

How and Why to Build Compassionate Communities for Children with Autism



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Introduction

About me...

Career in Public Health > NOW > I write children's books



Public health =
motivating behavior change

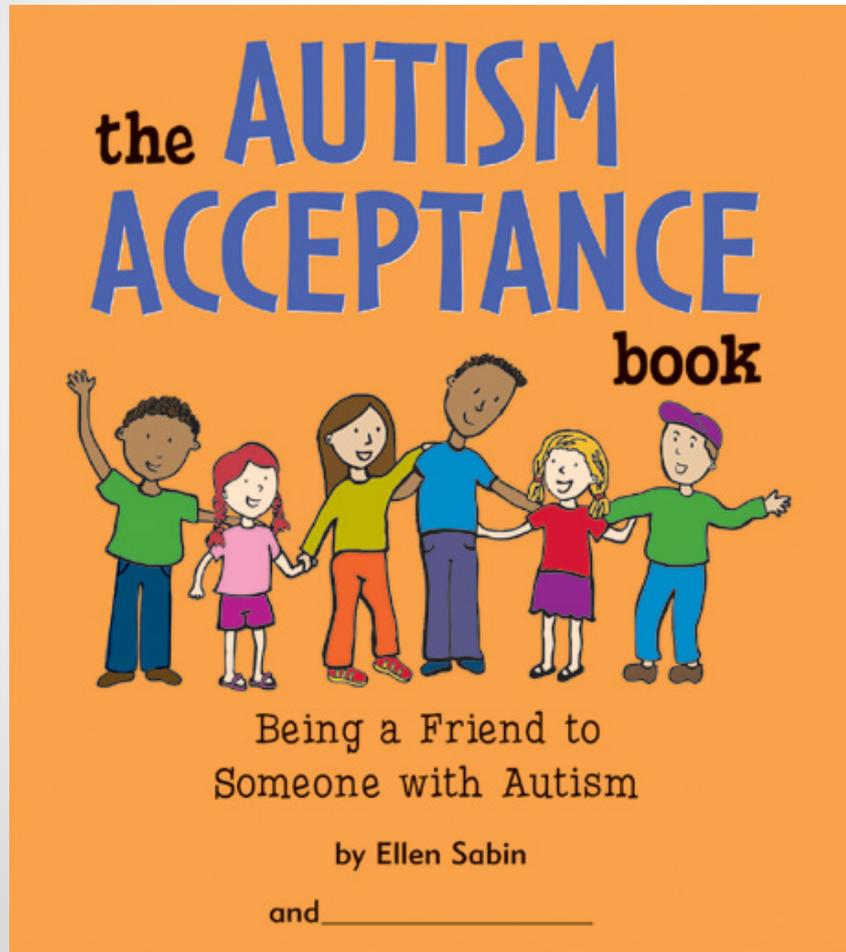
WATERING CAN™



Growing Kids with Character

Promoting positive habits
Igniting conversations
+ behavior change

The Autism Acceptance Book



Growing kids with character by:

- Helping them understand that everyone is different and has unique talents and challenges.
- Encouraging them to take the time and make the effort to understand and respect others.
- Offering exercises that encourage them to practice empathy and compassion.
- Broadening their experiences by showing them that all friendships are different and can be rewarding in many ways.
- Building their self-esteem by helping them understand the power of their actions and their ability to be kind. •3

We're ALL Different



TAKE A WALK IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES

How are people different
from one another?

Here are just a few ways that people can be different from one another:

LOOKS

People look different from one another in all sorts of ways: Some people are tall and others are shorter; some have dark skin and others have light skin; some have long hair and others are bald.

You can probably think of many other ways that people look different from one another.

SKILLS

People have different skills and talents—things that they are really good at and that are easy for them to do well. Some people are good at spelling or science. Others might be great singers or good at sports. We all have things that we enjoy doing or that we do really well.

