



THINKSTOCK

## *Social suggestions for teens on the spectrum*

THE TEENAGE YEARS ARE A CHALLENGING TRANSITION FOR PARENTS, BUT CAN BE EVEN MORE SO FOR PARENTS OF KIDS WITH AUTISM

BY KELLY MCKINNON-BERMINGHAM

**A**s children with autism become young adults, the support services available to them seem to diminish. With 1 in 68 children being diagnosed with autism, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's most recent study, and with some estimating that those rates are higher in Orange County, there's a significant need for resources that will help parents ensure that their children are as successful as possible when they head to high school or college or enter the workplace.

With the recent support of a grant from the McBeth Foundation, The Center for Autism & Neurodevelopmental Disorders has established a program designed to teach teens and young adults with autism social and communication skills aimed at improved social independence.

Here are a few tips for parents to help ease the transition into teen years:

**Appearance:** Help your child put their best face forward by explaining the importance of personal hygiene and appearance. Make sure your child looks clean, smells clean and is portraying the social image that matches their social group or potential group.

**Initial impression:** Spend a few minutes rehearsing with your child how to greet members of their peer group. This is different than greeting a teacher, familiar adult or acquaintance, and demonstrating the difference can go a long way.

**Starting a conversation:** Making a list of 4-6 typical conversation starters that teens might be talking about will help your child feel more confident in new interactions. Frequent topics for conversation starters include sports, school activities, movies and items in the news.

**Balanced discussions:** Rehearse balanced conversations with your child. Teach them to spend as much time asking questions and listening as they do making statements.

**Finding a peer group:** Help your child find like-minded peers to spend time with. Most high schools have clubs focusing on various interests, and if your child can't find one that interests them, encourage them to start their own.

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