

I appreciate this opportunity to be able to share with you today and give you hope, inspiration, and understanding for your own autism situations in your life. Today's topic is titled Transitioning: From a Kids, Parents, and Autistic's Point of View which I will talk about transitioning through the different stages of life with how-to's, understanding the feelings of a person with disabilities, outcomes of steps taken, and changes still needed in today's society. As I share with you I will explain how doors have opened for me to accomplish different purposes and about how I've gotten to be here today as well as what it's like for me to have autism and other disabilities and to parent my young adult kids on the autism spectrum. I apologize ahead of time for jumping from different topics throughout my speech, but there is a lot for me to cover and it will also give you an idea of how my brain works with me feeling like it's going a hundred miles a minute and I can't get everything out of my brain to slow it back down sometimes. Even though I experience autism and other disabilities I am not an expert on everybody's autism. We all experience things differently and I just represent my story and understanding of the autism I've experienced. I will never claim to understand everything because I am continually learning to understand myself, my kids, and others with autism. I like having the job to see the world through the eyes God gave me and explain Autism through an autistic eye to whoever I can make a difference to. It's also important to me to have a question/answer time for you all to ask me things and I can answer them the best I can. If you are experiencing struggles personally I hope you are refreshed and filled with hope and inspiration. I desire to help the autism community connect and be encouraged to help each other. God can take neurological glitches, impairments, and disabilities to do incredible things and make a difference because he has a purpose for each of us. Not only am I diagnosed with Autism, but I'm also diagnosed with Anxiety Disorder, Attention and Concentration Deficit, Mixed Receptive-Expressive Language Disorder (receptive is a second grade level and expressive is a sixth grade level), and Recurrent Major Depressive Disorder as well as I was born deaf/hearing impaired.

First, understanding the basics of Autism is the beginning to bridge the gap between autistics and the community. Under the autism umbrella there is Child Disintegrative Disorder, Rett's Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified, and Asperger's Syndrome as well as the classic Autism diagnosis. Child Disintegrative disorder is a rare condition characterized by late onset of developmental delays or severe and sudden reversals in language, social function, and motor skills. Retts's Syndrome is a rare genetic neurological and developmental disorder that affects the way the brain develops, causing a progressive inability to use muscles for eye and body movements and speech in females due to a mutation of the MECP2 gene occurring on the X chromosome causing problems with language, coordination, and repetitive movements. PDD-NOS disorder is characterized by delays in the development of multiple basic functions including socialization and communication. Some people are close to having Asperger syndrome, but do not quite fit while others have near full-fledged autism, but without some of its symptoms. The major difference between Asperger's and Autism is there are no speech delays in Asperger's. Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting communication, social impairments, and behavioral elements. It is not a mental or psychological disorder.

A doctor took the time to build a picture and explain to me why I was called autistic. The following is the definition of my Autism and a visual graph that helped me understand the perspectives of what neurotypical people saw in me and was the beginning to understand myself more. This explanation has helped me connect with people that surround me and I know it will help you too.



A) Social  
 ~◇ nonverbal  
 peer relationships

C) Motivational/Body  
 ◇ restricted interests  
 patterns - inflexible  
 mannerisms  
 rts/  
 ith whole

### How I understand this to mean

- ◇ never
- ~◇ sometimes struggle (maybe once a year)
- ◇ rarely (not so much, but can't say never)
- ◇ definitely

\* When you have two or more in each category of A, B, C, D you get diagnosed with Autism.

\*In the circle graph, I struggle with some of the issues inside of the circles at various times. All are a part of a person who has Autism.

Hopefully this helps anyone to further understand Autism a little more. There is a statement that once you have you met one Autism person, you've met one Autism person. No two persons are the same.

