make sure that you go there with your child, you meet the other parents and you facilitate play-dates. Church and temples work great, as far as you're meeting other families and asking if their son or daughter can come over for a play-date after school. So the first thing is identifying the peers and having access to the peers, to form those friendships.

` The next one would be to facilitate that so it's a positive experience, and that's a whole two hour presentation we can give on how to do that. I'll just be really general and say that you want it to be really positive; it's not an ABC time, it's not an academic time. In our program that we run, it is a social skill development program, but for the first month of the program, the only goal that we have is to have fun. We want the child to have fun, to want to be there, to look forward to those play-dates. And after a month of just having fun, two things have happened: one is that they've already developed lots of play and social skills based on all the experiences they've had. Two is the motivation to be in those play-dates is strong enough to over-ride the challenges we put on that child to try to get them to grow in areas that are difficult for them. So really, so many families will want the child to immediately start working on something. There's a big time in life where it's just important that kids have fun, and what we need to recognize from that is that they learn more frequently by having positive social experiences, than by anything we can teach them. Social skills are the most complex things we can teach a child. There are so many nuances, there's absolutely no way to predict exactly what a four-year-old child is going to do. So to teach that is nearly impossible – the best way for kids to learn social skills is by having lots and lots and lots and lots of experiences and social interaction with other kids.

Ernest: Very good. As a matter of fact, this kind of ties in with another question I've received from L.J. in Old Orchard, Missouri (or Maine, maybe). She wants to thank you for clarifying the role of an aide, and says, "I'm trying to find the best way to help my four-and-a-half year old son participate in a Sunday school class. It is probably not going to be possible for me to find him a separate helper, so how do I, as a mother, help myself lay off teaching him how to behave, to respect one's personal space, to stay on-task and not appear different? Thank you for the acronym, by the way, for the aide."

Rick: The *Move In, Squat and Get Out*. I love that acronym. I like to get parents and say "MISGO, we're on it!" It's such a prevalent issue that we see in the schools. Again, not knowing the child or the degree of the challenge that he or she has makes it difficult to be specific, of course. I could say that when we talk about inclusion, in a school or club type situation – in this case, Sunday school – there's a Sunday school teacher. And we want that teacher to be the teacher; to take ownership over the child, and be the one who gives directions and redirections, to give prompts and support, to give discipline when needed. And to do that, we want to make sure we give her or him as many tools as possible. So I would start by seeing if you could meet with the teacher – you should be able to – and really sit down with the teacher. Explain, first of all, what you're trying to accomplish; what your goals are for the child in this setting. And then really help them to understand the unique needs of the child, specifically what they can do to help support the child. The other supports in the classroom – natural ones as opposed to artificial ones – are the kids! And I will tell you, it's probably one of the best things about this job that I get to experience, are how great people are – how great kids are. We've seen three and four year olds do amazing things in supporting our kids, and we've seen high school students, and yes, everyone's surprised – middle school students, high school students doing a fantastic job in supporting our kids. The key to that is education. If we educate the typically developing kids at Sunday school, high school, elementary school, about the child, and about what the child needs to be successful, the kids will step up to the plate and do an amazing job. The reality is, you'll get a kid with significant challenges of some sort; proximity challenges, whatever they may have been. And you know, providing support, you can have a really hard time. But it doesn't mean that it's necessary to bring in artificial support such as an aide, or a parent who needs to go with the child. The teacher and the peers can provide great levels of support as long as they have the information to do so.

As far as the peers go, we have this thing called *ability awareness*, making the kids aware of the child's different strengths and challenges, and I go a step further – and let me elaborate a little further on this one, because it's an extremely important area. When we're including kids with autism, it's imperative that the typically developing peers, the neruo-typical peers, know about the child and are aware of the child. I have families say to me… we talk about ability awareness, and I would say the first thing is education… and families will say, "I don't want to stigmatize my kid." What I have to respond 99.9% of the time is, "Have you seen your child in the classroom?" The behaviors which are characteristic of kids with autism, the types which kids with autism demonstrate, are perceived by kids who are unknowledgeable as being weird, as being different. They stigmatize themselves without having the understanding of what's going on. By providing knowledge, the kids go "oh, okay, I understand that, and it's no big deal." It's amazing – we see the kids go from shunning the child, because here's this kid they perceive as weird in their classroom, and they stay away from them, to – once they have an education about the child – embracing them. And it speaks to the power of education. There was a great bumper sticker I saw years ago, and many times since, which is "Prejudice is Ignorance". I think it's so true. We pre-judge people when we're ignorant. When we have knowledge and education, we don't pre-judge people anymore. That's so important for our kids with autism.

The step further I would go with that… the first thing is education – make kids aware of the strengths and challenges of those with autism. But then, lots of people who do ability awareness stop there. Your typical ability awareness lesson plan would be where you talk about human differences and how we all have strengths and weaknesses. You ask to the kids to share some of the things they're good at, and some of the things they're not good at. Then the child with autism, if they can't speak themselves, they nod, or a parent or teacher explains what that child is good at, and has challenges. Then we say that we should all get along. That's typically where we leave it.

