



“How Can My Child Have Autism When He Seems So Smart?”

From *Does My Child Have Autism?* by Wendy Stone

Right now you might be thinking about all the things your child with autism learned at a much younger age than other children you know. And yes, you are right: there are also things that children with autism learn on their own much faster than their typically developing peers or siblings. For example, they can be very good at learning to pick out their favorite DVD from a stack, even when it's not in its case. They may learn at a very young age how to operate the remote controls to the TV and DVD player so that they can rewind their videos to their favorite parts (or fast forward through the parts they don't like). They can be very creative in figuring out ways to climb up on the counter to reach a cabinet that has their favorite cereal or even how to use the key to unlock the dead bolt on the back door so they can go outside to play on the swing. Clearly, these are not behaviors that you would even think about trying to teach a two-year-old child. And yet some children with autism somehow manage to acquire these skills on their own. How can we understand this inconsistency between the things children with autism do and don't learn? How can a child who can't put different shapes into a shape sorter learn to turn on the TV and DVD player, put a DVD in and push the play button? How can a child who can't understand a simple direction like “get your coat” figure out how to unlock a door to get outside?

What accounts for this unique learning style? In a word: *motivation*. We all pay attention better to the things that interest us, so we become much more proficient at learning them. Understanding what is motivating to your child (all children are different) will be one of the keys to increasing their learning and their skills. Your child's special talents may be part of his unique and inherent learning style and nature.