

# Kaleidoscope

A MAGAZINE FROM AUTISM SUPPORT GROUP

FINDING CLARITY  
IN CONVERSATION

*The symphony  
of sensory needs*

*A Call to Let Autistic  
Individuals Thrive*



Task Analysis and Chaining





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#### Special Thanks

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to  
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### Behind the Mask

I say I'm doing well, as I wear the mask,  
But beneath, there's a silence I dare not unmask.  
I'm restless, I'm lost, unsure of my way,  
Yet I keep up appearances, day after day.

I don't want to trouble, I don't want to weigh  
On the hearts of the people who brighten my day.  
So, I carry the weight and smile through the pain,  
Hoping that soon, it'll wash away like rain.

I long to be open, to show what's inside,  
But the fear of being seen makes me hide.  
So, I'll keep saying "I'm fine" for a while,  
But is it the truth, or just part of the trial?

Are we really okay when we say that we are?  
Or do we hide our true selves, behind walls from afar?



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# FROM THE EDITOR



## Get Involved: Share Your Voice!

Have a burning question about autism? A personal story that could inspire others? Or perhaps some snapshots capturing special moments? Send them our way!

Your input adds depth and richness to our magazine, creating a space that truly reflects the collective spirit of our community. Don't hesitate—your voice matters, and we can't wait to feature your unique perspectives!

Sent to :  
[magkaleidoscope@gmail.com](mailto:magkaleidoscope@gmail.com)

In this edition, we continue to explore the challenges, triumphs, and nuances of life with autism, bringing you stories that resonate with families, educators, and individuals alike.

One of the most pressing concerns we address is **Managing Constant Screaming in Children with Autism\*** This feature offers practical strategies to help parents and caregivers manage these difficult moments with patience and understanding, while recognizing the underlying sensory or emotional triggers.

We also delve into the importance of communication in **Finding Clarity in Conversation** Communication challenges are common among autistic individuals, but this article explores how thoughtful approaches can help foster meaningful dialogue and connections.

In **Empower Us, Don't Hover: A Call to Let Autistic Individuals Thrive**, we highlight the need for independence and trust in autistic individuals' abilities. This powerful piece calls on society to shift from overprotectiveness to empowerment, allowing autistic people to flourish on their own terms.

Transitions are particularly difficult for many children on the spectrum, and **Supporting School Transitions** offers guidance for parents and educators to make these changes smoother and less stressful, helping children adjust and succeed in new academic environments.

Sleep struggles are another common challenge, and **The Elusive Path to Rest: Navigating Bedtime** provides insight into why bedtime can be difficult and shares tips for creating a calming routine to help autistic children achieve better rest.

Sensory needs are central to many autistic individuals' lives, and in **The Symphony of Sensory Needs**, we explore the complex ways in which sensory inputs are processed differently, offering suggestions on how to create more comfortable, accommodating environments.

We also take a closer look at practical behavioral interventions, like **Task Analysis and Chaining**, a method that breaks down complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps, helping children build skills and confidence in their daily routines.

Finally, our Q&A feature, **Why What How**, returns with expert answers to the community's most frequently asked questions, providing valuable insights into everyday concerns and challenges.

We hope this issue offers both practical support and a sense of solidarity as we continue to learn, grow, and advocate together.

Warm regards,  
 GEORGE



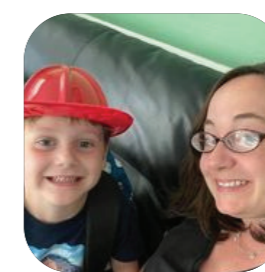
## Contributors

A big thank you to everyone who adds to our magazine! Your stories and thoughts make our community special. We love hearing from you because each story is like a friendly guide for others. Your ideas and experiences help us all connect and understand each other better. So, thank you for being a crucial part of our Autism Support family!

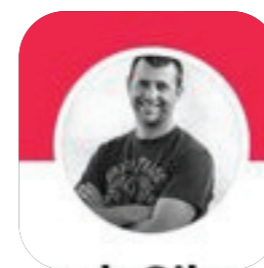
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## Special Thanks



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# EDITORS

Pick



## Autism Spectrum Disorders Linked to Neurotransmitter Switching in the Brain

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) involve mild to severe impairment of social, behavioral and communication abilities. These disorders can significantly impact performance at school, in employment and in other areas of life. However, researchers lack knowledge about how these disorders emerge at early stages of development.

University of California San Diego neurobiologists have found evidence of altered development of the nervous system in mouse models of autism spectrum disorders. They linked environmentally induced forms of ASD to changes in neurotransmitters, the chemical messengers that allow neurons to communicate with each other. They also discovered that manipulating these neurotransmitters at early stages of development can prevent the appearance of autistic-like behaviors.

"In seeking the root causes of autism spectrum disorder behaviors in the brain, we found an early change in neurotransmitters that is a good candidate to be the primary cause," said School of Biological Sciences Professor Nicholas Spitzer of the Department of Neurobiology and Kavli Institute for Brain and Mind. "Getting a handle on the early events that trigger ASD may allow development of new forms of intervention to prevent

the appearance of these behaviors."

ASD diagnoses have been ramping up in recent years, but how these disorders manifest at the critical cellular and molecular levels has not been well understood.

The study's lead author, Assistant Project Scientist Swetha Godavarthi, and colleagues investigated neurotransmitter expression in the medial prefrontal cortex, a brain area often affected in individuals diagnosed with ASD. They tested the hypothesis that changes in the type of neurotransmitter expressed by neurons in the prefrontal cortex could be responsible for a chemical imbalance that causes ASD-like behaviors.

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We found  
an early change in  
neurotransmitters  
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## Progress in infant speech development found

A researcher from The University of Texas at Dallas found that baby sounds in their first year are less random than once thought. Dr. Pumpki Lei Su discovered that babies make three types of sounds in patterns, even alone. This suggests that infants are more active in learning speech, exploring their vocal skills with or without interaction from adults.

One study focused on typically developing babies, while the other looked at infants later diagnosed with autism. Both studies found that babies "play" with sounds, learning what actions create certain noises and repeating them.

Over the past few decades, scientists have realized that early sounds like cooing and babbling are important steps toward speech. Researchers used home recordings from over 300 children to document how babies practice and group different sounds in their first year.

Sounds made by babies are categorized as squeals, growls, or vowel-like noises, based on pitch and frequency. A study using 15,000 recordings from 130 typically developing infants found that 40% of recordings had more squeals, and 39% had more growls than expected by chance.

Clustering was common at all ages, especially after five months. 87% of infants showed at least one instance of significant squeal or growl clustering. This study is the first large-scale investigation of these sound patterns in babies.

A study published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders found that babies later diagnosed with autism explore

sounds during their first year.

According to Dr. Su, regardless of a future autism diagnosis, babies cluster sounds into categories on their own, even without a parent's presence. This shows that babies are active learners, not just passively imitating; they learn and create sounds more spontaneously than previously thought.

Dr. Su received a three-year grant to study how "parentese" (baby talk) affects autistic children. Parentese uses high-pitched, sing-song speech that typically developing children respond to and learn from. Dr. Su wants to see if autistic children find parentese engaging or if it might be too overstimulating for them. This research will explore if parentese helps autistic children learn words better than regular adult speech.

## The importance of early intervention: Valley Haven School's EI director discusses program

VALLEY — The director of the Early Intervention program at Valley Haven School talked about what she and members of the EI team do to help young children and their families who are in need of their assistance. Jennifer Tidwell has been with the school for some 20 years. In 2019 she succeeded Trisha Williams in leading the program. Members of her team include Katherine Smith, developmental specialist; Missy Stewart, physical therapist; Hannah Rivers, occupational therapist, and Emily Woodason, speech therapist.

Valley Haven's Early Intervention is part of the Alabama Early Intervention System (AEIS), a coordinated, family-focused system of resources, support and services for eligible infants and toddlers of up to three years of age who have developmental delays. AEIS is supported by federal, state and private funding sources. It's a system of service delivery that is voluntary on behalf of the family. Even if a child is eligible for the service, the parent must consent to participate in it.

"Early Intervention is a free program to the parents," Tidwell said. "When we are called in, our team will go to your home. We are very family friendly. We do what we can to educate the parent on what they can do to help their child the best way they can. At the age of three, the children we have been helping are transitioned to the local school



system. We assist in that transition." ..... The term developmental delay means that a child is not growing as expected physically and/or mentally. This can include delays in walking, talking, speaking, learning or understanding. In Alabama, a child with a delay of 25 percent or more in one of the five developmental areas (physical, communication, adaptive, cognitive, social or emotional) is eligible for early intervention services. A child is also eligible based on a diagnosed physical or mental condition that is likely to lead to a developmental delay.

There is a six-step pathway to early intervention: (1) referral, (2) service coordination, (3) child and parents rights, (4) evaluation/assessment, (5) an individualized service plan and (6) transition.

The referral stage involves a system of identifying children up to three years of age who could be eligible for EI services. This can be done by contacting Child Find, the lead agency, at 1-800-543-3098. The family will then be contacted by an early intervention service coordinator.