I like to take it a step further; I do. I think it's important to take a step further. That's where we elicit support from those kids, and say what those challenges are. And not just for the kid with autism – but if we say "here's a challenge that we've identified, what can we do as a community now" – a Sunday school classroom community, a second-grade classroom community, whatever it is, a Boy Scout community – "what can we do as this community, because we have a responsibility and should be teaching kids that they have a responsibility to support people who have that need." Be it because they have autism, or emotional challenges, or financial challenges – we should be supporting each other in order to make a better world. The individual with autism, we say "what can we do to support this child as a community here?" We don't just leave it at education but we actually elicit support – we take this step further to actually elicit support. Let me give you an example as to what that might look like. It's not uncommon for a child with autism, when a kid says "hello" to them, for them to keep walking and not acknowledge that child. So the adults, frequently, if we're walking by and we say "hi" to Johnny, and he doesn't respond, we might require a response in order to teach him appropriate social skills, and social greetings. The typical kids might say "hi" to be nice, and then Johnny doesn't answer back, and they just keep going. Basically, what that's teaching Johnny is that "I don't need to respond. Someone says 'hi', I don' need to – its not big deal, I don't want to respond, and there's no consequence for me not responding." So to elicit the support from the kids if that's the pivotal behavior we want to work on, we would tell the kids, when you say "hi" to Johnny, stop walking. If he doesn't respond, get inside his personal space, his proximity, and say "hi, Johnny". If he doesn't respond, get right up to him and say "Johnny, I said 'hi'". Don't allow a non-response to occur. What we know is that if we've got thirty kids, every time they say "hi" to Johnny, requiring a response, Johnny's going to learn to respond. As opposed to just the adult doing it, Johnny will learn that when I say "Johnny, respond to me", he'll respond. But he won't respond to anyone else. But what happens is when we get more and more people being consistent in that, he starts to generalize outside those people, and starts to respond to the thirty kids, plus the additional thirty kids he meets in his life in other environments; he learns to respond, he generalizes that skill and now he's learned that skill. And so peer education, and eliciting peer support, is a critical part of making inclusion work.

Ernest: Good, good. Great way to explain that, and it brings me to another question here. That's from a woman named Jessica Kona, Hawaii, I guess. I heard you explain this before, and you did such a great job at this – her question was, "How do I make school less stressful? My six year old shuts down at school and obsesses over it at home. She's also very withdrawn at school, and severely frustrated at home. How can I keep the violence of this child at a minimum when she's at home?" I know you talked about a checklist at one time, for parents to do when they take the kids back to school. Maybe that might help her.

Rick: Yeah, I think there are many ways – and we talked about this as a serious issue. No offense to the people in Michigan or Minnesota, but Jessica, I'd be happy to come out to Kona and provide personal support on that one! Of course I'd be happy to go to Michigan too, or any place, but Kona might be my first one on that list. I think it's important for everyone to recognize that school's hard. With the standards movement, now a national movement, school has become much more difficult. It's not just the content; it is the intensity of the flow of the day. Teachers in the U.S. are under such pressure to build test scores, that they are forced to be 100% academically driven. When ten or fifteen years ago we were looking at the whole child, today we're forced to look more at the academic child.

What that means, as far as what the day looks like, ten or fifteen years ago we'd give an assignment, say "when you're finished there's a free box of activities to do", and some kids would have five or ten minutes of downtime before the next activity came up. These days, it's everyone doing the same thing, on the same timeframe. They work until the subject ends, and boom, go right to the next subject. It becomes an extremely intense day for our kids with autism. There's no time to relax. Then what happens, as Jessica pointed out, is that the child tries so hard all day to hold it together, because of the social pressures, and the peer pressures. When they get home, they explode, because they are absolutely overwhelmed and over-stressed. So, the thing we have going for us is that even though the country has been on a standards movement of intense academic focus, we still have IDEA, the *Individuals Disabilities Education Act*, which supersedes all of the state laws on education, basically meaning that we can individualize a child's educational program and provide accommodations and supports to help that child be successful. So what I would say to all families is, although as a nation we have moved towards looking primarily, almost entirely, at the academic child, for our kids with autism, we have the legal opportunity and availability to still look at the whole child, and to make sure we're doing that. We need to look at the whole child. We need to say "okay, academics are important and I want him to do the best he can, but I also want to look at his overall wellbeing and make accommodations to allow that to happen." So there's a plethora of strategies to reduce academic stress. I'll tell you a couple of them.

One is to adapt the material. These days, like I said, kids go from one activity to the next with no downtime, and to adapt the activities so that what's built in for the child with autism is some downtime. We believe if we adapt it in this way, he or she should be able to finish the activity five minutes before it's over and move on to the next. They'd have five minutes of downtime where they can de-stress, maybe participate in a preferred activity, and then be read to move on to when the subject changes. It's a transitional prop.

The other area we talk about is recess. Tony Atwood has said before, several times, that for kids with autism or Asperger's syndrome, keeping it together in school is so hard. At recess time we really need to be careful and let them chill. I agree with the first part, and disagree with the second part, which is that we just need kids chill at recess. Autism is very much – what we're finding more and more, and what's becoming more and more agreed upon in the professional community – is that autism is a social disorder in its root. And in the old days where we had a lot more time to work on social skills at school, these days the only opportunity we have to work on social skills is recess and lunch. For most kids that's maybe forty minutes a day. So as opposed to allowing them to decompress at lunch and recess, I believe those need to be instructional opportunities in the area of social development. Therefore, we take the child out of the academic periods which are a lot longer – there are a lot more opportunities for academics in the day – to allow them do decompress. For example, if we're in math and after math is recess, potentially ten, fifteen or twenty minutes before recess, the child would be able to stop that math activity and get their own recess time. Because for them recess isn't truly recess, it's learning and education. So they can have their own downtime to engage in an activity which is of high preference to them, and then be ready to learn during recess. So I think the primary answer to Jessica's question is to make sure that built into the child's day are opportunities to decompress, opportunities to relax. The school should recognize how difficult it is for individuals with autism to stay engaged, how much mental and physical energy goes into that for a child with autism, in a full six or seven hour day.