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Some of the more specific things of how autism personally affects or affected me at one time include:

1. I didn't understand some things like concepts on/off, over/under, before/after and it had to be taught to me as pictures with words underneath of them.
2. Difficulties in schooling. In first grade I went to three different schools because they didn't want to deal with me or didn't have the abilities to have me there.
3. I don't fit in and understanding things that were or are going on around me. I couldn't put into words how I was feeling and sometimes didn't know how I was feeling because I didn't have the word knowledge to know what was going on inside of me.
4. Sometimes I shut down when overwhelmed and have had to learn and know when my body is foregoing an autistic meltdown. I've pushed myself too far at times to where I feel like I can't move and it takes me a long time...days/weeks... to be able to function properly again. Instead of throwing myself down on the ground, which is obviously inappropriate behavior I bawl my eyes out uncontrollably and hyperventilate horrifically, hide in public bathrooms or in my car or get to my home as soon as I can get there. Depends on the situation. I can also sense your frustration when I have failed at something and I can't handle failure which also leads to severe meltdowns. I need lists to function better. Sometimes I say I am not able to process all of this and remember it so may I have it in writing?
5. Sometimes a certain smell or sound is bothering me and I can't function because of it. For instance I can't handle whistling at all and I hate the Seven Dwarfs whistle while you work song. It literally makes me have to leave a store if I hear it or politely tell someone I have autism and I'd appreciate if they would stop.
6. I've been known to stim. My son hit his head against the wall repeatedly. Please note though that stimming or hitting your head against the wall is the same as you tapping your foot, doodling, or playing with your pen. It calms you.
7. I was in speech therapy till I was eight.

8. I've struggled being successful and handling keeping jobs even though academic wise I have an AA degree, an office assistant and word processing certificates, and I have been a nationally certified medical assistant, and a certified chiropractic assistant. It's documented with the government employers stating that "We know Heidi is trying and doing her best, but her best will never amount to being good enough." These experiences is part of what had led to my current successes.
9. I lose focus a lot, have trouble managing interruptions, can't multitask, and I love doing one project at a time. I like it when things are repetitive sometimes. I maintain understanding and learn better that way, and my food can't mix like at thanksgiving I use 4 or 5 plate.
10. I process things slowly. My dad would have conversations with me even as an adult and he would tell me to go home at one point because he knew I wouldn't get it for a few days. Then I would come back a couple days later and tell him something not realizing that the lightbulb that turned on is what he was trying to tell me days earlier. Sometimes I get stuck on a thought or concept and can't get past it. Or I take things literally not realizing that our communication is not matching up the same as you may think it is.
11. My intense focuses are all creative related...acting, directing, script writing, dance, colorguard, writing books, crafting, sewing, knitting, and drawing.
12. I was a socially awkward kid and even as an adult I still struggle in unfamiliar crowds on how to fit in and what to talk about when it's not a specific type of function with a purpose involved for me.
13. There are still things I'll never quite get like being told staring at someone is considered rude, but not looking at people's eyes while talking is also rude? So if you look at people's eyes or you don't you'll never get it right and not be rude. Sometimes life is too difficult to figure out and you all do not make sense.

As I had mentioned my family is unique as not only am I and autistic parent, but I have two young adult kids on the autism spectrum too. Our family can be described like a 12 inch ruler. I see things in pictures, comprehend and explain things to people in this way. Number twelve on a ruler is like a person with autism who is completely nonverbal and needs 24 hour constant care. One on the ruler is someone with Asperger's the highest form of autism on the spectrum. My son when he was little was about a 7-8. He rocked, hit his head against the wall, ran away all the time, and had fits in grocery stores. Now he's 20 and he's about a 4-5. With both my son and I some people doubted that we would ever have any chance for improvement and are shocked to see how far we have come and what we've accomplished so far. People have said we are a hot mess, won't achieve anything, can't graduate from school, have to be institutionalized, can never be a parent and then there are those who have made a huge difference. I have been described as having been a 6-7 and now I'm a 3-4. My daughter is now 19 and was diagnosis with PDD-NOS at 3-4 on the ruler and is now a 1½. My son didn't talk till he was six. My daughter first talked in public when she was four years old. And not only am I a parent, but I am a grammie too. I have two grandsons --2yrs old and 10 days old.

Doors have opened for me because some people never give up on me and have helped with specific things along my journey. People the Lord has put in my life have made a big difference in where I'm at today and have helped me to become CEO of Puzzled with Purpose-Autistically Inspired Creations as a platform to share my gifts to others and I'm the founder of Shining Abilities Craft Fair which features crafters/artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I'm also a council member for the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, a part of the Education, Employment and Transportation, and Developmental Disabilities Committees, the Autism Ad Hoc Workgroup, and soon the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Board. I recently spoke at the capitol legislative board meetings for the Supported Decision Making Agreement and the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Telecommunication Bill. I'm obtaining my national speaker/advocate certification this year and I'm an author of "Marutika's

Amazing Outcome”, an actress, and currently working on producing a film called “Through Autism Rescue Eyes”.

