

# The Next Thing You Know Ellen Notbohm



Notes, news, perspectives and possibilities

Issue 65 July 2017

***My greatest challenge has been to change the mindset of people.***

Muhammad Yunus  
2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate

## Hitting the Mindset Reset Key

Star Trek has many fans in the autism community, Bryce and I among them. An oft-quoted line in our house comes from a scene in *Star Trek Into Darkness* when Admiral Pike demands irritably of Spock, “Are you giving me attitude?” Spock replies, “I am expressing multiple attitudes simultaneously. To which are you referring?”

Attitude, perspective, mindset, outlook. However we refer to it, at times it’s like walking around with the open zipper you aren’t aware of—everyone can see what you’ve got inside, whether you know it’s on display or not.

Your child or student with autism will become a reflection of your perspective.<sup>1</sup> Whether deliberate or unconscious, the perspectives we form about a child, his or her autism, and what his or her future might be pervades all we do and say. When confronted with mindsets from others that are untrue, unfair or damaging, we marshall all the tools we have to reshape and reframe those negative attitudes.

Enter the strikethrough key! As our children with autism have taught us, visuals are often more powerful and effective than the spoken word. One good visual may be worth more than many minutes of a wearying IEP meeting or the ninety-third no-win argument with recalcitrant relatives. The strikethrough font amounts to a visual stop sign, and strikethrough mindset resets have become quite popular with my social media community. If any of these resonate with you, you can find them in shareable graphic meme form on my [Facebook](#) and [Pinterest](#) pages.

“He’s disruptive and inattentive, always making noises, making messes, getting out of his seat and talking out of turn.

He needs to get himself under control.

“He’s so bright and energetic!

He loves to move and has a lot of knowledge in his head.

How can we help him settle and focus better so he and his classmates can enjoy each other?”

~~"This is the way we've always done it."~~  
"Tell me more about why you think your idea can work."

~~"That's your problem."~~  
"You're in a difficult position. How can I help?"

~~"He doesn't do that with me."~~  
"Let's talk about how we can give him consistency between home and school."

~~Misbehaving again!~~  
This kid is giving me a hard time. How can I get him to stop?

Hmmmm. Behavior is communication.  
This kid is having a hard time. How can I help him?

~~We have an isolation room where students are sent  
when they throw tantrums.~~

We have a quiet room where students can go to feel safe when they need a break for self-regulation or calming.

~~She doesn't need a speech therapist. She talks, doesn't she?~~  
She needs a speech therapist.

The ability to speak is only part of the ability to communicate.

~~It's so frustrating trying to reach him when he just sits there oblivious  
to what's going on around him.~~

There's so much going on around him!  
I can see that his senses are overwhelmed and he's trying to defend himself.  
How can I modify his environment so he can participate comfortably?

~~Reasons a child with autism has tantrums:~~

~~He's trying to manipulate people.  
She likes it, otherwise she'd just stop.  
He's spoiled by all the special treatment he gets.  
She's a brat.~~

Reasons a child with autism melts down:

Sensory overload  
Inability to communicate  
Illness, injury or pain  
Food sensitivities, biochemical imbalances  
Sleep disturbances  
Maltreatment  
Sense of failure  
Poor examples from adults

~~He's not playing with that toy the right way.~~  
Well, that's a different way to play with that toy! How clever!

~~She can't.~~  
She can't—yet. We'll never know how much she's capable of until we give her every support and opportunity.

Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Peace Prize winner whose words opened this column, further reminds us that "Mindsets play strange tricks on us. We see things the way our minds have instructed our eyes to see." When we know the trickster, we can call foul on the tricks. We can change the instructions. We can choose to see through different eyes,

and guide others to do the same.

We can, Spock-like, change multiple attitudes simultaneously.

<sup>1</sup> [\*Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew, updated and expanded edition \(2012\)\*](#)

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## Your story

*Writing prompts can help you tell your story, even if it's only to yourself. If you do feel like sharing, send me your thoughts for possible inclusion in future newsletters. (Hateful and/or profanity-laced material will not be considered.)*

This month's prompts:

Finish the sentence: "I hope my child always remembers that I \_\_\_\_\_."

Finish the sentence: "I hope my child never knows that I \_\_\_\_\_."

## Your question: When stims go from harmless to harrowing

*My beautiful nine-year-old daughter has autism and is mostly nonverbal. She has always done some vocal stimming but it has never been disruptive. But for the past few months, she's doing it much more often and more loudly, and it's becoming a real issue in our home and at school. We're not sure why the stimming has intensified, as nothing has changed in her day-to-day routine. We are at our wits' end. Nothing we have tried has worked. Clearly we must be missing something.*

Stims (self-stimulating behavior) are common in children with autism, and they're a spectrum within a spectrum, ranging from quietly quirky and relatively harmless to disturbing and potentially harmful to self and others. What we must first understand and accept is that stimming is the child's attempt to fill a need. Until that need is identified and addressed, the stimming will continue. Many stims fill sensory needs, some have emotional roots. When a child is nonverbal, vocal stimming is an attempt to communicate those needs in one of the few ways s/he is able. If the stimming increases, so has her need increased. Imagine her festering frustration as she keeps trying to express what's wrong, and no one gets it. And the more she tries to communicate it, the more she gets shushed. The world in which she lives doesn't recognize her language . . .

[\*\*Read more\*\*](#)

Got a question you'd like to see answered in my newsletter or blog? [\*\*Tell me about it.\*\*](#)

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