Ernest: Okay. Man, oh, man. So many new questions here, it's kind of hard to pick out ones as they're coming in. We're up to 62 now. Let's see here. I'm going to read this question, and hopefully it will make sense as I read it. Her question is, "Our son is five and has just started a new autism school. He is doing great there but hates the bus. I think it is the bus driver he's afraid of. I can drive him to school but I'm afraid he will learn that if he fusses he will get me to do what he wants. I want to keep having him take the bus. How can I make him take the bus? I want to make the transition smoother for him, but he starts to get upset about ten minutes before she arrives and starts begging me to drive him and pick him up. Any suggestions?"

I don't know if that's in your area or not, but she sounds very concerned.

Rick: I didn't quite get it – maybe you could paraphrase the part for me – why is he having problems on the bus? Why does he not want to go on the bus?

Ernest: I think it sounds like he's afraid of the driver.

Rick: Okay. If that's the case, he wants to ride the school bus but he's afraid of the bus driver. If it's the bus driver, or the bus, or whatever might be going on, it sounds like we need to do some desensitization training, which is behavioral techniques to get him more comfortable in that situation. Again, we could do a whole two-hour training on desensitization techniques. I would recommend that she look into that and how we desensitize kids to fears, to environments and activities which create fear for the child. Some things that are pretty common in the area of autism are social stories – to read a social story about the bus or the bus driver on a daily basis. The other one would be to have him have a positive interaction with the bus driver so whatever's scaring him is not scary. It's one of those things where, when it comes to behavioral intervention, we have to do much more significant analysis to be able to determine what is the cause of the behavior, what is the cause of the fear. Then we determine interventions based on that. I think, again generally speaking, for kids with autism, it's familiarity. The unknown is usually pretty scary for our kids, and they have a difficult time processing new information, so the unknown is even that much more scary. So really trying to do some priming, some desensitization in that situation. Maybe being able to go on the bus, at the end of the day when it's empty and all the kids are gone, if you go to the bus yard and work it out with the bus yard director. He can maybe just go on to a bus, walk around on the bus, get comfortable on the bus, meet the driver, if possible, at the end or the beginning of the day. Again, really going back to the desensitization type of stuff.

Ernest: Okay. We have one question which probably affects a lot of parents here, and I'm going to take a two minute break while you answer this question, because I have to go to another room here. But I'll give you the question: "Should you remove a child who is experiencing a tantrum, or work through it in the classroom?"

Rick: Is the question whether, during the tantrum, you remove the child or work through it?

Ernest: Yes.

Rick: Okay. Again, that goes back to a behavioral question or strategy, and the reason those are more difficult to answer – I'll answer the question pretty extensively to give Ernest plenty of time. You want to make sure that you're not reinforcing the inappropriate behavior. The challenge with behavior is that children are engaging in the behavior for a reason. They're communicating something for the behavior, trying to get a need met, and that behavior is communicating what that need is. Even though we might not be able to know what that is. That's why we do functional analysis sessions, to really determine what child is communicating through that behavior. The problem is, why can't say "yeah, always remove the child" or "always not remove the child", is you don't want to inadvertently reinforce the behavior. By reinforce the behavior what I mean is increase the occurrence of it in the future. It's behavior 101: reinforcement – the only way we know if we're reinforcing it is if it's increasing the occurrence of it. So, for example, the child that's rolling around on the floor having a tantrum because they don't want to be there, and we remove the child from the environment, meaning the child was demonstrating a communicative function that we might call *escape*. The child didn't want to be there, he wanted to escape from there; they're rolling around having a tantrum on the floor. We then remove them from the room, and gave them what they wanted. In essence, most likely, we reinforced the behavior which means the child will be more likely to roll around on the floor and have a tantrum when he doesn't want to be there. There's a huge problem with that.

On the other hand, if the kid's having a tantrum because he's physically uncomfortable, or there's something that went on earlier that day and he needs a break to decompress and talk about that… or if he really wants to be in the classroom but is just over-the-top with whatever's going on, then removing the child to be able to decompress, practice some calming techniques and to be able to talk about – if he can – what's going on, would be totally appropriate. So much of it depends on what the function of the behavior is. The key here – and this is the key when we look at behavior in any setting, and definitely an inclusive one – is to minimize the occurrence of the behavior in the future. So our goal, looking at a behavior, should always be to minimize the occurrence of the behavior in the future. Meaning, the interventions that we put into place are likely to decrease the likelihood of that behavior occurring again in the future.

Unfortunately, what we often do is just try to solve the immediate problem. The problem with that is that, inadvertently, making that problem so it occurs more often again in the future. That's a problem! So we need to be really careful about what the intervention is. By no means should be automatically take a child out, or leave a child there. We need to be analyzing what's going on and intervening appropriately. So the behavior is less likely, as opposed to more likely, to occur in the future.