Now that you have a basic understanding of Autism, know a little bit about me and my family, and how despite my struggles I’m currently achieving things some say was not possible I would like to talk about transitioning which is the topic of the presentation today. Transitioning is a widely talked about subject among the autism world, but not widely talked about from an autistic’s point of view. Our view is extremely important as it helps parents and professionals become better at their jobs in helping us to achieve our very best in life. By understanding us you become better at utilizing the knowledge to help us feel functional and learn how to handle daily life. And please remember that no matter who you are or what role you play don’t give up or in or quit on us ever.

Transitioning is just one of the many skills needed to function better and become a higher functioning autistic. I become a higher functioning autistic because every day I learn something, the Lord shows me something, or I experience something that helps me to become higher functioning by the minute. Sometimes when people say high-functioning autism though it means your deficits are ignored and if you’re low-functioning autistic it means your assets are ignored. “Mild” autism doesn’t mean a person experiences autism mildly...it means you experience their autism mildly. You may not know how hard they have had to work to get to the level that they currently are. Sometimes I tell myself and my kids that when transitioning sometimes in the midst of it you think FEAR. For some kids behavior with transitions comes from the fear of the unknown or what’s going to happen. However FEAR for us is not being afraid of what lies ahead, but instead it means Face Everything And Rise. This is what we continually do throughout our lives. Throughout my kids and I’s lives we constantly have had to do this not only with transitioning in our daily rigmarole, but with all aspects of our training, life, and job skills.

I want you to know and understand what it’s feels like to be overloaded and meltdown so you know how important teaching transitions skills to us is. We never quit feeling this way, but we learn to adapt and function in a better capacity when for instance learning handling procedures to keep us from going full fledge into where there is no return. This is how I understand it. A normal person processes at high speed internet pace, but I process at the slow internet connection rate. Sometimes when you click to a new page it takes forever and the system freezes or crashes, shuts down in order to reboot and function again. See first it overloads and then it has a major meltdown and needs to deal with itself and then start over and reload the page. And sometimes the internet throws at you distractions and pop-ups that it can’t filter out. So it’s like that when you keep having things come at you like voices, commands, lights, and sounds and you can’t filter through it all and it becomes more than you can handle which overwhelms you. Sometimes when you are overloaded you just can’t take it and you have a meltdown. You do learn how to more properly handle them, but the feeling inside your body never changes when it happens. I now know when they are in progress because I can feel it and I’ve learned for the most part how to go about not losing it completely like removing myself from the situation and learning how to say no and be ok with not trying to make everyone happy. If I push myself into a full overload mode there is nothing I can do but to go through the meltdown until I completely expel all the emotions. I now explode through crying, hyperventilating, and complete loss or control over being able to stop bawling my eyes out and shaking intensely. Once I go through it though I’m able to be ok for the most part again and rejoin society and get help with the situation.

Every kind of professional person and parent –Behavior analysts, Speech and Language therapists/pathologists, Neurologists, Psychologists and counselors, Early Intervention providers, special and general education teachers, Occupational and Physical therapists, DD/job/life coaches, Principals and school staff, teacher assistants, agency workers, and Parents play an important role in

knowing how to teach us transitioning skills and continue to reiterate and try to help the individual master one of the top life skills needed to see outcomes that will blow your mind at what becomes possible for the individual. Transitioning with autistic kids is one of the beginning essentials to embark on the journey to reach our full potential.

For my family learning to master or obtain the skill of transitioning is a constant reminder of the following statement because it explains how when you learn this skill and as you practice it you get the chance to do what my son said giving his high school graduation speech. He said remember how far you have come, everything you've faced, the battles you have won, and the things you've overcome. Don't doubt how far you can go.

Some tips to help transitions include allowing autistics to talk about their intense interests. This is extremely beneficial because as a kid it gives us something to look forward to and to push us to get through transitioning into the next step because we desire to discuss what we love. For instance, I've made snow skirts made out of men's ties at my booth that are character or theme oriented and teachers have worn them to their classrooms. They use them as a tool for the kids to pick out a tie and talk about it for one or two minutes when they successfully transition or complete an activity. Also my superhero capes have been used as a reward and something to look forward to when an individual is transitioning. When a child completes a number of successful transitions they get to wear the superhero cape outside at recess or when you give them an important job to go to the office to get something for you or the classroom then they get to wear it because they're on a mission. Mentioning these things allow transitions to become an easier process too and builds confidence for us to become independent.