Every family involved in early intervention has a service coordinator. This individual assists and enables a child with a disability and their family to receive services and the rights that are required by early intervention. These rights are clearly explained to the family.

The evaluation/assessment phase determines if the child meets Alabama's eligibility criteria. The parents must give their written consent to participate. If they do, the child's functioning abilities in the five basic areas of development – communication, social or emotional, physical (including vision and hearing), cognitive and adaptive – are reviewed. The process can take up to 45 calendar days of the initial referral. If the child is eligible, the parents are offered a voluntary family assessment.

An individualized service plan is then written. Parents are included on a team that writes this plan. The individualized service

plan team determines the kind of services that are needed to meet the functional and developmentally appropriate outcomes.

Early intervention services include: assistive technology device and service, audiology, family training, counseling and home visits, health services, medical services, nursing services, nutrition, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychological services, service coordination, sign language and coed language services, social work services, special instruction, speech language pathology services, transportation and related costs and vision services.

The transition phase involves the process of moving from services of Early Intervention to preschool. The individualized service plan will be revised to include a written transition plan. The process begins when the child is 27 months old and concludes on the child's third birthday. Families work with the early intervention and preschool staffs to make the change in the child service delivery by the time the child is three.

Tidwell showed members of the club photos of the children the Valley Haven early intervention team had worked with. The photos made clear each child had made significant progress during their time in the program. Parents provided their consent for the photos to be taken.

### Useful Link

<https://today.ucsd.edu/story/autism-spectrum-disorders-linked-to-neurotransmitter-switching-in-the-brain>



# Managing Constant Screaming Children with Autism



medication. Medications like Risperidone (Risperidone) are sometimes prescribed for children with autism to help manage extreme behavioral issues. While it's natural to feel hesitant or guilty about this option, it's important to recognize that medication, like any therapeutic intervention, is a tool. It is not a sign of failure or a lack of patience. For some children, the right medication can provide enough calm to allow other therapies to be more effective. However, this decision should always be made with close consultation with a pediatrician or psychiatrist, who can guide you through potential benefits and risks.

The entire family is affected by these behaviors. Parents and siblings may find themselves adjusting their lives around the child's needs, which can lead to feelings of isolation, frustration, or exhaustion. This is where self-care becomes critical. While it might feel impossible to carve out time for yourself when your child is struggling, doing so can help replenish the energy and patience needed to manage these challenging behaviors. Small breaks, whether that's taking turns with a partner or seeking support from a therapist or respite care, can provide some relief.

For siblings, it's important to ensure they understand what's happening and why their brother or sister may behave differently. Children often mimic the behaviors they see, especially when they notice how much attention it receives. Offering one-on-one time with the sibling, explaining the situation in age-appropriate terms, and showing them how to react positively can help them feel included and reduce mimicking behaviors.

This is not about enduring endless screams and chaos. It's about finding the right balance of support, therapy, and, when necessary, medication, to improve the quality of life for everyone involved. Every child is different, and what works for one may not work for another. As parents and caregivers, you are doing the best you can, and seeking professional help—whether it's therapy, medication, or just advice—is part of that journey toward a more peaceful home.

The first step in addressing this situation is to understand what the child is communicating through their screams. This requires careful observation, noting when these episodes tend to happen and if there are specific triggers. In many cases, transitions—like moving from home to school—can be difficult for children with autism. They may feel anxious or overwhelmed, unable to fully grasp the change, which leads to emotional outbursts. If this is the case, creating a more structured and predictable routine could provide comfort. Using visual aids or preparing the child with simple, clear communication about what's coming next can ease that transition.

Therapies such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) are often used to help children communicate their needs. However, if a child is pointing to objects, rejecting them, and screaming, it could indicate that they are still struggling to express themselves fully. Sometimes, simplifying choices or breaking them down into smaller, more manageable steps can reduce frustration. Working with a speech therapist or behavior therapist can help tailor these tools to fit the child's current abilities and needs.

When these screaming episodes become frequent and disrupt the family's functioning, parents may begin to consider

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*Creating a more structured and predictable routine could provide comfort*  
 ”

When a child is constantly screaming, it can feel like the entire family is caught in an unending storm. These behaviors, especially when they persist throughout the day, often signal that the child is trying to communicate something deeper. It's important to remember that this is not about bad behavior or disobedience; it's about unmet needs or difficulties in expressing what they are feeling. As therapists, we often see that these screams are the tip of the iceberg, reflecting sensory overload, frustration with communication, or internal discomfort.

Courtesy to  
**Anonymous**





# CLARITY IN CONVERSATION

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This approach requires a certain vulnerability

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In the quiet hum of daily life, where the mundane and extraordinary coexist, there lies a challenge few speak of openly, yet many endure in silence. This challenge isn't one of the grand, sweeping struggles of life, but rather one of the subtle, persistent misunderstandings that occur in the simplest of conversations. The words that pass between two people, though spoken with clarity and intention, can sometimes land like stones, heavy and misunderstood, in the minds of those who hear them.

For some, particularly those who navigate the world with a mind that is wired differently, the act of understanding another's words can be fraught with difficulty. The clarity that one person assumes can be a fog to another. The straightforward becomes convoluted, the simple becomes complex. And in this fog, it is easy for the listener to believe that the speaker is not merely unclear but intentionally so.

In the moment of confusion, when the mind struggles to grasp the meaning behind the words, it is natural to feel a swell of frustration. One might instinctively think, "Why can't they just say what they mean?" This thought, while understandable, can be a trap. It places the blame on the speaker, rather than recognizing the possibility that the listener's perspective might simply be different.

So, how does one cope with this? How does one navigate the murky waters of communication, where the

current seems always to be pulling in the wrong direction?

One method, often recommended, is to pause before responding. Take a moment, a breath, and let the initial wave of frustration pass. But this is easier said than done. For many, that pause can feel like holding back a tide, a balloon of anger ready to burst. The frustration doesn't dissipate; it intensifies, growing with each second of silence.

The truth is, while a pause can be helpful, it is not a one-size-fits-all solution. For some, it may simply delay the inevitable outburst of emotion. Instead, it might be more effective to use that pause not as a way to suppress frustration but as a moment to gather the courage to ask for clarification.

This approach requires a certain vulnerability. It requires admitting, even if only to oneself, that

understanding doesn't always come easily. But this admission, far from being a sign of weakness, is a strength. It is the strength to recognize that communication is a two-way street, and that sometimes, the road needs a bit of maintenance.

Yet, even with this strategy, the challenge remains. There will be times when the request for clarification is met with more confusion, or when the conversation simply cannot be paused for a moment of reflection. In these cases, it's important to have other tools at one's disposal.

Some might consider using a physical reminder, like a rubber band on the wrist, to snap themselves out of the frustration. The idea is that the slight sting of the snap will break the cycle of negative thoughts, refocusing the mind. But this method, while it might work for some, is not without its risks. The physical pain, however minor, can reinforce negative emotions, rather than dispelling them.

Instead of focusing on punitive measures, it might be more effective to develop strategies that address the root of the problem. For example, finding small ways to take mental breaks during a conversation can be invaluable. This doesn't mean stepping away physically, which may not always be possible, but rather finding a way to momentarily distance oneself from the intensity of the emotion.

It could be as simple as taking a deep breath, or shifting focus to something

neutral in the environment—a picture on the wall, the pattern of the carpet—before returning to the conversation. These micro-breaks can help diffuse the immediate tension, allowing for a more measured response.

The most effective long-term strategy might be something even simpler: honesty. Being honest with oneself about the difficulty of these interactions is the first step. It's okay to acknowledge that understanding others can be hard, that communication is not always smooth. This self-awareness can lead to a more compassionate approach, both towards oneself and others.

Equally important is being honest with those around you. If you struggle to understand a conversation, it's okay to say so. "I'm having a hard time following; can we take it a bit slower?" This not only gives you the space you need to process the information but also signals to the other person that they may need to adjust their communication style.

This honesty extends to the concept of masking. Many who struggle with

understanding others feel the need to mask their difficulties, to pretend that everything is fine, even when it's not. But masking can be exhausting, draining the mental and emotional energy needed to actually engage with the conversation.

Instead of masking, consider letting your guard down, even just a little. This doesn't mean exposing every vulnerability but rather being open about the need for understanding. Over time, this can create a more supportive environment, where communication becomes a shared effort rather than a solo struggle.

It's important to remember that these strategies are not about finding a single, perfect solution. Rather, they are about building a toolkit, a set of approaches that can be drawn upon as needed. Some days, a pause might be enough. Other days, a request for clarification, a mental break, or an honest admission of difficulty might be required.

And in this process, it's crucial to seek support when needed. A therapist or counselor who understands these challenges can

offer invaluable guidance, helping to refine these strategies and tailor them to your specific needs. They can provide a space to explore these issues in depth, offering both practical advice and emotional support.