Ernest: Right. I have another question here from Johnny, from Concorde, Kansas. And it's an interesting situation he has here. He says, "We want to include our children with autism into our community. Myself and a teacher with a degree in special education have offered to meet with local doctors, city employees, fire department employees, et cetera, to have a round-table discussion on what we think would be beneficial information to them in case they ever have an encounter with a child with autism. We have been denied any type of meeting. What advice can you give me to try to make this happen? I am a parent of a six-year-old child with autism who just happened to call 911 a few weeks ago when I was ill with the flu. So I think this would make them aware of what they might encounter."

Rick: First of all, that's an excellent mission to take up – extremely important. We're seeing it happen more and more. Again, as our kids with autism are in the community more often, the community – especially the service providers – needs to be best able to interact with that child in an appropriate manner. We are seeing more and more of that occurring. Especially among law enforcement in California, we're seeing them take part in a panel, where different professionals go in based on the topic, and provide presentations to law enforcement in the area of autism. So it's something we're seeing more and more occurring and it's extremely important. Unfortunately, it tends to be triggered by a crisis, especially in smaller communities. There was a community I worked in where there was basically a crisis situation, and it wasn't responded to appropriately, so that become the impetus for law enforcement, fire fight fighters to be able to get that type of training.

We would hope that wouldn't be the case – that we wouldn't need to have something unfortunate happen for us to be able to get the support in the community from those city officials, city workers, et cetera. So on that, there's a group out here which has been fantastic, and you might want to *Google* them; they're called *Special Needs Network*. It's a group that was started by two parents that I've worked with before. One of them I still work with. They provide resources in the inner city of Los Angeles. What they did was basically say "hey, there's a real discrimination here, in lower income and minority areas of Los Angeles, between the *haves* and *have-nots* where kids and families with autism are getting support in communities, but in these lower-income communities, they're not." They started this non-profit group which has done a lot of community outreach for the community. Part of what they've done and been successful with is getting community service personnel in those communities the training to be able to interact with individuals with autism when they encounter them. They'd be some great people to talk with – again, it's called *Special Needs Network*.

Ernest: Yes, I've just *Googled* it, and for those with a pen and pencil, it's *SpecialNeedsNetwork.net*.

Rick: I'd recommend emailing them, and asking about strategies specific to your question. But I think it's a great question for all the listeners, as we look at kids with autism being included in the community, we need to make sure that our community service personnel have the skills and knowledge to interact with our kids as situations arise. They would be good people to be able to do that. I could tell you, the way I'm familiar with how they've done that is to get community attention onto the issues, to connect with a legislator and to get politics involved. They basically found at least one or several legislators who had some connections to disabilities or autism. They were able to put the pressure on, or had some type of connection with law enforcement, fire fighters or community service people, to be able to get them to come onboard with these types of training. So connect with your legislators.

The good thing we have going for us right now is that autism had gathered and gained a lot of attention in communities. There has been a lot more attention on autism through periodicals, in different groups, on news shows. So it's being talked about a lot more, and that's a great start to get us into a place where, in the community, we can get these supports for different organizations.

Ernest: Let's see here, we've got a couple more that have come in. This is a person – Fran in New York – her question is, "Can a child be part of inclusion if language is very delayed compared with her peers? If so, why do schools put kids in special ed. classes instead of regular ed. classes? Does behavior play some role in the intelligence level? My son is going to be four, and he has PDD. He's reading at a six year old level but expressive language is poor. Talking to other parents' experiences with public school programs, inclusion is never an option thought for some of these children by teachers or school officials. They are placed in a special ed. program in nearly twelve to one programs." So I guess the question seems to be about language, and what about placing them in special ed. classes?

Rick: I think the simple answer to your question is absolutely. Children with language challenges – and most kids with autism do have these, including kids who are completely non-verbal – can, and in most cases, should be included with their typically developing peers. When we look at language development, for most kids, the most important component of language development is opportunity, and exposure to good language models. So it has always frustrated and made very little sense to me that a child who has difficulty in the area of language, we put them into a classroom with other kids who have difficulty in the area of language. Hence, there are no good language models other than the adults, who really aren't very good language models because we talk very differently from how a four, six or ten year old talks. Of all the challenges, it seems like language is one where, there's so much research in language development which says "exposure, exposure, exposure" to good language models. Therefore segregating kids doesn't make a lot of sense to me. It absolutely does not limit – a child's language, cognition, social skills, physical abilities regarding toileting, et cetera – do not limit that individual from being included, and there's plenty of law to support that. Even behavior, you know, behavior can eventually limit a child, if we've done the appropriate behavioral interventions and the child is still causing significant distractions in the learning of the other kids. Then, the school district may be able to – in that situation – remove the child from the general education classroom. But language, social skills, cognition, does not limit a child. Those are not prerequisites for placement into a general education classroom. In fact, IDEA clearly states that academic ability; grade level performance, is not a requirement for placement in a chronologically age-appropriate classroom. It's our job as the professionals and the adults in the child's world to provide the adaptations to help the child be successful.