Difficulty with transitions can manifest in a number of ways depending on the child and the setting. It can take the form of resistance, avoidance, distraction, negotiation, or a full-blown meltdown. I remember my son Steffen when he was 2yrs old in a therapy classroom and he couldn't handle anything that was going on. He would scream bloody murder and wouldn't cooperate to do anything at first. The reactions were the result of him being overwhelmed by everything and everybody in the room. That was the first time though that I saw someone work with him, help him communicate, and teach him the very first transitioning skills. Transitioning can be very disruptive and discomforting from our perspective. For instance if we remember not being successful or productive before the transitioning to it makes it hard to do when we're reluctant to try again or challenged to something new. Sometimes transitions are hard because the activity next causes stress or associated with something bad. Associated riding the bus home activity to getting downtime at home to be in their room drawing some awesome pictures which they love to do. Being prepped for it can reduce the stress of transitions, resulting in more confidence and comfort during difficult phases.

Sometimes allowing kids to feel helpful in participating with the preparing for the next transition is something that makes autistics feel more in control instead of feeling powerless in the face of changes throughout the day. It also allows them to thrive on repeated successes. When you're doing something to be helpful then that becomes the focus of the transition and not the actual transition itself. Have them carry objects like supplies to the work area, the shopping list to the car, or something to give to a person at the next location. One of the things I used to do with my kids is when we went into the grocery store I would review the expectations so that they would transition into this activity better because they knew exactly what was going on. When you do this it calms us down from not liking to not know what is happening next. They also each had jobs to do which helped them to focus on things and transition into that task easier. I would break down our list so they each had things to grab and sometimes I would tell them what I need but they would grab it and put it in the cart. These things help us to not focus on all the overwhelming things like sounds, smells, many items.

Another tip is to give us choices like, "Next we need to work on math. Do you want to work at your desk or the big round table? It helps us feel like we are in a little bit of control with the tasks which can ease our transition anxiety when it's mixed with prep time to finish what we are currently doing and preparing us to expect the ending of one thing and the beginning of the next. A little side note too: Transitioning to math for me was something I didn't like, was too hard, made me feel dumb, and didn't understand the point to it for me to learn it past a certain level. With some transitions show autistic people the purpose and examples of importance that they understand to they can connect to grasp reasons to switch.

Give us time to finish. When we have to stop something that is unfinished to us, our brain doesn't allow us to feel like we can stop it because 1. We're really focused on it. and 2. It's illogical to leave something unfinished. It is a strength that we have to actually finish tasks to completion. In preparing us for what's next give us information explaining certain things. Understanding the reasoning behind what we're expected to do helps since we are logical reasoners. For example, why would someone want to stop a video game to take a bath? I explained to my son the necessary facts of why it makes sense, time of day (time to get ready for bed), stinkyness, and you can insert that they can play for 10 minutes after getting ready for bed. Please remember though that once you do this if they refuse it's a behavior issue like all kids of not obeying or choosing to do the right thing and it becomes a normal consequence moment. Allow us adequate time to move to the next activity and give the opportunity to complete the current task if possible. Ask us if we feel we have enough time to finish what we feel we need to do. Giving enough time to finish eases transitioning moments.

In giving us the time to prepare to end an activity and transfer to a new one using a timer worked for me and my son. It was a visual aid to teach how long 5 minutes felt and how much time was left before the transition. A timer can also help to keep us on task for projects we don't like because we can see it has an ending. Time is an abstract concept that is difficult for some autistic people to grasp, one of the most challenging, and is also a culprit of disorienting us on how long time is. This is sometimes the basis of our behaviors and an autistic meltdown. To counteract disorientation of time you can create a physical time duration map to show the passing of the length of time. Both my son and I had trouble learning time. Digital clocks were better for us. People don't realize it, but I didn't grasp a regular clock until I was an adult. I always thought I was stupid and dumb because no matter how hard I tried for some reason I just never had the light bulb go off. My son didn't get it until his junior year of high school. No one has explained to me why it was so hard. I just know that I had to memorize in pictures the concepts of what 15 minutes before or after a number looked like, what half past meant and looked like, and although it may not bother you, but on regular non digitalized clocks you can never know exactly what time it is down to the minute because for example the numbers between 4 and 5 are missing. I could never get that the numbers 22 or 23 are in between 4 and 5 or that 4 is also the number 20 like why can't it just say that. Maybe that sounds dumb to you, but it was a huge problem area for me. Digital clocks are exact and leave out the guessing game. I like them better. I remember feeling like an idiot or having to ask people verbally what time it was because I couldn't tell by looking at the clock on the wall. I would pretend I never saw it.