In the end, the goal is not to eliminate misunderstandings entirely—an impossible task, given the complexity of human communication—but rather to navigate them with greater ease and less distress. It's about finding ways to make social interactions, however challenging, more manageable, more comfortable, and ultimately, more meaningful.

The journey to understanding, like all journeys, is not without its bumps and detours. But with patience, self-compassion, and the right tools, it is a journey that can be made with confidence. And along the way, the misunderstandings that once seemed insurmountable may become mere stepping stones on the path to clearer, more fulfilling communication.





# Empower Us, Don't Hover: A Call to Let Autistic Individuals Thrive

Dear world

Im writing this letter because theres something important that needs to be said and its something that I hope will reach the hearts of everyone who reads it. As an autistic adult Ive lived through the challenges and triumphs that come with being on the spectrum. And while Ive been fortunate enough to achieve things Im proud of there are some misunderstandings about autism that need to be addressed especially when it comes to how parents and caregivers interact with us.

Let me start by saying that I know parents of autistic children love their kids deeply. youre doing your best and I can see that your actions come from a place of love. you want to protect your children from the difficulties that life can throw at them and I get it. But Im here to tell you that sometimes this well-intentioned protection can turn into something that isnt helpful: helicopter parenting.

we autistic people arent stupid. we may process things differently and we may struggle with certain tasks that others find easy but we are capable of learning growing and becoming independent. when parents do everything for their autistic children it sends a message that we cant handle things on our own. It tells us whether you mean to or not that were not capable of facing the world by ourselves.

But the truth is we need to learn how to do things. It might be harder for us and it might take us longer but its essential that we get the chance to try. If we dont learn these skills were going to face even bigger challenges down the road. The world isnt always going to accommodate us the way you do and we need to be ready for that.

I love that you care so much and I love that you want to make our lives easier. But what we really need is help not helicoptering. we need guidance not someone to do everything for us. we need to be taught step by step how to navigate the world even if its tough. And we need the chance to fail



sometimes because thats how we learn.

Now I want to address a misconception that really bothers me: the idea that autistic people cant learn. thats simply not true. Im living proof of that. I have both a high school diploma and a GED/HiSET diploma. Getting them was a nightmare and felt like climbing a vertical mountain but I did it. And Im not alone. Many autistic people have achieved great things but we had to fight for it and we needed support not coddling.

Before I got the help I needed I was a kid who struggled a lot. I made mistakes and I have regrets—things I wish I could go back and do differently. I

dont want your kids to have the same regrets. I want them to have the chance to learn grow and become the best version of themselves just like I did.

This isnt about being tough on your kids. Its about believing in them even when things are hard. Its about giving them the tools they need to succeed not just in the present but in the future. They need to know that they are capable even when the world tells them otherwise. I know that what Im saying might upset some people and Im sorry if this comes across as harsh. But Im speaking from my own experience from the truth that Ive lived through. I want to see a world where autistic people are empowered where were given the chance to learn and grow even when its difficult.

This page this community should be a place of helping and including not tearing each other down. If you dont agree with what Im saying thats okay. we can discuss it. But lets be kind to each other. Lets remember that were all here to support one another to share our experiences and to help our kids grow into the incredible people theyre meant to be. So to all the parents and caregivers out there: please believe in your kids. Believe that they can learn that they can overcome challenges and that they can thrive. Give them the chance to prove to themselves—and to the world—that they are capable. Because they are. I promise you they are.

Thank you for reading and for being a part of this journey with us.

Sincerely  
An Autistic Adult





## Supporting School Transitions

When children struggle with separation from their parents, particularly in new or challenging environments like school, it's essential to address their anxiety with strategies that build their confidence and sense of security. For your son, who finds comfort in being with you and calming activities at home, replicating that sense of security in the school setting is key.

Start by establishing a consistent routine that mirrors what he is used to at home. Familiar routines can provide a sense of predictability, which helps reduce anxiety. You might try a morning routine that includes a favorite calming activity or item that he can take with him to school. This could be something small like a favorite toy or a piece of clothing that has a comforting texture. These items can serve as a bridge between home and school, providing a tangible connection to the comfort of home.

Consider gradual exposure to the school environment. If possible, extend the time he spends at school in small increments, allowing him to adjust at a pace that feels manageable. During these sessions, it may be helpful to create a predictable pattern of activities that he can learn to expect and look forward to. For example, starting with a quiet activity he enjoys or is familiar with can make the initial moments of separation easier. Collaborate with his teachers to develop a strategy for these sessions. Teachers can play a vital role in helping him transition

by engaging him in activities that capture his interest or by providing extra reassurance and attention during these initial periods. You might also explore the possibility of having the teacher or another trusted adult at school take on a comforting role, similar to how you would comfort him at home. This could involve holding his hand, sitting close to him, or using gentle, encouraging words.

It's important to remember that separation anxiety often stems from a fear of the unknown or a lack of control. Giving him some control over his environment at school can help ease his anxiety. This might involve allowing him to choose a particular activity to start his day or giving him some say in how he spends his time at school, within the structure of the day.

It can also be helpful to practice short separations at home or in other familiar settings. For example, you might leave him with a trusted family member or friend for brief periods, gradually increasing the time apart. This practice can help him build confidence in his ability to cope without you, even in less familiar environments.

Another strategy involves the use of visual supports or social stories that explain what will happen during his time at school and when you will return. These tools can help him understand the sequence of events and reduce his anxiety by making the day more predictable. Social stories can be particularly effective, as they can

be tailored to his specific concerns and help him visualize a successful, calm experience at school.

Positive reinforcement is also crucial. When he successfully manages a session at school, even if it was challenging, recognize his effort and offer praise or a small reward. This reinforcement can help him associate school with positive outcomes, making future sessions less daunting.

If his anxiety persists, it might be worth considering additional support, such as working with a behavioral therapist who can develop a more personalized plan to address his specific needs. Sometimes, having an expert involved can provide both you and your son with new strategies and insights that make the transition smoother.

Ultimately, the goal is to help your son feel secure and capable in the school environment, even when you are not there. By building a bridge between the comfort he feels at home and the experiences he has at school, you can help him gradually develop the confidence and independence he needs to succeed in this new setting. It's a process that takes time, patience, and often a bit of trial and error, but with consistent support and understanding, he can learn to navigate these challenges.

Courtesy to  
**Cooper**

## Managing Potty Training Triggers

Potty training can be challenging, especially when dealing with triggers and sensitive reactions. If your four-year-old child, who is pre-verbal, is showing signs of distress or urgency when hearing the word "potty," it is essential to approach this situation with understanding and practical strategies. This issue is not uncommon and can be managed with a few focused techniques.

First, it is crucial to understand that young children, particularly those who are pre-verbal, may not always respond predictably to new concepts and words. Their reactions can be influenced by a variety of factors, including previous experiences, the tone of voice used, and the context in which a word is used. In your case, your child's reaction to the word "potty" suggests that the word has become a strong trigger. This might be because the word is associated with certain expectations or routines that your child finds overwhelming or confusing.

One practical approach to address this issue is to gradually desensitize your child to the word "potty" in a way that reduces its emotional impact. Start by using alternative words or phrases when discussing bathroom needs. For instance, use terms like "bathroom," "toilet," or "going to the bathroom." The goal is to decrease the association between the word "potty" and the urgency or stress your child experiences. Consistency is key, so ensure that all caregivers and family members use the same alternative phrases.

It might also be helpful to create a more positive association with the bathroom

itself. This can be done through play and exploration. Allow your child to explore the bathroom in a non-threatening way. You can make this time fun by incorporating toys or games that are bathroom-related but not directly associated with potty training. For example, use waterproof toys or engage in activities that involve water but are not focused on using the toilet.

Another effective strategy is to reinforce the behavior you want to see with positive reinforcement. When your child shows interest in using the bathroom or behaves appropriately in relation to bathroom routines, offer praise and rewards. Ensure that these rewards are meaningful to your child. This could be a favorite activity, a small treat, or extra playtime. The aim is to make the experience of using the bathroom pleasant and rewarding, rather than stressful.

It's also beneficial to maintain a routine around bathroom breaks. Children often feel more secure when they know what to expect. Set regular times for bathroom breaks and stick to this schedule as closely as possible. This can help reduce anxiety and create a predictable routine that your child can anticipate.

In cases where a child shows strong reactions or distress, it may also be useful to consult with a behavior analyst or a child psychologist who specializes in early childhood development. They can offer personalized strategies and interventions based on a thorough assessment of your child's behavior and needs. These professionals can provide additional support and guidance in creating an effective potty

training plan that addresses your child's specific challenges.

It is important to remain patient and supportive throughout this process. Potty training is a significant milestone, and each child progresses at their own pace. Be mindful of your child's feelings and reactions, and try to address them in a way that is calm and reassuring. Avoid any form of punishment or negative reinforcement, as this can increase stress and make the process more difficult.

If your child's reaction to the word "potty" continues to be a challenge despite these efforts, consider revisiting your training approach. Sometimes, a brief break from potty training and then reintroducing it after some time can be beneficial. This pause can give your child a chance to reset and approach the task with a fresh perspective.