Now we go to the second part of the question from the way I heard it, which was the district is not offering that for these kids. Even with states like California, where we've definitely progressed in the area of inclusion, we're still behind in the other states. But we've definitely progressed. The overwhelming majority of kids who are included with autism, the request for inclusion came from the parent and not from the school district. It's a pet peeve of mine, and a frustration of mine, because we've gotten to the point where we've seen thousands and thousands of kids with autism be successfully included, but too often school districts will still stick with their old philosophy which is a special ed. classroom. The parent needs to be the one who says "I want the child to be included." Now, fortunately, in many areas, once the parent says that, the school will go along without too much of a fight. But from a legal point of view – or let's just say, a practical or education point of view – what I always advise parents is if you believe your child should be included, or you want your child to be included, when you go to that IEP meeting, don't make your fight about the child being included. Make your fight about what supports are you going to get for your child to be successfully included. What I mean by that is to use what I call the *assumptive approach*. Assume that the child is going to be included. For the district, legally speaking, it's very difficult for a school district to say – based on case law and the interpretation of IDEA – that this child can't be included. But what many families make their mistake about is they spend all of their energy fighting to get the child included, then when the kid gets included, he doesn't have the supports to help that child be successful in the inclusive placement. So really go into that IEP with the assumption that he's going to be in general ed., and now the question is "how are we going to support him in general ed? What are we going to provide to help him and his teacher be successful in general education?"

Ernest: Really good. I've got another question here from Nicole. It's just exactly in this area you discussed regarding IEP. The question was, "Can you suggest some examples of goals to include in the IEP for increased success in socialization with peers?"

Rick: It's a great question, and first let me say that I gave a presentation the other day to a school district and I told them what I've said many times before – if we have a child with autism in the educational program, there had better be a really good reason why there isn't a social goal in that IEP. Autism is a social disability. IDEA includes social development as part of the educational needs of children with disabilities. Therefore, pretty much every child with the diagnosis of autism should have an IEP goal addressing social skill development and socialization. On that note, what goals would be right? There is a plethora of them, they're unlimited. Again, it needs to be based on the individual child. It might be initiation goals; it might be language / socialization goals; it might be expansion of interest goals… the list goes on and one. I'd have to actually see, know and assess the child to say what type of goals we should write. But I will say that pretty much every child with autism should have a social goal in their IEP.

Again, if you were to go on *Google* and search for *social domain goals* – domain, because we call that a domain as far as education – *social domain, IEP goals and objectives*, you'd probably get lists of them. There are resources which many school districts put out of recommended goals which are just hundreds of goals in different areas. There would be no shortage in finding those social goals. The important thing is that they are focused on that individual child and are meeting that child's needs. I will tell you one goal that I write in our social program, and we write this same goal for many of our school kids.

But through our regional center program, or our Department of Developmental Services program, the goal that we write for almost all of our kids with autism is *expansion of interests*. The reason for that is because kids with autism tend to have more limited interest, and as I said earlier, our social relationships are based on shared interests. Our kids with autism tend to have limited interests, and as they get older, those interests don't changed, so they become developmentally immature interests, or developmentally inappropriate interest. So therefore, they have much less in common as they get older, with another fourteen at year old. Maybe at age five, they have not as much in common because they have limited interests, but the interests they do have would be interests of another five year old. But if those interests don't change when our kids hit ten, eleven, twelve, et cetera, they have no shared interests with their typically developing peers, so we do a lot of expansion of interest.

What's important to know is that kids with autism are not neurologically boring at all. The reason I believe that most kids with autism have limited interests is because they have a difficult time processing the world around them and that causes discomfort and anxiety. So when that happens, anybody would like to stay where they're safe. If newness is difficult for me, I'm going to stay where I'm safe; I'm going to stay with the same. If I'm staying with the same, I'm not going to be able to have new experiences which are going to help me to expand my interests. So we do all kinds of interventions to make kids feel comfortable, to use motivational strategies, to help kids try new things. What we find is, just like the typically developing kids, when the child tries new thing, frequently – not always, like all of us – they will like it and will get new interests and will expand their interests. That is the one goal that I would say, universally, is important for most of our kids. Other than that, there's thousands of them, but kids should have social goals on their IEP.

Ernest: Really good. We've got one question here from Holly in Michigan, and her question is, "Who do I need to contact to introduce coping skills for my son, my husband and I? I don't feel like he's getting taught coping skills. He is constantly in trouble – basically in trouble more than not."

Rick: Well, if it's school based, you'll probably talk to your school psychologist – might be the first person to talk to, as they might have more skills in that area. But if there's an autism specialist on campus, or another counselor, or just another special educator who might have knowledge in that area, you would talk to them about strategies to teach coping skills. The other people that are working on coping skills these days are occupational therapists, as far as far as engine speed and helping kids to regulate when they go into de-regulation. So really, there's a list of people that you could talk to. Certain individuals have more knowledge than other individuals. You might find one occupational therapist who knows a lot about coping skills, or another who knows a ton about coping skills. Most school psychologists should have some knowledge in coping skills, so that might be your safest bet. Most people who specialize in autism should have some knowledge about coping skills, regulating and dealing with de-regulation. So there should be a list of people.

As far as outside of the school system, unfortunately I'm not familiar enough with the system in Michigan to know who to go to. But I would again, go to the school and say, "We're having real issues with de-regulation and coping strategies at home. Is there somebody in the community that we can consult with, that you might know of?" They're going to be more familiar with community resources outside of the educational system just by working in collaboration with them.

Ernest: I've had one person here asking me to repeat the website before. I believe it was *www.SpecialNeedsNetwork.net*. People had apparently missed that, so I wanted to repeat that again. Let's see here. I've got a question here from Florida. "My child is overwhelmed in the cafeteria. He often ends up underneath the table with a book TO help soothe himself. He's unable to stay in his seat the whole time in the class, and is losing reward points because of his inability to sit still. What strategies might I suggest to help him deal with this sensory overload that happens in the school cafeteria?" So I guess when her son is in the cafeteria, he's really overwhelmed, and what things can she do to help him with this sensory overload that occurs?