One thing I used to do with my kids at home and I had a teacher do this at school for them too was to sing a transition song. When it begins the individual begins mentally transitioning followed by a physical action thus shifting to the next thing that is expected of them. My son loved music and even though he didn't speak or sing the words of the song he would pick up things to put them away and dance and move his little body back and forth while others were singing it. When the song was done the transition is to be complete. It made transitioning more fun because he loved music. The easiest one I remember was called the "Clean Up" song. (Sing it.) Clean up, clean up everybody everywhere. Clean up, clean up everybody do their share. Clap, Clap Now it's time to clean up. Clap, Clap now it's time to clean up. We had a lot of fun, but now that we're done. Clap, Clap Now it's time to clean up.

Now it's time to clean up. Girls and Boys let's put away the toys. Now it's time to clean up. Also with this example letting them know that when they finish sometimes it's mixed with a preferred next task like if at home a Spiderman video or at school recess.

Visual step pictures or photo cues show what's expected and helps alleviate anxiety and meltdowns. It reassures not only about what is going to happen, but it helps satisfy the need for predictability by outlining what to do next. We find it comforting to do the same things in the same sequence. It feels kind of empowering to look at it and feel proud when we're doing things all by ourselves. It makes us not embarrassed either to not be able to remember everything all the time which can cause us stress too when we mess something up. In my home with my kids we had these everywhere...in the bathroom, bedroom, laundry room, kitchen, and at the front door (making sure we had everything to walk outside).

Cues and prompts are a great help too. Saying things like, "The game is almost over. Just a few more spaces." Or for drying the dishes "there are only 5 more plates and then we are done". It's good to let it be known when the activity begins, how long the activity will last. You can show it on a clock, set a timer, give a five minute warning, or with video games establish a certain level of when they're done. You can say, "When the timer rings we will then do...(dot, dot, dot). "We are leaving in 10 minutes and you need to grab what you are bringing to the park."

Something I always did for my kids was before the school year started we would go to each classroom they were to be in, meet each teacher, see where they were to sit, give them expectation lists of what was expected during their day and the order of how things were going to go. This would alleviate a lot of behaviors as they would transition into a new schedule. It gave confidence and alleviated lots of stress issues that cause behavioral outbursts and conflicts within the school day.

During hard activities to transition to because of dislikes of subject or activity you can remind them that during break time they can play a computer game they like or let them know when they can return to the activity they don't want to leave or what will be happening after the thing they dislike. Planning a desirable activity after an undesirable one can give incentive to get through the more difficult activities.

It's important to me to make sure you understand that even kids who are nonverbal or of only a few words and also at the stages of what I view as more severe in their current autism journey can be talked to and present with all these concepts I am talking about and incorporated into their daily lives. I speak from personal experience of myself, my kids, and other autistics I've been around. Just because we have trouble speaking doesn't mean that we don't understand or we're unreachable or unteachable.

Sometimes I've heard people say to avoid surprises in an autistic person's day because of transition and behavioral issues not a part of their routine. I actually believe that is not a good thing to think. An individual needs to learn that life is not about being repetitive or the same every day. Surprises are sometimes a good thing and another important life skill is to expect things will sometimes happen out of the norm so when it does happen you can, will, and have prepared yourself to handle it most appropriately. You can actually practice changes in a routine which will happen like the car breaks down, you ran out of your favorite daily snack, or you have a substitute teacher. For instance, adding a sign for a change in a routine such as a lightning bolt to represent a sudden change happening is actually a really helpful transition step to be included for the unexpected transitions skills needed. In school it can be used for small changes like they will work with Ms. Garcia instead of Mr. Mitchell for math today. I have come to learn and so have my kids that surprises can result in huge blessings like my most recent one was when my daughter found out she was pregnant with my grandson who was born last week.