Remember that every child is unique, and what works for one may not work for another. The key is to remain flexible and responsive to your child's needs, adapting your strategies as necessary to support their progress and well-being.

Overall, addressing the issue with a combination of desensitization, positive reinforcement, and a consistent routine can help alleviate the stress associated with the word "potty" and make the potty training process smoother for both you and your child.

Courtesy to  
**Be Change**



# The Elusive Path to Rest: Navigating Bedtime

The task of putting a child to bed is one that almost every parent faces, but for some, this daily ritual becomes something entirely different—something far more complex and elusive. For your three-year-old autistic son, bedtime is not just the end of the day; it is a moment when his energy seems to ignite rather than settle. As the rest of the world slows down, he speeds up, jumping around the house, stimming, piling objects on himself, humming, and running as if sleep is a distant concept, beyond his grasp. This is not simply a child resisting bedtime. It's an intricate, layered experience where the very notion of winding down becomes foreign.

In moments like these, the typical strategies for managing bedtime feel inadequate. What should be a peaceful routine transforms into something closer to chaos. Yet it's not chaos in his world. For him, this hyperactivity, the stimming, the repetitive movements, are a way of processing his environment. These behaviors are not acts of defiance or a refusal to sleep, but rather a means of negotiating the overload of sensory input that has accumulated throughout the day. To the outside observer, it might look like restlessness or an inability to sit still, but these movements are his language, his way of making sense of a world that often doesn't seem to fit.

As a parent, your first instinct is often to try to impose some form of order on this disorder. The logic is simple: if a structured routine can calm other children, surely it can calm your child too. So you start to put that routine into place. Every night, the lights are dimmed at the same time, the noise is reduced, and you introduce comforting rituals—perhaps a favorite stuffed animal, a blanket, a soothing lullaby. The expectation is that these gentle signals will help guide him toward sleep. But instead, you may find that the quieter the world becomes, the louder his need for movement and stimming grows.

This contrast between what you expect and what actually happens can feel bewildering. You've done everything right, but your child is still racing around the house, humming to himself, piling up objects as if building some kind of fortress against the night. The usual tricks don't seem to work because he is operating on a different wavelength. His stimming isn't an obstacle to sleep—it's a vital part of how he copes with the transition from the day to the night. When he jumps, hums, and piles things onto himself, he's not avoiding rest; he's finding his way through the sensory maze that his mind and body navigate each day.

Understanding this shift in perspective can change how you approach bedtime. Instead of seeing his stimming as something to be stopped, it can become something to be included, even embraced. His need to jump or hum or organize his surroundings doesn't have to be in conflict with the bedtime routine; in fact, it can be part of that routine. Giving him the space to engage in these behaviors in a structured way may help ease the transition rather than exacerbate it.

This brings us to the idea of consistency. It's easy to imagine that consistency means following a set plan, a rigid structure that must be adhered to for it to work. But in the case of your son, consistency might look different. It could mean allowing for a period of stimming as part of the routine. Instead of trying to rush him into bed, you can build in time for jumping on a soft surface, playing with a familiar toy, or creating a space where he can pile objects without it feeling disruptive. These moments of movement and self-regulation can become stepping stones toward sleep, rather than hurdles to overcome.

However, even as you adjust the routine to accommodate his needs, the process will likely remain unpredictable. There will be nights when sleep seems to come more easily, and others when no amount of structure or patience seems to work. The frustration that comes with this inconsistency is real, but it's important to remember that progress in these situations is often non-linear. Some nights will feel like small victories, while others will seem like setbacks, but over time, you may find that the overall trajectory is one of gradual improvement.

Incorporating visual schedules can also offer some clarity. For many autistic children, the visual representation of what's coming next can help reduce anxiety. A simple chart with

pictures of brushing teeth, putting on pajamas, and lying in bed can serve as a roadmap for the evening. This visual aid doesn't have to be complex. A few basic symbols can help your child understand the sequence of events without feeling overwhelmed by verbal instructions. But even this, like everything else, is not a guaranteed solution. It might help some nights and not others, depending on how your child is processing the day's sensory input.

The critical thing to remember here is patience—though patience itself can feel like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it's the most valuable tool you have; on the other, it's a reminder of how little control you have over the situation. You can set up the perfect environment, follow the ideal routine, and still find yourself watching as your child moves through his nightly rituals, seemingly

miles away from sleep. Patience tells you to wait, to let him work through his stimming and sensory overload, but it also forces you to confront the fact that this process is not something you can fully control.

The idea of control—or the lack of it—becomes central to your experience as a parent in these moments. You can't make your son fall asleep. You can't switch off his energy like flipping a light switch. All you can do is create an environment that supports his needs and be there with him as he moves through his own process. The more you try to rush or force him into bed, the more resistance you might encounter. The calmer you remain, the more space you give him to settle in his own way, the more likely it is that he will eventually find his way to sleep.

And sleep will come. It may take longer than you'd like, and the route there may be

winding and filled with unexpected detours, but it will come. When it does, it won't feel like a victory in the traditional sense. There won't be a moment where you can say, "I've figured it out." Instead, it will feel like a small reprieve, a quiet end to a long day, where your son's energy finally winds down, not because you've found the perfect method, but because his body has reached its own natural conclusion.

In the end, the bedtime routine with your son is not a battle to be won but a journey to be taken night after night. Some nights will be easier than others, and over time, you will learn to adapt, to adjust, and to accept that this process is as much about his unique way of experiencing the world as it is about sleep itself. There's no magic formula, no one-size-fits-all approach, only the ongoing effort to understand and support him as he navigates his own path toward rest.



Courtesy to  
Anna



# The Symphony of Sensory Needs

“Gradually, Max began to find his footing. The visual schedules became familiar landmarks”



In the quiet corridors of my classroom, I wrestled with a challenge both delicate and profound—a struggle that twisted through my days with the quiet intensity of a muted symphony. I had a new pupil, Max, whose presence in my classroom painted my days with a vibrant yet challenging hue. He was a boy of seven, sharp as a tack, with eyes that seemed to dance with an inner light. But Max had a particular sensitivity, a penchant for silence amidst the clamor, and an aversion to music that echoed through our lessons with a subtle but relentless insistence.

The soundtrack of our classroom—a series of carefully chosen melodies intended to foster engagement and ease transitions—was like a discordant note to Max. He would wince, his small frame visibly recoiling at the faintest sound. The music, meant to soothe, became a source of discomfort, a dissonance that shattered his tranquility. And the headphones, the very instrument designed to contain this disturbance, were met with equal resistance. They were, to Max, a constraint, a barrier rather than a balm.

The journey began with observation. I found myself attuned to Max's reactions, each twitch and tremor, each flicker of unease. I observed his interactions with the environment and the ways in which he navigated the sensory world around him. It was a delicate dance, a choreography of sensitivity and discomfort. The loud, brash notes of our musical interventions clashed with his inner harmony, a cacophony to his serene landscape.

In the realm of education, where music and auditory cues often serve as the underpinnings of our methods, I faced a conundrum. How could I maintain the rhythm of our classroom without disturbing Max's fragile equilibrium? The answer lay not in the volume or absence of sound but in the presence of understanding.

Visual schedules emerged as my primary tool, a silent orchestra of pictures and symbols that spoke to Max without disturbing his peace. Each transition, each change in the flow of our day, was signaled through a visual cue—a chart, a picture, a sequence of symbols. These became the gentle harbingers of change, their silence a comfort rather than a disturbance.

The classroom was also transformed into a haven of sensory respite. A corner was

dedicated to Max—a quiet enclave furnished with soft textures and subdued lighting, where he could retreat when the outside world became too overwhelming. It was not merely a space but a sanctuary, a place where Max could recalibrate his senses and regain his composure. Here, he could engage with tactile toys, stress balls, and calming textures, each item a thread in the fabric of his sensory respite.

Collaboration with Max's parents was an indispensable facet of this endeavor. Through our dialogues, I glimpsed into his world beyond the classroom walls, understanding the nuances of his sensory experiences at home. We discussed his reactions to different sounds, the ways he found solace, and the strategies that resonated with him. This partnership was not just an exchange of information but a shared journey toward creating a conducive learning environment for Max.

Technology also played its part, a modern aid to sensory management. Apps designed for calming and controlling sensory inputs were introduced, giving Max a degree of autonomy over his sensory experiences. These tools, while contemporary, were integral in allowing him to navigate his world with a measure of control and comfort.

Yet, despite these efforts, there were days when Max's sensitivity rendered our best-laid plans insufficient. On such days, I found myself improvising, experimenting with different auditory stimuli—soft instrumental music, nature sounds—hoping to find a balance that would be less intrusive. Each experiment was a step in a delicate ballet of trial and error, a dance to find harmony in an otherwise discordant experience.



Gradually, Max began to find his footing. The visual schedules became familiar landmarks, the sensory breaks a welcome reprieve. The quiet corner became a sanctuary rather than an escape, a place where he could find solace and re-engage with the classroom. His journey was not without its bumps, but each stride forward was a testament to the evolving harmony between his needs and our classroom practices.

