

Coping with Special Needs Children and Social Bias

| BY HELEN HIPPI |

Life coach shares experiences overcoming the prejudice, ignorance, and bias against disabilities

If Helen Hipp knew something was wrong. Her three year old son didn't act normal at all. He'd rock back and forth and bang his head again and again. He wasn't even trying to talk. His communication skills were simply not up to his playmates level. Something was wrong here. Way wrong. He needed help. She needed help.

They went to a team of specialists. The doctors said his development was delayed. After a battery of tests, her son was assessed by the doctor as displaying "autistic tendencies" but not enough to support a diagnosis.

"Your child is functioning beyond his abilities", one doctor said before he diagnosed her son as "globally mentally retarded."

Stunned and upset and confused she struggled about what to do. She didn't feel that the doctors had it right at all. She learned that the people have serious prejudices when dealing with people with special needs.

And she learned to sidestep the dismal attitudes she encountered.

It took many years. Her son was eventually diagnosed with "Asperger's Syndrome" and properly treated.

It's been over 20 years now, but the prejudice and ignorance about disabilities still abound.

Just recently, radio personality Michael Savage stated that autism is the "illness du jour" and children do not have a father around to tell them to stop acting like a "putz."

She realizes that such hurtful shoot from the hip comments are spoken by out of total ignorance.

"The pain and damage he's caused because of his position of visibility and influence is truly monumental," she said. "People deserve better respect and wisdom than that. Society needs better leaders in positions of authority and influence.

Helen is a prime example. She worked with her son and found people who believed in his

she said. "It's crucial to value them as individuals and nurture them. Family, friends, and professionals need to go slow and be non-judgmental."

Helen did that with her son and as a result, he grew up to be resilient and hold an ever-present positive attitude. He has taken hold of the life he wanted for himself, rather than having outside services determine his future.

Today Helen's son is healthy, happy, independent twenty-three-

as your child changes...so use the support system to your advantage, but exceed it. Go beyond it...don't let it be the end..."

It's crucial that people learn to deal with the prejudices they will encounter when dealing with special needs. Here are some crucial messages when conveyed will help adults with special needs advocate for themselves:

- Discover what is most important to you. Identify what you really want to do.

- Develop a plan to achieve your desires. Identify the specific things you want to receive and achieve.

- Learn how to deal with negative thoughts and beliefs you encounter. Ignore the naysayers. Step around other people's prejudice and bias.

- Be confident in yourself and your decisions. Keep steady on the positive and productive elements. Tap into the creativity within you.

- Bring a sense of balance into your life. Maximize your potential. Explore what you love to do. Focus on what you do best.

"You've got to stop thinking about the past. You have to look to the future with the belief that you will find the resources you need to realize your deepest dreams. Do that and you will succeed." ❖

For more information visit www.withinlifecoaching.com. E-mail Helen at helen@withinlifecoaching.com or call 802.899.2128.

"A DIAGNOSIS is only a label that is used to HELP. Embrace it, it is only a snapshot in time. It can and probably will change. Know that the diagnosis can change...just as your child changes..."

strengths. She learned that what is needed is proper care, patience, and caring.

Helen says:

"Use a diagnosis as a suggestion, a springboard for possibilities, not a straightjacket."

There are times when it helps to have a trusted, objective person help you to explore your choices, and determine how to achieve your objectives.

"When dealing with a person with a disability it is crucial to acknowledge the person's worth,"

year-old living in Williston, Vermont. He lives as he sees fit, shares an apartment with a roommate and works at a local retail store.

Helen Hipp has ten years of experience in Human Services, working as a vocational counselor and family advocate. Helen now works as a life coach who focuses on special needs coaching for young adults and their parents.

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