Rick: Let me first assure you that he's not alone. I'll explain why in a minute, but I work with a lot of kids with autism spectrum disorder who are overwhelmed in the cafeteria. First of all, the cafeteria tends to be extremely loud. There are a lot of kids, a lot of commotion…

Ernest: Food fights.

Rick: Food fights! And the architecture of cafeterias tend to be high-roof and echoey. I haven't been in Florida much, but throughout Californian architecture in schools, the cafeterias tend to be very echoey, the way they're built. So you have all that noise vibrating and echoing off of the walls, and it becomes, sensationally, very difficult for our kids. A couple of different options – if it is auditory, which it tends to be with a lot of our kids, I actually have kids that wear earphones over their ears to reduce the noise level. We have several kids that we've done that with. They're actually those that you can buy at a shooting range, or a sports store, which silence and minimize certain frequencies, and it tends to help a lot of our kids with autism.

Now the question might be, if he's going to wear these earmuffs in the cafeteria, he's going to stand out. Again my answer would be, if he's crawling under the table in the cafeteria, he's probably standing out. So it goes back to peer education – he's got real sensitivity to a lot of noise or high pitched sounds, and therefore when we go into this very loud environment, we're going to have him wear this headset to reduce the sound. We've had a lot of luck; it's one of those things where you look at kids with autism and they're all so different, and therefore the strategies are also different, but that tends to be one of those strategies which is more universal. Those kids who are having a difficult time in the cafeteria, we give them the option of wearing this headset or earmuffs, and they seem to just say, "ok, no problem anymore", it's worked really well. Of course, we can also give the kid an iPod or a Walkman to play music, if that's the issue. I'm going to guess that if that's the environment it's happening in it's most likely the noise level that's very difficult for the child. So something to muffle the sound – I guess the earmuffs is one way which muffles the sound but the child can still engage in conversation, as opposed to an iPod or something where the child would be listening to music, which should fade out the rest of the sound but would make it more difficult for them to engage during that interaction.

The other option would be to have an alternative place where the child and a small group could go to eat their lunch if the cafeteria was just so overwhelming that they could not deal with it. I would not want the child to go by themselves. Lots of kids, probably, would be happy to eat somewhere other than the chaos of the cafeteria. A teacher could open up a classroom, or the office could open up an area of the school where the kids could go and eat lunch. And this child, or the child with autism, whoever he or she may be, would have an opportunity to go with some other kids to an area outside of the cafeteria to eat.

Ernest: So, sort of talk, if you will, about what things are going on, or what new things are happening in your area of expertise. Anything new that you'd like to let parents know about today?

Rick; There's so much. In the area of autism and inclusion we're learning so much constantly. We're learning new strategies, new techniques, new understandings. In school, the whole concept of accommodations and modifications, I think, is very important. There's been a lot of growth in that area; I'll talk about that for a minute.

The difference between accommodations and modifications. Let me actually go to a slide that I frequently use in presentations on this area, as a way of helping me stay on focus here. I'm going to read you guys something. When we look at learning in the classroom, and when we look at the idea of can the child learn what everybody else is learning, or do they need to learn something different? The idea of inclusion is that the child is actively engaged in what's going on in the classroom. The activity, the content does not need to be the same, because the child might not be able to do the content, but the actual activity would be the same. So the idea of accommodations and modifications is getting a lot of attention, especially the far-reachingness of accommodations; understanding what those are. Most important for our high schoolers. When kids get into high school and the grades truly count, and are truly important towards the competition of getting into college we need to recognize what accommodation is, and in short it means that the child can still learn the information. They can learn it and retain it, and have a way of demonstrating it even though it might be something different than everybody else. Accommodation means that as long as a child is learning the same or similar content knowledge, it doesn't matter how they learn it or how they demonstrate it – it is still considered in accommodations. Therefore the grade is exactly the same as their peers – there is no change in grading.

Let me give you an example. In tenth grade, if the students had to write an essay on the relationship of the Allies in World War II – so now we're in world history, and U.S. history, and looking at a pretty advanced concept which is the relationship of the Allies – that's what they need to learn. The way of assessing the knowledge the teacher is using for the kids is to write an essay. Let's say Timothy has a difficult time with writing; either physically or just getting his thoughts onto paper. But he is a pretty darned good artists, and he could draw a picture which would have to be pretty intricate – way better than anything I could draw! – which would be detailed enough to demonstrate the relationship of the Allies in World War II, and capture the same points that the teacher was looking for. So the content knowledge is the relationship of the Allies in World War II. The assessment tool the teacher is using is an essay. But teacher number two could be doing a multiple choice test, teacher number three could be allowing children to role-play it in skits. For Timothy, he's allowed to draw it. And therefore, as long as he's demonstrated the same content knowledge, as long as he's done it with 100% accuracy, he would get an *A*, and it would be the same *A* as anybody else. And I think that's an area – in terms of curriculum – that we're really growing. The idea of curriculum adaptations, accommodations and modifications.

Ernest: All right. We've got a couple of last questions here. We have Carrie from Sagano, Michigan. Seems like Michigan and Minnesota keep popping up here. "My child has high-functioning autism. He is in a regular education class with supports. He has an IEP which says he will get one-on-one time with a social worker for thirty minutes in a week, but this is not being done. This is an area he most needs help in. I ask for logs of where they have met, and they refuse to give them to me. What can I do?"