CHALLENGES

People also have different challenges—things that they find hard to do. Some of your classmates may find that learning math takes them longer than it takes their friends. Others might have a hard time riding a bike or playing soccer.

Sometimes these challenges can be small, and people can work hard to improve at the things they find difficult. Other times, these challenges can be bigger and harder to overcome.

FEARS

Everyone feels scared sometimes. Some people don't like the dark and sleep with a nightlight. Others get upset when they see a spider or hear loud noises. The things that scare one person can be different from the things that scare someone else.

PERSONALITY

Some people like to play with their friends all the time. Other people like being alone sometimes, or playing with just a few friends at a time. Some people love to talk and share lots of stories with their friends. Other people might be more shy or quiet.

But even though everyone is different,
EVERYONE wants to be included, accepted, and liked!

We ALL Want to Be Understood and Appreciated!

TEXT FINAL-Special Needs 3/22/07 6:54 PM Page 15

How do **YOU** like to be treated?

Now, you can think about how you like people to treat you.

When I feel different, I hope that people will: (circle all that apply)

treat me nicely	lend a hand
be my friend	BE PATIENT
NOT LAUGH AT ME	help me feel better

You probably circled all of them!

That means that you hope others will take the
time to understand you, be kind to you,
and walk in your shoes!

Why Teach Compassion and Understanding?

PART 1: FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM and THEIR FAMILIES

- Improves the quality of life for children with autism. (Until people are accepted in an environment, they can't thrive)
- Children and families deserve this respect - as we all do.

Part 2: FOR ALL CHILDREN AND FOR ALL OF US!

Largest minority in America (and the world) is the population of people with special needs. Children live in a world FULL of people who are different from each other in many ways.

- Helps them learn the importance of understanding differences
- Builds character traits that will serve them in life, work, relationships
- Expands their experiences and friendships
- Promotes greater self esteem

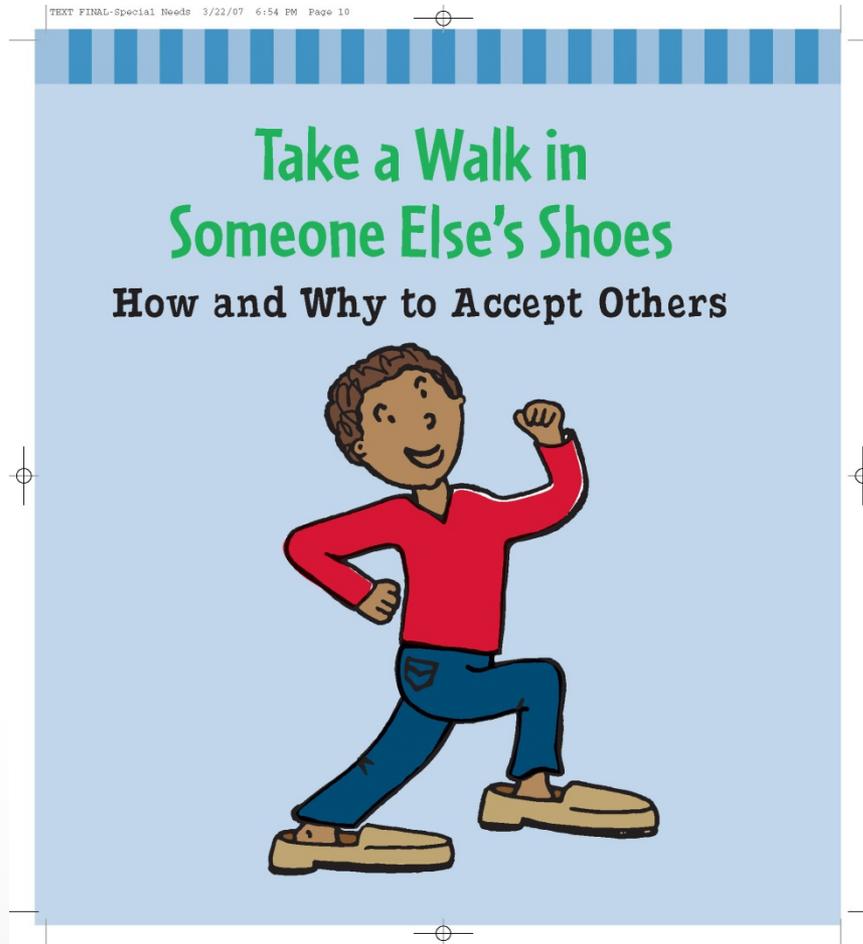
HOW to Teach Compassion and Understanding



