**Mild Autism-assistance for Older Kids (beyond 7 or 8)**

As our Kids get older, new **opportunities to become less-autistic** arise,

while additional **difficulties** also arise.

**Mostly the news is good:**

(a) In my experience our Childrens’ **distress-levels go down** as they get older. Their sensory-extremes (that are at the heart of much of their discomforts) seem to be either felt less by them as they mature, or they have learned to cope with their strong-sensory inputs better.

As those distress-levels decrease (i) there is less need to withdraw into Own World to recover from sensory-assaults - they become less autistically-oriented. (ii) they have a greater opportunity to observe the World without distraction. Knowledge of ‘how the world works’ increases their power over it, making them more capable of interacting, with less odd behaviours, thus less autistic.

(b) Over time **their small association with the Real World cumulatively becomes greater.** Thus their understanding of the world improves: maybe not at the same rate as their peers, but there are definite improvements.

With that better-understanding of the world comes (i) greater control of their environments, and (ii) more accurate predictions of what is to come: with that improved predictability comes a drop in their anxiety. Reduced anxiety makes it possible to cope with the world better and the need escape into Own World less.

(c) Provided you have been making meaningful Real-World connections with them over time, **you will have boosted their confidence in reaching out.**

Thus their Real-World-entering will have become more frequent, and correspondingly their Real-World-abilities keep getting better.

(d) Finally, with their increasing comprehension borne of age and good Training - **you will be able to communicate the concepts of Own World / Real World** to them now, boosting their abilities fundamentally - as set out below.

**On the pitfall side,** with increasing age, Habits become more entrenched.

It becomes harder to re-orient your Youngster’s world-view and behaviours.

That is why it is best to begin Real World Training as early as you can.

But it is still OK to begin Training from age 8 and up to 12 years.

**The other main change is our Childrens’ increased awareness of “differences” between them and others.**

I haven’t put this factor in either the “Good” or Bad” basket, because it contains both. Obviously the “Bad” part is the increased discomfort, or even distress, when our Kids become aware they are noticeably different from the bulk of their peers, as they feel more strongly the sense of missing out, etc.

But on the “Good” side is *the personal motivation to do something about it.*

That is why it is such a shame that up till now there have been no strategies to train this important age group, teaching them how to channel the power of their pain into greatly improving their abilities. We have a marvellous opportunity at this age that we should not pass up.

**Harnessing personal motivation is always the best way to Train *anyone* to do *anything*.** I have indeed developed strategies that can utilise their motivation, enabling them to enter the Real World more frequently, and to interact with it more effectively. Unfortunately I am still only able to put this information down as time/finances permit.

I am sure however, that you will find the introduction to the main strategies very novel and very helpful, as set out below.

**Is now the time to convey the concepts of Own World and Real World?**

Exactly what age your Young Person needs to be before understanding these concepts depends on your assessment of his.her comprehension levels.

If your Child is advanced you can consider beginning from age 7.

*When in doubt try it****,*** his.her understanding is probably greater than you realise.

**• The first step is to set out the facts for your Child: and they are:**

“***Everyone*** lives in, and escapes to, their Own World quite often, not just you.

However, others may not live in their Own Worlds **as** **much** as you. Why? Because (*you need to tailor this diagnosis to your Child: here are examples)*: your senses take in the World more strongly than others”. (pick the ones from the five senses that are appropriate). Or you might need to go beyond the normal five into things like proprioception (bodily awareness/awkwardness) or a faulty sense of balance. Then there are distresses like interrupted sleeping habits that make a person more tired and less able to cope; or your Child might have an irritated digestion system, or other discomforts you have identified).

“So you have been more used to going to your Own World, to recover and reset than others, and in most cases your Own World time has been necessary for you.

But being in Own World more often, you miss out on understanding and being in the Real World. Others who are in the Real World more often than you, have more practice interacting with each other.

That is why, when you realise this, you will probably want to access that World more often, so you can catch up with others, and also have more fun with them.

“But be of good cheer, because the good news is **we can set up a system to make it easier for you to enter the Real World when you feel like it,** so you can basically catch up with others over time.”

**I recommend you create a physical representation of the comparison between Own World and Real World** (I did this for my son, and it had a lasting impact for him. He was 8 years old at the time):

I built a small cardboard “mini-wall” around 75mm (3 inches) using cardboard from boxes, and placed that “wall” so as to surround my Boy. Within the wall was Own World, and beyond was Real World. (You might like to do similarly, or maybe use a rope or similar to delineate the area.)