In recounting this experience, I am reminded of the profound truth that underlies special education: it is not merely a field of techniques and strategies but a realm of understanding and adaptation. The classroom becomes a living entity, a mosaic of needs and responses, where each child's unique sensory landscape must be navigated with empathy and ingenuity.

My experience with Max is but a single chapter in the ongoing narrative of special education. It speaks to the essence of our work—not the rigid application of methods but the fluid, responsive adaptation to the ever-changing needs of our students. It is a testament to the belief that every challenge holds within it the seeds of a deeper understanding and that every adaptation, no matter how small, contributes to the creation of a more inclusive and responsive educational environment.

Courtesy to  
Sheela Mayi



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# TASK ANALYSIS AND CHAINING



**T**ask analysis and chaining are two fundamental methods within Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) that are highly effective in teaching complex skills to individuals, particularly those with developmental disabilities. These methods are grounded in the principles of behavior analysis, which emphasize breaking down tasks into manageable steps and systematically teaching each step to promote skill acquisition and independence.

Task analysis and chaining are essential tools for educators, therapists, and caregivers. They allow for the systematic teaching of complex behaviors by focusing on each individual component of the task, ensuring that learners can master each part before moving on to the next. This approach not only promotes successful skill acquisition but also enhances the learner's confidence and motivation by providing clear, achievable steps toward a goal.

### Understanding Task Analysis

Task analysis is the process of breaking down a complex skill or behavior into smaller, more manageable steps. The goal is to identify all the necessary components of a task and to teach each component systematically. This method is particularly useful for teaching skills that involve multiple steps, such as personal hygiene routines, academic tasks, or social interactions.

To conduct a task analysis, the first step is to observe the task being performed, either by the teacher, therapist, or a competent individual. This observation helps in identifying the sequence of steps required to complete the task. Each step is then listed in the order it should be performed. The level of detail in the task analysis depends on the learner's abilities; some learners may require very detailed steps, while others may benefit from a more general outline.

For example, consider the task of brushing teeth. A task analysis for this activity

might include steps such as picking up the toothbrush, applying toothpaste, turning on the water, brushing each section of the mouth, rinsing the mouth, and cleaning the toothbrush. Each of these steps is taught separately, allowing the learner to master one part of the task before moving on to the next.

Task analysis is not only useful for teaching new skills but also for identifying areas where a learner might be struggling with a particular task. By breaking down the task into smaller steps, it becomes easier to pinpoint the specific step or steps where the learner is having difficulty. This allows for targeted intervention and support, which can lead to more effective teaching and faster skill acquisition.

### Chaining as a Teaching Method

Once a task has been analyzed and broken down into individual steps, the next step is to teach these steps in sequence, a process known as chaining. Chaining involves teaching the learner to perform each step of the task in order, with the goal of eventually linking all the steps together into a complete, independent skill.

There are different types of chaining methods, each with its own approach to teaching the steps of a task. Forward chaining involves teaching the first step of the task first, then gradually adding subsequent steps as the learner masters each one. In contrast, backward chaining starts with the last step of the task and works backward, teaching each preceding step until the learner can perform the entire task independently. Total task chaining involves teaching all the steps of the task at once, with the learner practicing the entire sequence each time.

Forward chaining is particularly effective for learners who benefit from starting with the first step of a task and gradually building on their knowledge as they move through the sequence. This method allows the learner to experience success early on, which can be motivating and encourage further learning. For example, in the task of brushing teeth, forward chaining would involve first teaching the learner to pick up the toothbrush. Once this step is mastered, the next step, applying toothpaste, would be added, and so on, until the entire task is completed.

Backward chaining, on the other hand, is useful for tasks where the last step is particularly rewarding or motivating for the learner. By starting with the final step, the learner can experience immediate success and reinforcement, which can increase motivation to learn the preceding steps. In the case of brushing teeth, backward chaining might involve teaching the learner

to rinse their mouth first. Once this step is mastered, the preceding step of brushing the teeth is taught, and so on, until the entire task is completed.

Total task chaining is often used when the learner is able to perform some of the steps of the task independently but needs support to complete the entire sequence. This method involves teaching all the steps of the task in one session, with the learner practicing the entire sequence each time. The therapist or teacher provides prompts and reinforcement as needed, gradually fading the prompts as the learner becomes more independent.

### Reinforcement in Chaining

Reinforcement plays a crucial role in the chaining process. Each step of the task is followed by reinforcement, which can be in the form of verbal praise, a tangible reward, or any other type of positive reinforcement that is meaningful to the learner. The purpose of reinforcement is to increase the likelihood that the learner will repeat the behavior in the future.

In forward chaining, reinforcement is provided after each step is completed. For example, after the learner picks up the toothbrush, they might receive verbal praise such as "Great job!" or a small reward. As the learner progresses through the sequence, reinforcement is gradually provided for completing multiple steps in a row, until the entire task is performed independently.

In backward chaining, reinforcement is provided after the last step is completed, ensuring that the learner experiences success and reinforcement immediately. For example, after the learner rinses their mouth, they might receive verbal praise or a reward. As the learner masters each preceding

step, reinforcement is gradually provided for completing the entire sequence.

In total task chaining, reinforcement is provided after the entire task is completed. This method is particularly effective for learners who are already able to perform some of the steps independently and need support to complete the entire task. By providing reinforcement after the entire task is completed, the learner is encouraged to practice the entire sequence and gradually becomes more independent.

### Generalization and Maintenance

One of the key goals of task analysis and chaining is to ensure that the skills learned in one context can be generalized to other settings and maintained over time. Generalization refers to the ability of the learner to apply the skills they have learned in different environments, with different people, and under different conditions. Maintenance refers to the learner's ability to retain and continue using the skills over time, even after the initial teaching phase has ended.

To promote generalization, it is important to teach the task in a variety of settings and with different materials. For example, when teaching a learner to brush their teeth, it is important to practice the skill in different bathrooms, using different toothbrushes and toothpaste. This helps the learner to understand that the skill is not limited to one specific context but can be applied in different situations.

To promote maintenance, it is important to continue practicing the skill even after the learner has mastered it. This can be done by incorporating the skill into the learner's daily routine and providing periodic reinforcement to ensure that the behavior continues.

### Summary ...

Task analysis and chaining are essential tools in Applied Behavior Analysis for teaching complex skills and behaviors to individuals with developmental disabilities. By breaking down tasks into manageable steps and systematically teaching each step, educators, therapists, and caregivers can help learners acquire new skills, increase their independence, and improve their quality of life.

The success of these methods depends on careful planning, ongoing assessment, and flexibility in adapting the teaching approach to meet the learner's individual needs. Reinforcement plays a critical role in the learning process, and it is important to ensure that the reinforcement provided is meaningful and motivating for the learner.

Generalization and maintenance are also key considerations, and it is important to teach the skill in a variety of settings and continue practicing the skill to ensure that it is retained and used over time. With careful planning and thoughtful implementation, task analysis and chaining can be powerful tools for promoting skill acquisition and independence in individuals with developmental disabilities.



# Protecting Yourself

## *Navigating Trust and Relationships as an Autistic Person*

**B**uilding and maintaining relationships can be a challenging process for anyone. However, for individuals with autism, these challenges are often magnified due to the unique ways in which they perceive and interact with the world. Trust is a cornerstone of any healthy relationship, but understanding and establishing trust can be particularly difficult for autistic people. This blog post will explore the complexities of trust and relationships from an autistic perspective, offering insights and strategies for navigating these important aspects of life.

Trust is a fundamental part of human relationships. It's the belief that someone will act in your best interest, that they won't harm or deceive you. For many autistic individuals, understanding trust can be complex. This complexity often arises from difficulties in reading social cues, interpreting non-verbal communication, and understanding the intentions of others. Autism often brings with it a heightened sense of honesty and straightforwardness, which can sometimes clash with the nuanced and often indirect ways in which trust is built and maintained in neurotypical relationships.

In the context of autism, relationships can sometimes feel like navigating a maze without a clear map. Autistic individuals may take things at face value, interpreting words and actions literally, which can make it difficult to discern when someone is being dishonest or manipulative. This straightforwardness is a strength in many ways, but it can also make autistic people more vulnerable to being taken advantage of by those who don't have their best interests at heart.

One common issue is the assumption that everyone operates with the same level of honesty and transparency. When this assumption is proven false, it can be deeply hurtful and confusing. The realization that someone you trusted has been deceitful or manipulative can be a difficult pill to swallow, and it often leads to feelings of betrayal and isolation. These experiences can make it harder to trust others in the future, which can in turn make building and maintaining relationships even more challenging.

Understanding trust in the context of autism and relationships requires recognizing these unique challenges and finding ways to navigate them. It's important to remember that while trust is essential, it's also something that can be rebuilt and redefined as you gain more experience and learn to protect yourself better.