Some building blocks:

- Help people recognize they feel and are different in some ways,
- And ... that we're all similar in many ways, too.
- Recognize we're often scared of things we don't understand.
- So...EDUCATE; teach facts and demystify issues.
- Help people understand deeper and "walk in someone's shoes to better see how they feel".

Some examples



People with autism may feel more comfortable when things are predictable

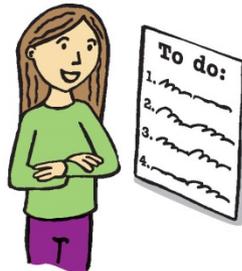


YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

★ Some people with special needs do not like to be surprised—they feel much more comfortable when things are predictable.

Something is predictable when you know it's going to happen because it usually happens in a certain way or at a certain time.

Some of your friends with special needs like to have a schedule or a routine so they know what they are going to be doing every day. They do not like it when things change or surprise them.



If their schedule has to change or if they are surprised by something, they may get nervous, upset, or frustrated. Sometimes they will try to make themselves feel better by doing something over and over again. For example, they might work on a puzzle, clap their hands, or draw a picture. They may not want to stop doing this activity because repeating it makes them feel calmer. They also might go into a corner to be alone and quiet. Sometimes they might talk to themselves or make sounds to help themselves calm down.



Walk in their shoes.

All people have routines that they like—things that make them feel safe and comfortable. Maybe you like it when someone in your family says good night to you every night, and you get upset when that doesn't happen. Or, maybe every morning you go to school with the same person and it would be disappointing to you if that changed.

Write down some of the things that you like doing or seeing every day:

.....
.....
.....

Now, think about how you would feel if these parts of your schedule changed.



Be a good friend.

Since your friend likes to follow routines, you can help her by reminding her about the day's schedule. For example, you might say to her, "In five minutes we'll finish recess and go back inside." That will help her begin to prepare for the change. Or, if something really new happens, like maybe a fire alarm goes off or an unexpected visitor comes to your classroom, you can be patient and understanding. Remember, these new events may be difficult or scary for your friend.

Helping others understand some common behaviors

- Sensitivity to noise
- Noticing of many details
- Difficulty talking or expressing things
- Often think and listen 'logically' and literally
- Difficulty understanding nonverbal communication
- Sensitivity to touch

Etc.



♥ A Final Thought About ♥
Being a Good Friend

Did you know that no two snowflakes are exactly alike?



They are all beautiful and special.



They are all unique and different in some ways.