When my youngster was ready, he physically stepped out of his Own World into Real World, and looked at things I had set out on a table in the Real World.

**With my increased understanding I would change them now to these:**

A picture of yourself, family and friends, on a **big** greeting card, saying something like “Welcome! We love you and are here to help you!”

Another card showing a picture of happy kids, titled “you will have more fun with others in the playground and in the classroom.”

Another card with a picture of your Boy.Girl looking happy with the title in the card : “I understand things better now!” or words to that effect.

Add a physical thing for your Child to do, for example light a candle and sing “Happy Real World to Me” and have him.her blow out the candle.

A hug afterwards would be natural.

All this is to happen in a very quiet peaceful room with absolutely no near or distant distractions.

Also another card or placard reminding him that “All people live in their Own World, and you should be there too when you feel the need to be.

We only enter Real World when you are ready.”

Having aroused your Child’s powerful motivation to get out of pain into more pleasure, he.she will be wanting to know how to get all these good things.

Thus is set up our process that we worked-to for several years:

**opening the “D.O.O.R”** :

**D**ecide when you are ready, to enter the Real World.

**You** decide when to enter, not others.

**O**pen the Door into the Real World –by stepping over our cardboard mini-wall,

or it will be an imaginary wall if you are in everyday social surroundings.

**O**bserve that Real World, see people and things without raising a barrier of

 (distancing) self-protection.

**R**esponses: look for peoples’ **R**esponses to you, enjoy their praise and support,

 then **R**eturn to Own World for **Rest** and to congratulate yourself.

“Opening a Door” in your imagination gives you a strong mental picture when you want to go from a withdrawal state to a socialising state.

Although the “Real-World entering Motivations” (described above) will tap into your Child’s growing self-motivation “to fit in more, have friends”, etc, we need *more*.

We need a **strong** and **immediate Reward** for your Child, for making the extra effort to enter the Real World more often.

**What is that Reward?**

The more immediate, instantly satisfying Reward to offer is **this**:

“when you enter the Real World you get **lots of *fun* from *feelings-matches*.**”

What are “feelings-matches’ and why should you try to teach your Child to get more of them? The usual word is **Rapport** and is probably the main motivation and reward for we humans doing what we do.

**You as a human are a social animal, and you enjoy Rapport with others.**

That shared thought or feeling you have with another person makes you feel joy

- that you are less alone, and that you have an ally, a common purpose, and so forth. Matching your experiences with others increases your pleasure, and reduces your feeling of exposure danger.

Repeated Rapport ends up creating friends.

From the survival point of view, Rapport makes us want to want to co-operate with others so we can gain that feeling again.

**It is a feeling that our more-autistic Kids don’t get enough of, because of their relative isolation.**

But they **do want Rapport** (***because they* are *the same as us!***)**,** and in fact they may enjoy even more than us, because of its rarity for them… But we need to help them **identify what Rapport is**, and **teach them how to get it**.

SO, at times when you gain a Rapport (*“feelings-match”*) with your Child, no matter how rudimentary (eg you might be enjoying a ride together, or a song, or doing the same actions, eating the same fun food, etc.), **be more consciously aware of the shared fun you are having, and make more of a thing of it, more of a celebration of it:**

“this is good, yes?” (get a “yes” response, or some response) “Match-match” – you say one “Match” and get your Child to say the other “Match”.

Then celebrate it physically, a high-five might be a good way, but any kind of joyful expression is good, especially one that your Youngster uses, and you should imitate it too.

With this technique you are again tacitly “selling” the value of Real-World Interaction, making it easier, and more compelling, for your Child to want to

“reach-out” to others more frequently, and further!

**this draft written August 2017**

**Footnote**

Regarding the comparison between “Own World and Real World”…

**I am astounded that no-one tells mildly-autistic people that**

 **“Own World and Real World” are universal concepts.**

Quite the contrary, there seems to be a subtle inference in various Trainings that autistic people are unique in their possession of an “Own World”.

So many/most/all? seem to think that by having an “Own World” they are fundamentally different from others. And if they **were** unique in this, it **would** be a fundamental difference setting them apart from everybody else.

***That is why it is so important to make it clear to them that***

***no such difference exists! -***

We **all** have our Own Worlds to go to, especially in times of distress, but also for entertainment.

It is only a questionof **how frequently one enters Own World,** and

**reducing** **that** **frequency is the aim and focus of all Real World Training.**