### **Building Healthy Relationships**

For autistic individuals, building healthy relationships involves more than just finding people to connect with; it requires developing a set of strategies that can help safeguard against misunderstandings and potential exploitation. One key aspect of this is setting clear





boundaries. Boundaries are the rules that define how you want to be treated and what you are comfortable with in a relationship. For example, you might set boundaries around how often you communicate with someone, what kind of personal information you share, or how much emotional or practical support you're willing to give.

Setting boundaries is not about pushing people away; it's about protecting yourself and ensuring that your relationships are mutually respectful and beneficial. When boundaries are clear, it's easier to identify when someone is crossing them, which can help you take action before a situation becomes harmful. It's also important to communicate these boundaries clearly to others. This might involve having direct conversations about what you need and expect from a relationship, which can sometimes feel uncomfortable but is necessary for maintaining healthy connections.

In autism, relationships often require more explicit communication than might be typical in neurotypical interactions. This can be a strength because it allows for greater clarity and understanding. However, it also requires that both parties are willing to engage in this

level of communication. If someone is unwilling or unable to respect your boundaries or communicate openly, it may be a sign that the relationship is not healthy or sustainable.

Another important strategy is to build a strong support network of people who understand and respect you. This might include family members, close friends, or even members of an autism support group. These are the people you can turn to when you're unsure about a relationship or when you need advice on how to handle a difficult situation. A supportive network can provide a sense of security and help you navigate the complexities of trust and relationships with greater confidence.

### Recognizing Red Flags in Relationships

Autism, relationships, and trust are interconnected, but they also come with challenges that require careful attention. One of the most important skills to develop is the ability to recognize red flags in relationships. Red flags are warning signs that something might be wrong, and they can take many forms. In the context of autism and relationships, these might include someone frequently disregarding your boundaries, being

dishonest or manipulative, or making you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Recognizing red flags is not always easy, especially if you're someone who tends to see the best in others or who struggles with interpreting social cues. However, there are some common signs to watch out for. For example, if someone often makes you feel guilty for not meeting their demands, if they pressure you to share personal information or make decisions you're not comfortable with, or if they consistently downplay your feelings or concerns, these are all potential red flags.

Another red flag to watch for is inconsistency. If someone's words and actions don't match, or if they seem to change their behavior depending on the situation, this could be a sign that they are not being genuine. For example, someone who is kind and supportive one moment but distant or critical the next may be trying to manipulate your emotions. This kind of behavior can be particularly confusing and hurtful, especially for autistic individuals who may take things at face value.

It's important to trust your instincts when it comes to red flags. If something doesn't feel right, it's worth taking a closer look at the relationship and considering whether it's truly healthy for you. Sometimes, this might mean having a difficult conversation with the person involved, or it might mean distancing yourself from the relationship altogether. Remember, your well-being is the most important thing, and it's okay to prioritize it even if it means making tough decisions about who you allow into your life.

### Recovering from Betrayal

Unfortunately, there may be times when, despite your best efforts, you find yourself betrayed by someone you trusted. This can be a deeply painful experience, especially in the context of autism, relationships, and the unique challenges they present. Recovery from betrayal is not easy, but it is possible, and it starts with acknowledging your

feelings and giving yourself permission to grieve the loss of trust.

Betrayal often leaves a deep emotional wound, and it's important to allow yourself time to heal. This might involve talking to a trusted friend or therapist about what happened, journaling your thoughts and feelings, or simply taking some time to reflect on the experience. It's normal to feel a range of emotions, from anger and sadness to confusion and self-doubt. What's most important is that you don't bottle these emotions up but find a healthy way to process them.

As you begin to heal, it can be helpful to focus on what you've learned from the experience. While it's painful, betrayal can also be a powerful teacher. It can help you identify patterns of behavior in others that you may not have noticed before, and it can strengthen your resolve to protect yourself in future relationships. Remember, the fact that someone betrayed your trust is not a reflection of your worth; it's a reflection of their character.

Rebuilding trust after a betrayal can be challenging, but it's not impossible. It's important to take things slow and not rush into new relationships without first establishing a strong foundation of trust and mutual respect. This might mean being more selective about who you allow into your inner circle, or it might mean setting even clearer boundaries to protect yourself. Trust is something that grows over time, and it's okay to take your time to ensure that the people you let into your life are worthy of it.

### Moving Forward with Confidence

Navigating trust and relationships as an autistic person is a journey that comes with its own unique set of challenges. But it's also a journey that can lead to deep, meaningful connections with others when approached with care and intention. By understanding the role of trust in autism and relationships, setting clear boundaries, recognizing red flags, and learning from experiences of betrayal, you can protect yourself and build relationships that are truly supportive and fulfilling.

As you continue on this journey, remember that you are deserving of

relationships that are built on respect, honesty, and mutual care. Trust takes time to build, and it's okay to be cautious and deliberate in your approach. The more you understand yourself and what you need from relationships, the better equipped you will be to find people who genuinely understand and appreciate you.

If you have experiences or thoughts on navigating trust and relationships as an autistic person, we'd love to hear from you. Please feel free to share your comments below and join the

conversation. Your insights could help others who are on the same journey, and together we can build a community of support and understanding.



Additional tip

#### Tips ...

- **Self-advocacy means learning to speak up for your own needs, preferences, and boundaries in relationships.**

It can be empowering to clearly express what you need from others and what behaviors you find acceptable or unacceptable.

To start, try identifying specific situations where you felt uncomfortable or misunderstood in the past. Reflect on what you would have wanted to say or do differently. Then, practice these conversations in a safe environment, such as with a trusted friend or therapist, so that when the situation arises again, you feel more confident in expressing yourself.

Self-advocacy helps you take control of your relationships, making it less likely for others to take advantage of you or misunderstand your intentions. It's a skill that can be developed over time and can significantly improve your interactions with others, helping you build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding.





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*Mrs. Harris, the principal would like to meet with you.*

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I knew something was wrong the moment I stepped into the school. You can always tell, can't you? The way the air thickens, the way conversations stutter to a stop when you walk by. The way the smiles fade just a little too quickly. I could feel it creeping up my spine as I made my way down the hallway, the fluorescent lights buzzing overhead like a swarm of flies. And then, as if to confirm my worst fears, the secretary handed me a note. "Mrs. Harris, the principal would like to meet with you."

My heart sank. I'd been down this road before, too many times to count. It was always the same. Meetings. Polite smiles. More meetings. More polite smiles. But underneath it all, a growing sense that something was about to break.

My son had just started 4K, and we'd been working so hard to get him ready. I'd requested an IEP the minute he stepped foot in the school, knowing that he'd need the extra support. But every time I brought it up, the school sidestepped the issue, dodging my requests like it was some kind of game. It wasn't a game. This was my son's life.

He wasn't fully potty trained, and in the world of 4K, that was the unforgivable sin. They had rules, you see. Rules that said every child had to be able to use the bathroom independently. No exceptions. And my son, with his autism diagnosis and his struggles, didn't fit their neat little mold. He had accidents. Sometimes one or two a day. Sometimes more. And each time, they made sure I knew about it, their voices dripping with that peculiar mix of pity and frustration. As if this was my fault. As if I wasn't doing enough.

The principal's office was as sterile and cold as ever. Pictures of smiling children lined the walls, but none of those kids looked like mine. I could feel the weight of it, pressing down on me, as I sat in the stiff-backed chair across from the principal and the special education coordinator. They wore the same strained smiles they always did. "We've reviewed your request for an IEP," the

principal began, shuffling papers in front of her like she was trying to find the right words. "And after our evaluation, we've determined that he doesn't qualify."

Doesn't qualify. The words echoed in my head, a dull thud that made my stomach churn. "What do you mean, he doesn't qualify?" I asked, trying to keep my voice steady. "He has a medical diagnosis. He has autism. He needs help."

The special education coordinator nodded, her expression practiced, almost robotic. "We understand that he has a medical diagnosis, Mrs. Harris. But a medical diagnosis isn't the same as an educational diagnosis. We only evaluate based on how he's performing in the classroom. And from what we've seen, his issues aren't significantly impacting his ability to learn."

I stared at them, my mind racing. How could they say that? My son was struggling. Struggling to communicate, struggling to keep up with the other kids, struggling with something as basic as using the bathroom. And yet here they were, telling me that none of it mattered. That because he wasn't failing academically, he didn't qualify for the help he so desperately needed.

"He's having accidents," I said, my voice cracking despite my best efforts to stay calm. "He's not fully potty trained, and you're telling me he doesn't need an IEP? How am I supposed to handle that? I've tried everything. Therapy, routines, rewards, punishments. You name it, we've done it."

The principal shifted in her seat, glancing at the clock on the wall. She looked tired. "We understand your concerns, but our policy is clear. All 4K students must be potty trained. There's really no flexibility on that."

"No flexibility?" I repeated, the words bitter on my tongue. "So what am I supposed to do when he has an accident in the middle of the day? Quit my job so I can come here and change him?"

# The Sound of a Door Closing

There was a brief pause, just long enough for me to feel the full weight of their indifference. The special education coordinator shrugged, almost apologetically. "We can't have staff members handling those situations. It's a liability. If he's not fully potty trained, then perhaps 4K just isn't the right fit for him right now."