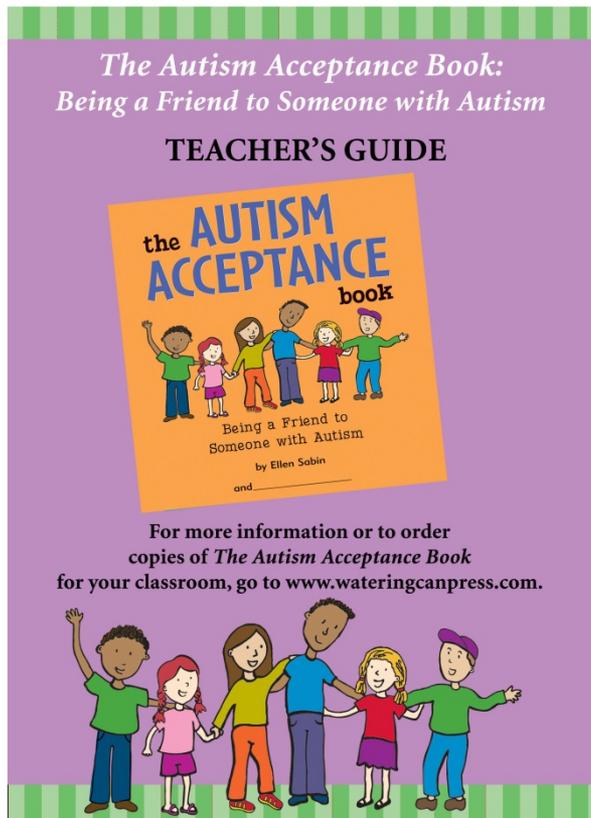


You and everyone you meet are like snowflakes—
beautiful, special, *and* unique and different.

The easiest way to be a good friend to someone
who seems different is to remember that—
like a snowflake—each one of us is special in
our own way and adds beauty to the world.



Creating Compassionate Classrooms



TIPS

- Expect schools and educators to understand and support this mission.
- Handout or presentation to child's teacher or classmates (by parent or child)
- Promote stories/books that include people who think, learn, or act in their own unique ways.
- Ask about bullying prevention policies and programs
- Offer ideas for ways to bring that into the school and community ie: SEPTA, grants, etc

... and Note...

Respecting your child and student with autism as a complex and complete self must be a circular concept: whole child, whole parent, whole teacher. Respect your own developmental timeline and sequence. You're not born with the skills and knowledge to parent or teach a child who has these challenges. It's a parallel process you follow with the child. Too many "systems" don't take this into account—the need to nurture your own development as you build a relationship with the whole child.

Don't Forget about YOU

- It's new territory; ask questions, get educated
- Your relatives, friends, or social network may need educating, too. Use similar building blocks.
- Ask them if they have questions,
- Tell them when you need support
- Express your feelings and seek outside help
- Find time for things YOU enjoy

Words and Attitude Matter

"Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see."

- Mark Twain

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away." -Henry David Thoreau

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it."

-Helen Keller

"When you judge someone based on a diagnosis, you miss out on their abilities, beauty and uniqueness" - Unknown

"From an identity standpoint, what does it mean to have a disability? Pamela Anderson has more prosthetic in her body than I do. Nobody calls her disabled." -Aimee Mullins

"The only disability in life is a bad attitude." - Scott Hamilton

"Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn, whatever state I may be in, therein to be content.

