



## **Autism Spectrum Disorders: Stress-Relief for Families Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders and/or Other Special Needs**

**by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell**

*'It is not what you look at, but what you see.'* -Henry David Thoreau

The fascinating array of Spectrum Disorders, sometimes called Pervasive Developmental Disorders and consolidated under the umbrella of Autism, is gaining more notice in the media. As a result, the general public is beginning to understand and appreciate its challenges and, in some cases, extraordinary gifts. We often wonder whether such media coverage indicates increased incidence or just heightened awareness. In the case of spectrum disorders, it may actually be both.

Q: Dear Susie, Our 8 year old boy with Aspergers Syndrome experiences very "jangly" moments and can be quite disruptive at school and home. Do you have relaxation suggestions that might help him to settle down, and might your CD, *"Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace,"* possibly soothe him into a calmer state at those times? He is a fabulous child with so many gifts, but as you might imagine, we face many challenges too. Signed: Sleepy Mom

A: Dear "Sleepy Mom," Your journey, and your son's, are not easy ones. But there is growing attention to the complex range of Autism Spectrum Disorders. My own work being in stress management, it is also advisable to talk with knowledgeable medical professionals who can sit face to face with your family to provide informed support. That said, here are a few thoughts that I hope will bring some comfort.

As you probably know, one indicator of these neurological spectrum disorders often manifests itself in difficulty communicating and interacting with others. There may be "stimming" (*self-stimulating movements like rocking or hand-flapping, lip-licking, etc.*) which serve to soothe an individual experiencing sensory overload. Unless the behavior is dangerous or excessively disruptive, it may bring comfort to a child whose perception of the world may be very different from our own

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Your suggestion of guided imagery and other relaxation tools is an excellent idea. Listening Therapy is an approach sometimes applicable for Aspergers, so the concept of multi-sensory guided imagery may have merit, providing a soothing focal point for the mind, especially as a gentle distraction from repetitive thoughts. We do receive letters and emails telling us that *"Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace,"* has been used with great success by many parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders, other developmental disorders, A.D.H.D. and sleep disorders to soothe children and help them to fall, or fall back to, sleep. The gentle narration provides a comforting focal point for the listener's mind, which can be especially helpful if thoughts or actions seem to preoccupy attention and energy. *"Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace,"* was originally created with an adult audience in mind, though we've discovered, through parents, that children also respond to the comforting quality. *"Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace"* is used to comfort the children as well as for parents facing inherent challenges too. Aspergers is a complex condition, but awareness is growing. As you know, these children often possess rare charm and formidable expertise, and if we are open, they teach us important lessons. Ask your medical professionals about potential benefits of guided imagery, touch, music, dance, art therapy, pet therapy and mindful breathing to provide an oasis where the mind can rest.

Take a look on my website's Tips page at [www.relaxintuit.com](http://www.relaxintuit.com) for many techniques for helping caregivers, parents, and kids cope with stress, too. There are many strategies there that are appropriate for you and your little boy or that you can adapt to fit your needs. As you know, autism impacts every family member, so I hope you all will find supportive stress-relief suggestions. Also, see tips for breath work - mindful, focused breathing to calm and refocus, providing a focal point where the mind can simply rest.

The following may also be helpful:

<http://www.autismchannel.net/>

<http://neuro-www.mgh.harvard.edu/disclaimer.html>

<http://204.162.96.147/~mepa2000/links.htm>

[http://www.listeningcentre.co.uk//](http://www.listeningcentre.co.uk/)

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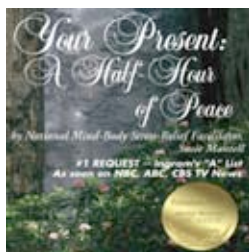


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**Bonus:** "Just for This Day" by poet Sally Meyer for her remarkable son, Dhylan, reprinted with permission from the author at: <http://www.relaxintuit.com/tips/259>

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## END OF THIS TIP##