The right fit. The words sent a cold shiver down my spine. They wanted him gone. It was as simple as that. He didn't fit into their box, so they wanted to shove him out, sweep him under the rug like a problem they didn't have to deal with.

I swallowed hard, trying to hold back the tears that were threatening to spill over. "He's trying," I whispered. "We're trying. I held him back an extra year just to work on potty training, but it's not something that's going to happen overnight. He needs time. He needs help."

The principal sighed, her patience clearly wearing thin. "We understand, Mrs. Harris, but there are other options. Maybe he'd benefit from a more structured environment. There are specialized programs for children with autism, programs that might be better suited to his needs."

Better suited. Another way of saying "someone else's problem." I knew what they were suggesting. They wanted to shuffle him off to some special program, to get him out of their sight so they wouldn't have to deal with the inconvenience of his accidents. They didn't see my son. They didn't see the bright, curious child who loved dinosaurs and could spend hours flipping through picture books, memorizing every detail. They only saw a kid who didn't fit.

I left that meeting feeling like the walls of the world were closing in on me. The air felt thick, suffocating. I walked to my car in a daze, the sound of the principal's voice echoing in my ears, those two words—doesn't qualify—repeating like a cruel joke.

At home, I sat in the dark after putting my son



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*“I couldn’t just sit back and let the school push my son out”*

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to bed. The house was quiet, but my mind was anything but. Every thought was a spiral, a slow, tightening coil of anxiety that twisted and turned, squeezing tighter and tighter until I couldn’t breathe. What if I was failing him? What if I wasn’t doing enough? I thought about all the hours I’d spent researching therapies, all the sleepless nights lying awake wondering how I could help him. But none of it seemed to matter. The school didn’t care. The system didn’t care.

The next day, I called the psychiatrist who had evaluated my son. He had tried to warn me that a medical diagnosis wasn’t enough, that the school would conduct its own evaluation based only on what they saw in the classroom. But I hadn’t wanted to believe it. I thought they would see what I saw, that they would understand. But they hadn’t. And now I was stuck in this nightmare, caught between a system that didn’t care and a child who needed more than I could give him on my own.

I started talking to other parents in my area, parents of kids with autism who had been through the same battles. Some of them had managed to get their children IEPs after months—sometimes years—of fighting. Others had hired advocates, legal experts who could go toe-to-toe with the schools, forcing them to follow the law. But it was expensive, and I wasn’t sure if we could afford it. Still, I couldn’t just sit back and let the school push my son out.

There were days when I felt like I was losing the fight, when the weight of it all pressed down so hard I could barely breathe. But then there were other days—good days—when my son would come home with a smile on his face, excited to show me something he had learned at school. Those days reminded me why I couldn’t give up. Why I wouldn’t give up. No matter how many meetings they dragged me into, no matter how many times they told me he didn’t qualify, I would keep fighting.

Because that’s what you do when you’re a parent. You fight. Even when the system is broken, even when the world seems stacked



against you, you fight. You push back. You keep going, because your child needs you to. And maybe, just maybe, one day, someone will see what you see—a bright, beautiful child who just needs a little help to shine.

Until then, I’ll keep fighting. I’ll navigate the tangled web of bureaucracy and resistance, fueled by the belief that love can forge a path through the darkest corners. The battle is far from over, but every step, every voice raised, every moment of persistence, is a victory in its own right. My son deserves that much, and as long as there’s breath in my lungs, I’ll make sure he gets it.

And so, with every rejection, every cold glance, every bureaucratic barrier, I find a renewed strength. For in each struggle, I see not just an obstacle, but a testament to my resolve—a reminder that while the system may be unforgiving, the love of a parent is boundless. This fight isn’t just about my son’s needs; it’s about proving that love and determination can break through even the most unyielding walls.

**Quick Tip**

When navigating complex systems like schools or medical institutions, documenting every interaction can be incredibly valuable. Keep a detailed record of meetings, phone calls, emails, and decisions, including dates and key points discussed. This documentation can provide evidence of your efforts and help build a stronger case if you need to appeal decisions or seek legal assistance.

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# WHY WHAT HOW

how is it we autism moms get a diagnosis of our littles being on the spectrum they start school. And the schools only tests the educational side of the evaluation there not evaluating the whole circle of the spectrum so they get disqualified for iep ... any ideas on what to do next because I am at a loss

It's a common issue that schools often focus on educational performance rather than a full evaluation of the spectrum when considering an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This can be frustrating for parents who know their child has broader needs that aren't being addressed.

One step you might take is to seek a comprehensive evaluation from a private clinician who specializes in autism spectrum disorders. This evaluation will look at the whole range of the spectrum, not just academic performance. It will provide a detailed report of your child's needs and strengths.

Once you have this comprehensive evaluation, you can bring it to the school to advocate for the services your child needs. You might request a meeting with the school's special education team to discuss the findings and argue for the inclusion of supports and accommodations in the school setting.

Additionally, it can be helpful to connect with local or national autism advocacy organizations. They can provide guidance on navigating the school system, and you might find support groups with other parents who have faced similar challenges.

Remember, persistence and documentation are key. Keep detailed records of all

evaluations, communications with the school, and any evidence of your child's needs and progress. This will strengthen your case when advocating for appropriate educational supports.

**I'm concerned about my child's ongoing symptoms, including choking at night, loss of appetite, lack of weight gain, and unusual stool color. Can you help us understand what could be causing these issues and what further tests or specialists might be needed to address them?**

It sounds like you're going through a really tough time with your child's health and it's completely understandable to be worried. From what you've described, your child's symptoms—choking at night, loss of appetite, lack of weight gain, and changes in stool—do not immediately suggest a link to autism. Autism itself typically involves challenges with communication, social skills, and behavior rather than specific health symptoms like those you mentioned.

It's important to follow up with healthcare professionals to address these health issues. Sometimes symptoms like these can be complex and may require more detailed investigation. You might need to ask for a second opinion or seek out specialists such as a pediatric gastroenterologist or a nutritionist. It's also worth continuing to monitor your child's symptoms closely and keep detailed notes, which can help when discussing the situation with doctors.

Being proactive and persistent in seeking answers is crucial. If you continue to feel that your child's issues are not being addressed adequately, don't hesitate to push for more comprehensive assessments or referrals. Your concern and vigilance are important in ensuring your child gets the care they need.

**What strategies can I use to help my non-verbal 5-year-old son with potty training, especially when he tends to go #2 after bedtime and makes a mess despite wearing zip-up pajamas?**

To support your son with potty training, start by identifying his bathroom habits. Look for patterns, especially around the time he typically goes at night. Encouraging him to use the toilet before bed and setting a consistent bathroom routine throughout the day can help. Using visual aids like picture cards or a bathroom schedule may assist in communicating expectations.

You can also try different clothing options, like pajamas that zip in the back, to prevent him from accessing his diaper. Creating a structured environment by using sensory

elements such as calming sounds, lighting, or water temperature can make the bathroom more comfortable and familiar.

Offering rewards or praise when he uses the toilet, even just for sitting on it initially, can reinforce positive behavior. Introducing a social story that breaks down the bathroom process in a visual and simple way can also support his understanding.

If progress is slow, it's helpful to work with a behavior analyst or occupational therapist who can create a tailored plan for your son. They can guide you through a step-by-step approach, using reinforcement and small goals to build success over time. Patience and consistency are essential, and over time, these strategies can help him develop toileting independence.

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**Autism itself typically involves challenges with communication**  
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**How can parents effectively advocate for their autistic child while ensuring they receive the necessary support and interventions?**

Autism is a complex developmental condition that affects individuals in different ways. Recognizing autism early is crucial because it allows for timely intervention, which can make a significant difference in a child's development. Many people have preconceived ideas about what autism looks like, often based on stereotypes. These stereotypes can make it difficult for certain individuals, particularly girls, teens, and adult women, to receive a proper diagnosis. Autism is often associated with boys, and as a result, the characteristics that are more commonly seen in females can be overlooked. This can leave many individuals struggling without the support they need. Autism is not a one-size-fits-all condition, and it presents differently in everyone. That is why it is called a spectrum. The signs of autism can be subtle, and it is essential for parents and caregivers to trust their instincts if they believe their child might be on the spectrum. It is important to listen to your child and observe their behavior closely. Early signs of autism may include difficulties with social

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interaction, communication challenges, and repetitive behaviors. However, these signs do not always look the same in every child. For instance, a child might avoid eye contact, have difficulty understanding social cues, or become deeply focused on specific interests. They may also have sensory sensitivities, such as being overwhelmed by loud noises or certain textures.

Parents are their child's best advocate, and it is their responsibility to ensure that their child receives the support they need. This can involve advocating for an evaluation or diagnosis, even if others, including professionals, might not initially see the signs. It is important to be informed and persistent. Knowing about autism and understanding the unique ways it can affect your child can help you in advocating for the right kind of help. Early intervention is critical. Research shows that early interventions can improve a child's development, especially in communication, social skills, and behavior. These interventions can include therapies such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and applied behavior analysis (ABA). ABA is a well-established approach that focuses on understanding and improving specific behaviors. It has been shown to be effective in helping children with autism develop important skills. Alongside early intervention, psychiatric care can play an important role in managing some of the challenges that come with autism, such as anxiety or depression. It is important to ensure that your child has access to professionals who understand autism and can provide appropriate care and support.