So I've talked about kids a lot but what about teenagers and adults like myself. A teenager needs to learn to transition into the adult world which is so overwhelming you feel sometimes like you don't want to face it because it's too much to handle all that's thrown at you. We have to learn daily living, life, social, college, job, and self-help skills to brave the real world. Teenagers and adults sometimes have difficulty securing and maintaining employment. Some skills take a life time to master and some we will always struggle with. Steffen is currently working at Home Depot, but transitions are a part of his work schedule. I will mention that his disabilities and behaviors got him fired from Fred Meyer, Subway, and Sam's Club before he started working at Home Depot. He has learned a lot the hard way and has taken those things to his current position. He gets to work early and prepares himself in his mind in his way. Home Depot allows him to practice his Tai Chi exercises in the break room which he insists that he can't handle working without them. He says it helps him to transition into handling things on the job. Recently the job had a work party and instead of participating in the activities and socializing he got overwhelmed and hid in the break room to do his exercises so he could handle being there until I arrived to pick him up. They seem to be very understanding and I just keep my fingers crossed and pray that this is the job he learns to be successful at. With my experiences I've never held down a job very long. I've never figured out how to transition to be successful in the job market, found an employer who wanted to work with me, or mastered the skills needed to handle holding down jobs and everything else that is required of me to do. However those experiences allowed me to be who I am today and do what I love doing. I'm always continuing to learn how to transition and handle all the things currently in my life. Some days I fail miserably. You may find this funny, but it was a serious issue in my life so make sure you teach all transition type skills. Everyone said in school you had to use a pencil to write and you couldn't use pens. So when I transitioned out of high school people failed to tell me it was ok to use pens and as an adult you couldn't use pencils anymore. When I wrote my first rent check I wrote it in pencil not having a clue that a pencil meant it was invalid and unacceptable. No one said anything to me for a long time. We also have to learn how our specific interests related to sustaining what we do with our daily life to be successful. Obsessions when properly directed can lead to successful things. Sometimes we struggle to find a satisfying job or college major that suits our needs and preferences and we need help to find productive ways to incorporate our interests into our future. For instance if someone loves basketball but isn't drafted into the NBA they could work for the local college basketball team. This may sound weird, but when we have a transition plan to actually transition as an adult it helps to relieve the behavioral aspects we feel and the overwhelmness that cause our meltdowns to happen.

One major factor for me was when I was in high school I had been given the understanding that I needed to work hard at getting through things during the day to do the activities I desperately wanted to do like drama, dance, and colorguard. Motivation for transitioning is a powerful thing. I remember melting down too when drama and dance season schedules were out of whack or changed.

As an adult I still use transitioning skills in my daily activities believe it or not. For instance I really struggle with going from one activity to another and have to not go to the next activity until I feel or my brain allows me to move there. Like I need to finish sewing something or sew all aprons for an afternoon in order to clean my dishes. Or I have to clean house fully before attending to my business all day. If I have government meetings or trips and other things on my plate I have to get into the mindset and plan how I can do it all and make lists so I can transition according to times in my day, week, month, and year.

There are several things my son and I use to help us function through all the transitions that happen every day. We use individualize schedules to know what is expected of us that particular day which we go over the night before. I have a day and month planner I utilize all the time to keep me on a basic task for remembering what's at hand to help me prepare any transitional things I need to handle the next activity. I make a checklist of tasks and an activity schedule to complete. Sometimes I check



things off and it helps me to feel more in control of everything I'm supposed to get done. I feel a sense of calmness when I do that and it helps me to avoid the body emotions going haywire a little more. I have an iPad which is my lifeline too to help me make lists and I list everything that I need to do. I write out the individual steps to accomplishing things and moving throughout my day and my life. We've done checklists within a family schedule for trips and flying and listed major events in the day for the family as a whole too and I have to map or draw out where I'm going to feel functional. If I don't I feel out of control, my body and mind get overwhelmed and I can feel the meltdown coming. I have many mini meltdowns too and those who know me or hang around me see quite a few of them. For instance when certain things cause distress like items misplaced or unavailable and tasks left incomplete.