Rick: Well, it sounds like it's just not happening. Potentially, the logs, if they're saying they are meeting, they should be able to give you logs as far as date and time. Note logs, they might not give you, if it's social work or counseling – they might be claiming professional educational confidentially. So that would not be abnormal or wrong at all for them to say that we can't give you our notes or written logs from that meeting. But they should be able to give you dates, times, frequency and duration of when they met and for how long they met for. If they are not meeting, and it's in the IEP, then they are basically what we call *out of compliance* with the IEP. That's an issue between the school and the parent because it's in the IEP. I talked about IDEA and then I talked about civil rights earlier. IDEA, if you were to go to due process, that meant that you had a disagreement with the IEP, or were at an impasse. That means that you want this but the school doesn't want to give you this, or the school wants this and you don't want to do that. You go to impasse or due process, which is a disagreement.

In this situation, it's in the IEP and it's not being delivered. In California, and I'm assuming it would be the same in every state, that would be considered a compliance error, meaning that the district is not in compliance with the IEP. Again in California, and I assume it's the same in most states, we have a compliance board as part of our Department of Education. So the California Department of Education – as it has a special education unit – has the compliance board, and you would file a compliance complaint, meaning that the district is out of compliance with the IEP. I'm assuming that in every state there's a similar type of process. Usually, those types of department fall under the mandates of IDEA. You would file a compliance complaint, and they would come and find out what's going on, and mandate the district to provide that service because it's in the IEP. If they say that they can't provide it because they don't have a provider – which may be the case – under law, they would be required to provide that service, if it's in the IEP, privately outside of the school.

Ernest: All right. I have another question here, and we're coming up on thirteen minutes before the call is over. So if you have any last-minute questions, folks, you'd better get them in now. We won't have much time left here. We have one question here from Kim, in Long Beach, California. Her question is, "Is it reasonable to introduce recommended aides into the general education environment like an auditory trainer that might assist or disrupt the typical developing children?"

Rick: Is it reasonable to request? The answer is always "yes". It might not be reasonable to demand, but it might be reasonable to request. The reason I say that is because you might be thinking "oh, that might not work", but maybe the school will look at that and there might be someone sitting at that table who's really creative and could say "here's how we could make it work".

So I think the question is really good in the sense of recognizing, with inclusion, we need to be concerned and aware of what we do and how it affects the environment and the other people in the environment. But if it's the kind of auditory trainer that I'm thinking about, where it's a kind of FM system, many teachers love that because it helps them to teach to all kids. I would say, in general, the best special educators and special education programs are those where creativity is a huge part of it, or brainstorming. It's so difficult to provide the best services for our kids, and to know what they are, and figure out how to implement them. And so creativity is key to the success of that. So always, if you have an idea, put it on the table and maybe there will be somebody who picks it up and goes with it, or maybe you'll have conversation and come up with other ideas, other things or similar types of ways to get that same need met. It's always a good idea to put something on the table.

Ernest: Really good. I have one person here who wanted to ask if you have a website that they could refer to.

Rick: I do. That's a great question. It's *www.IECP.us*. They wanted something like $10,000 for *.com*, and we said "we'll go with .us, that will be fine." I guess that's one of the new endings they have – they have .us, and dot something-else going on. We weren't willing to spend ten thousand for the .com, so we went with the .us. I do need to warn people: it's under construction, it's been under construction for years. An interesting little side not here is that we are actually one of the largest agencies in California, and I guess that I consult nationally as well. So we're one of the largest agencies in the country, as well. But we've never been focused on our business practices; we've always been focused on our kids. It started as a business; I was providing services to kids in the federal area, as an introduction. And more and more people started to ask – I never had business cards, never had a website. I presented at conferences, and I don't have a vendor booth. We don't try and sell our services at all. We just, fortunately, have done a good job with kids, and people liked the work we did. They kept asking for more and more, so I've had to hire staff along the way. Eventually we said, let's just make a website, because we get so many phone calls asking about the service, we said it would be easy and save us time. But it's sure not the best looking website, because our focus is not on the business – our focus is on the service.

Ernest: Of course. That's how it all starts, I mean if you focus on providing the help that people need, all those other things will follow, business-wise. But I do want you to give our your phone number, at least of your service center so that people can call in if they perhaps want to use your services.

Rick: Absolutely. Our phone number is (805)-985-4808. Of course, that's also on our website which I said earlier is *IECP.us*. They can feel free to email or call. They can email directly from the website, as well. Any requests for services as well as any questions they may have.

Ernest: Well, let's see. We're going to pick up some straggling questions here, given that we're pretty close. Let me pick one. I have one woman here who says, "My son is developmentally delayed. How do I get around the age issue? He is twenty years old. Fourth grade reading, second grade math level."

Rick: Well, how to get around the age issue? I'm not sure exactly what she's looking for. I guess I would say at age twenty, academically where he's at, theoretically, might not make much more progress beyond that academic area. And to make sure we're focusing on the skills to help him be an independent adult. We've got lots of folks we work with who have no academics, no language, and they're still able to live independently or with supported living and supported work arrangements. They participate in community activities. That does not prevent the individual – and actually, the academic level that she mentioned for her son, fourth grade reading, your average newspaper is written at a fifth grade level, so fourth grade reading isn't that bad. Second grade math is what most of us do, which is basic addition and subtraction. So actually, it's not too bad. The importance is to make sure we're focusing on the skills he needs to be independent.