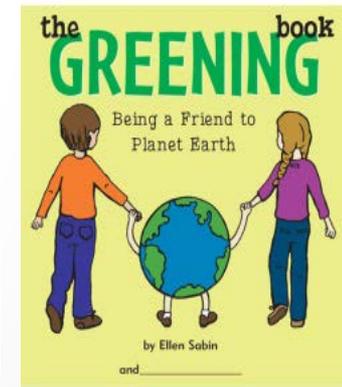
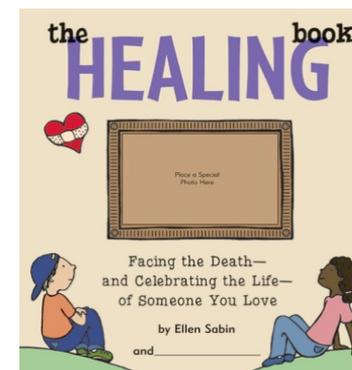
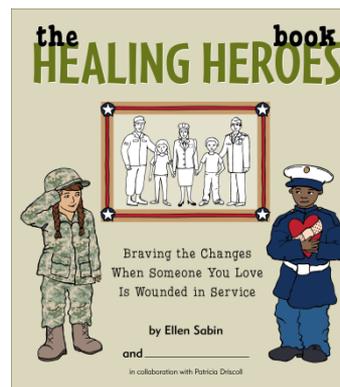
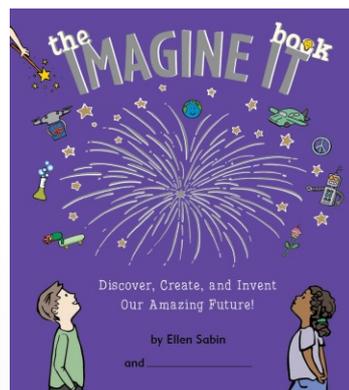
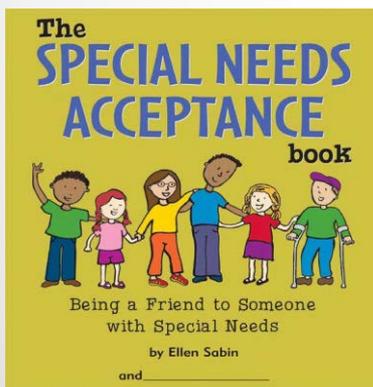
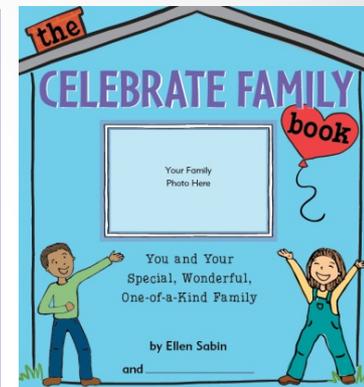
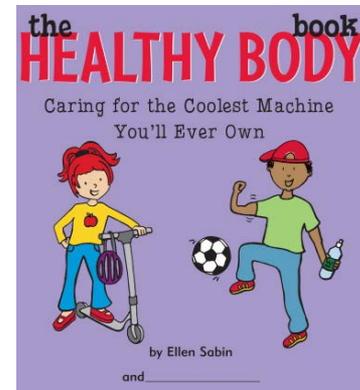
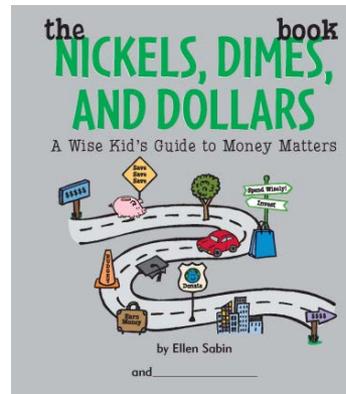
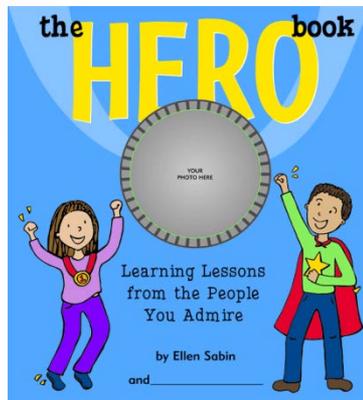
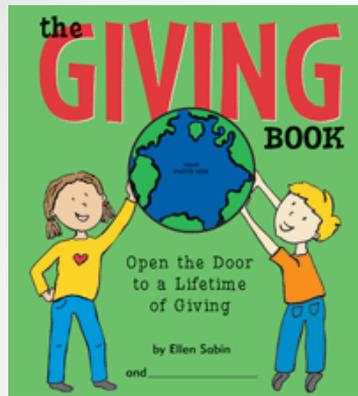
-Helen Keller

"Who do you think made the first stone spears? The Asperger guy. If you were to get rid of all the autism genetics, there would be no more Silicon Valley." -Temple Grandin

"Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference." -Winston Churchill

Questions?
Thoughts?
Ideas?
Sharing...

Growing Kids with Character



Other books by Ellen Sabin www.wateringcanpress.com

Email info@wateringcanpress.com to learn more about books, author appearances in communities, reading events and more.