Even now when I recently flew with the Governor's Council to Juneau I had to have my itinerary printed out ahead of time and give me exactly what I'm supposed to and Juneau's expectations at the capitol. I know my limits and had to advocate for someone to meet me at the airport to help me handle the procedures to get on the plane. I feel I can't explain it good enough to help you understand what I go through when I've never done something exactly like it before. I have to get all the information in order to handle things appropriately. I asked them exactly what to expect to ease my mind and even down to the point of what to pack in my suitcase to wear when I was at the capitol. I feel like I annoy or frustrate people by it, but in my heart I just want to be the best I can be. On the trip to the Key Campaign I arrived at the airport to have the fire alarm go off and the airport shut down. I didn't handle that well at all. I had a minor meltdown for missing my flight, not knowing what to do about it so from what I've learned I call Kristin from the Governor Council's office and she walked me through everything to move forward. I feel silly afterwards that I don't handle things better than I do. I don't mean to react that way it just is automatic for me.

For me to fly on a plane takes many transitions and prepping myself for it. Even then there are moments I just lose it and meltdown during flights especially. Those on the plane to the Key Campaign experienced me having a meltdown, but thank the Lord because he put lots of people on the plane that had disabilities or part of disability groups that helped me through it. People think I shouldn't have issues or look at me weird or out of line, but there are some things that I really struggle with and I want to not have those issues, but haven't figured out how to not have them.

Transitions are another word for changes in one's life. One of the major transitions for me throughout my life that is really hard for me to handle when friends and family move from Alaska. I would get close to people at my church, become friends and family with them and then something would happen in their lives like the military sends them away or circumstances call them away from here. I really do not handle certain transitions in life. I want things to stay the same when it comes to people never leaving. I do understand though that God sometimes brings people to different places because he needs them to be there to be a blessing to other people too.

People need to remember that teaching kids with autism is important because they are not unreachable. Transitioning is something that is achievable when understanding whys are explained and individuals obtain understanding of logical reasoning for doing it.

When you're in the midst of challenging situations as a parent it's hard sometimes to remember yesterday's miracles in the midst of today's storm. But please do not give up, but persevere because the outcome is like night and day in the long run.

I want to share some funny and inspirational quotes.

God since I am autistic and made in your image then you are autistic too. Isn't that why you made the planets to spin around and around and around again?

We travel life's journey using a different roadmap.

My son was figuring out one time what costume he wanted to be. I suggested a cute little M & M costume and he said please no mom don't make me be one because I don't want to be eaten. Someone will bite me.

The autistic child forgets to say please. Parents tell them to say the magic word. So they reply abracadabra because please isn't a magic word.

....And inspirational quotes...

Autism is a journey that is challenging and rewarding; complex and lifelong overcoming challenges every day; untapped skills, talent, and potential; invisible and misunderstood. It has pushed me and pulled me, drained me & fueled me; beat me up & strengthened me; hurt me & helped me. It's a part of my growth and I'm thankful.

Autism allows you to be unique; process information in ways some people will never understand and see things in ways others find unimaginable.

Autism is like the Alaskan snowflakes. Each one is unique in its own way, but when it hits the ground it makes quite an impact on everyone around you.

Don't miss out on a blessing just because it's not packaged the way you expected. Look beyond my autism and see me. I can be a blessing if you just take the time to get to know me.

Through my struggles I don't wish to be anyone else because I'm here for a reason to use my testimony to make a difference to everyone I come in contact with. I hope that you've been encouraged. That embarking on my journey so far has brought me to be able to share how far I've come and what's possible for others with autism too. I pray my life gives you a shining light of the joy and peace I have with the struggles, the tears, and the accomplishments. I am so thankful the Lord has used people in my life to help me maximize my potential and open the doors I continually walk through. Thank you for coming to listen to me today. There isn't enough time for all I desire to share. Hopefully though something that I spoke today on touched your heart and makes a difference. Thank you for coming today. I do want to answer any questions you may have. Please don't be afraid to ask me anything. I will help the best way I can.

And one last thing I want to share is I am the founder of an event coming up on Saturday, April 14<sup>th</sup> from 10am-4pm at the Sears Mall. It's the Shining Abilities Craft Fair featuring only crafters/artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It is to showcase our abilities and having the community come out to support us through purchasing our artistry, and awareness of some of things we have to offer our community. There is also some artists who will be speaking/advocating as well as information booths to help assist families and individuals who experience disabilities. I hope to see you all there and spread the word.