People might not be familiar with this, but there was a study done, back in the early 2000's, it was called *SCANS*. It was federal research, and it was *Secretaries' Commissions on Acquiring Necessary Skills*. People also know it as the *School to Career* research. And basically, what they were looking at was what are the school-career skills that employers are looking for out of their employees? This was a huge study that was commissioned by the secretary of labor, and they interviewed thousands of typical employers – this was not a special educational needs type of study. Just typical environment community individuals. They researched thousands and asked the question, "What are the most important skills that you are looking for in your employees?" What became overwhelming when you look at the SCANS literature – what is the top thing that employers are looking for – are the abilities to work independently and the ability to get along with your co-workers. They could find different people with different skill levels for jobs that they need. But what was important was, given the different skill level, can they work independently, and can they get along with their co-workers.

I talked earlier about the dangers of one-on-one aides in inclusive settings, and the dangers of that. I'm not used to doing this on the phone, but in person. But if you look at a scale, basically what's important is that the individual's independent level is commensurate or above their skill level. I work with so many educators and families that are pushing academics, academics, academics. They raise this kid's skill level up to good areas, but their independent level is still down. So if you look at the scale, academics and skill would be on the high end and independence would be on the low end of that scale. What we know is, for adults with autism or other disabilities, the number one variable which affects their opportunities in life is their level of independence. Independence needs to be commensurate, if not higher, than skill level. Teach a new skill, and then teach that child to be independent with that skill. Don't keep teaching that skill without getting that child commensurate in their independent level. We need to make sure that if we are including our children in school and we're not preparing them for an inclusive life, we're doing a disservice. We're only providing a third or less of their life in an inclusive environment. We need to make sure that we're including kids in school, and giving them the skills – the number one being independence – to be able to be included outside of school.

Ernest: Someone has asked us, actually, to spell the website one more time, very slowly. I guess they were unable to hear it. I believe it was *IECP.us*. We're coming up on four minutes. A couple of people have actually gone to your website, and say it's very nice.

Rick: They're very nice to have said that!

Ernest: I guess they're looking for things that they're interested in, so a couple have just been and posted their comments here. Let's see here. We have one question here. You touched on this a little bit. Suzanne from Andrews, Texas. Her question is, "As my first grader has sensory issues and Apserger's, what suggestions do you have for a student who is distracted by all the stimuli within the classroom? He is capable of the work but his senses are over-stimulated and it's difficult for him to focus and to stay on task." I guess this is different from the cafeteria; this is actually someone physically in class.

Rick: Yeah. With sensory integration challenges. The first and easiest thing I could say is to talk to the occupational therapist about sensory strategies they could use to help that child with those challenges. The occupational therapist doesn't just work on fine motor skills; occupational therapy also works on sensory integration, especially in the area of autism. The most universal thing I could say is talk with the occupational therapist, ask them to look at the sensory issues and what we call a *sensory diet*, to help that child develop strategies and techniques of getting those sensory needs met. Again, it depends on the individual child for what those might be. A lot of our kids sitting in classrooms for long periods of time, doing their best to pay attention… it becomes very difficult and they need a lot more proprioceptive input, which is like deep joint pressure, to get them back to where they can learn, get their system back functioning in a productive way again. Again, sensory diet – there's a million strategies within that.

I'll share with you one of those universal things that we do for a lot of our kids in inclusive classrooms. We have what we call a *weighted backpack* – the messenger's backpack. It's just a backpack with weighted books in it, and whenever somebody leaves the classroom to run an errand, so they don't stand out, they need to take the backpack with them. The note goes in the backpack. The child then runs the errand. The most common strategy is that if that kid who needs a bit of input, and we see them starting to get a little bit over the top, instead of calling attention to the behavior which they can't control, we just redirect them by asking them to run an errand. The teacher would say "Johnny, can you take this note to the office for me?" The teacher just writes a note, you know, "Hope you're having a great day," puts it in the backpack, Johnny puts it on, walks out of the room to the office, gives the note to the office staff, comes back and has hopefully got some of his sensory needs met, and is in a better place to learn. That's just one strategy out of literally hundreds. To look for a sensory diet for the student would be the first thing to do.

Ernest: Rick, I want to thank you so very much for your time here today. This subject is quite popular among the parents here. We fielded over 83 questions here during the time we were on the phone. I just want to say thank you so much for your inspiration, your time. We love what you're doing. Certainly, one of these times, we'd like to have you back to discuss even more issues with us. But for now, this is the end of the call. For those of you that are still on the line, I wanted to you to do me one big favor here. I wanted you to tell me what you thought about the call. If you could, tell me what you most liked about the call, or what strategies you felt were going to be useful for you to make a difference in your child's life. Tell me what those are. And then tell me if you'd be willing to recommend this to someone else, to call in and get this information.

As you know, this is a totally free call and we'd love to hear what you'd have to say, would love to get your feedback. Just give me your testimonial. This is the best way to do this: you can actually call a number right now, which is – write this down – (877)-211-0212. When you hear the voice on the phone start up, just press one, and that will get you directly to the line where you can just simply tell us what you think. We'd love to hear back from you. This helps us do a better job with the calls in the future, add more subjects. Tell us what you like, what you want us to add to this next time, and we really appreciate your feedback. Once again, that number is (877)-211-0212, then just press one.

Hey guys, thanks a lot for everything. Rick – thanks so much, we know you're busy and we appreciate your time. This has been a wonderful call and you've helped out a lot of parents today.

Rick: Thank you for having me and good luck to everybody.

Ernest: Okay, all right. Thanks a lot, guys. Bye bye.

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