In addition to professional support, providing your child with a strong support network is crucial. This can include family, friends, teachers, and therapists. Having a community that understands and accepts your child for who they are can make a significant difference in their well-being. It is also essential to teach others about autism. Educating those around you, including family members, educators, and peers, can help create a more supportive environment for your child. When others understand autism and the challenges it can present, they are more likely to be compassionate and accommodating. One of the most important things you can do as a parent is to accept your child for who they are. It is important not to force your child to fit into societal expectations but to understand their unique needs and desires. While it is natural to want your child to fit in, it is crucial to be mindful of their comfort and well-being. Some children with autism may want to fit in, and in those cases, it is important to support them in developing the skills they need to navigate social situations. However, it is also important to recognize that some children may not have the same desire to conform, and that is okay. The goal is not to change who your

child is but to help them thrive in a world that may not always be accommodating to their differences. By advocating for your child, providing them with the support they need, and educating others about autism, you can help create a more inclusive and understanding world.

**How can I ensure that my responses on a diagnostic questionnaire are accurate, especially when my experiences vary depending on different situations?**

It's understandable that the process of getting diagnosed can feel overwhelming, especially when you encounter a questionnaire that seems complex. The kind of questions used in assessments like these are designed to gather a wide range of information about how you perceive and experience the world, but it's not unusual for someone to find them difficult to answer. Often, the questions are framed in a way that asks you to think about your behavior or experiences in general terms, but the reality is that our behaviors and reactions can vary depending on specific situations, environments, or even mood. This can make it tough to know how to respond accurately.

One thing to remember is that the goal of the questionnaire is to provide a broad picture of your experiences. If a question seems ambiguous or could be answered differently depending on the situation, it's perfectly fine to answer it in a way that reflects your most common or typical experience. For example, if a question asks how you usually react in social situations but your reactions depend on who you're with, try to think about what your general pattern or trend is. Are you more likely to feel anxious in most social situations, or does that only happen occasionally? Answer based on the experience that happens most often or the one that feels most significant to you.

If you're worried that you didn't fill out the questionnaire "correctly," it's important to know that these kinds of tools are rarely the only factor in deciding whether you move forward with an assessment. The questionnaire is just one part of a larger process. Clinicians or professionals involved in diagnosing typically use a variety of tools, including interviews, observations, and additional tests, to get a full understanding

of your experiences. Your responses on the questionnaire help guide the next steps, but they're not going to be the sole basis for any final decisions.

If you feel uncertain about specific questions or how you answered them, it can be helpful to bring that up in conversation during your assessment process. Let the professional know that you found some of the questions difficult to answer because of the variability in your experiences. This kind of feedback can give them additional context and help them interpret your responses in a way that makes sense for your situation. It's not uncommon for people to have questions or uncertainties when filling out these forms, and sharing that openly with your assessor will likely improve the process rather than hinder it.

You don't need to worry about getting every answer "right" or perfectly accurate. The purpose of these forms isn't to judge or test you, but to start a conversation and gather information that helps professionals understand your experiences more fully. Try not to second-guess yourself too much. Your honest responses, even if they feel incomplete or uncertain, are still valuable. What matters is that the professionals have a chance to explore your concerns and experiences with you in more detail.

It's also worth noting that assessment processes are usually designed to be flexible and adaptive. If the professional conducting your assessment needs more clarification or additional information, they will likely ask follow-up questions or use other methods to ensure they have an accurate picture. This is part of why an in-person or one-on-one assessment is so valuable—it allows the professional to see beyond the limitations of a paper questionnaire and consider the full context of your responses.

Overall, try to trust in the process and the professionals who will be guiding you through it. They are experienced in working with a range of people and situations, and they understand that no single form or questionnaire can capture everything. As long as you approach the process honestly and with a willingness to share your experiences, you're on the right path.

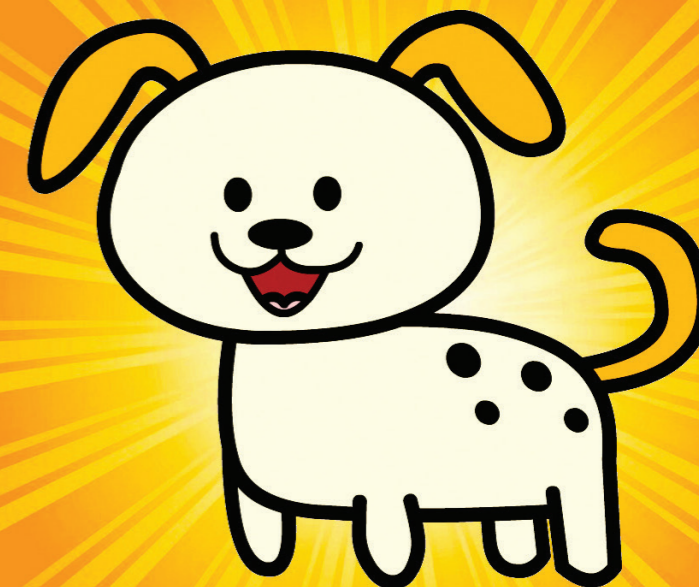
#### FAQ ...

- **How can I ensure my responses on a diagnostic questionnaire are accurate?**

To ensure accuracy, answer questions based on your most common or typical experiences, rather than trying to account for every possible scenario. If a question seems ambiguous, choose the response that best reflects your general pattern of behavior. It's okay if your answers vary depending on the situation; the goal is to provide a broad understanding of your experiences.

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With gratitude,



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# My minds inner conflict and redemption

## *A Journey Toward Self-Mastery*

In the recollection of my youth, there lies a tale not without its share of tribulation, a tale of passions unchecked and emotions misunderstood. I was, as a child, a creature of ungovernable temperament. My mind, prone to wild and untamed impulses, was as a stormy sea—capricious, unpredictable, and perilous. I moved through life with a sense of disarray, my feelings a confusion of extremes, each overwhelming the other, and I, the hapless victim of their whims.

There were times when the tumult of my heart would rise so violently that I could scarce discern the cause of my own despair. It seemed to me then, as it does upon reflection now, that the world itself was bent against me—an unfair and unforgiving place where, despite my sincerest efforts, I found myself at odds with everything. I was bewildered, lost in a world of rules I could not comprehend, and for every misstep, I was met with punishment that seemed, in my youthful mind, both severe and cruel. I was often removed from the company of others, cast aside as if a blemish upon their enjoyment, left to ponder the nature of my misdeeds in confusion and bitter tears.

Such were the early days of my existence, marked by sorrow and an aching sense of isolation. My emotions, like a beast untethered, dictated the course of my life, and I could not fathom how to master them. I saw others move through the world with grace, with ease, and I envied them, though I did not yet understand why.

But time, that most relentless of teachers, marched on, and with it came the faint glimmerings of change. At the age of five-and-twenty, I find myself in possession of a faculty that once seemed far beyond my reach: control. Control over myself, my impulses, my very being. It was not a gift bestowed upon me by the gentle hand of fortune, but a hard-won prize, earned through

years of toil and inner struggle. I became obsessed with the idea of control, not over others, but over the tempestuous nature of my own mind.

I strove, day by day, to master those parts of myself that had once ruled me so mercilessly. My sensitivity to the world, once an affliction so sharp that it caused me great discomfort, I have now tamed. I do not permit myself the indulgence of losing control, not in the slightest degree. To that end, I abstain from drink, from any substance that might dull my senses or impair my judgment. For I have come to believe that a man is only as strong as his ability to govern himself, and I fear, above all, a return to the chaos from whence I came.

Yet, despite this hard-won mastery, there are nights—dark, quiet nights—when the weight of my past presses upon me with a sorrowful intensity. Guilt, that unrelenting specter, visits me in those moments, reminding me of the child I once was, the child who could not be taken to places, who brought discomfort to those around him. The stories I hear of my youth fill me with an ache, for though I know that the boy I was could not have acted otherwise, still the knowledge of the burden I placed upon my family stings.

And there is one person in particular who bears the mark of my gratitude: my grandmother, whose wisdom and patience guided me through those turbulent years. It was she who, with a loving heart, devised a way to help me understand my emotions. She, recognizing the turmoil within me, created a chart of emotions, a simple tool that allowed me to see and name the feelings that so often overpowered me. If I behaved well, she would reward me, and through this system, I learned that there was peace to be found in restraint, in the quiet mastery of one's own heart.

Her kindness was a beacon to me, and through her guidance, I began to see

the world in a different light. Control was no longer an abstract concept but a tangible goal, something that could be achieved through discipline and patience. I learned that when I held my emotions in check, life became smoother, more bearable. And yet, for all the progress I made, the past remains with me, like a shadow that clings to the soles of my feet. It reminds me that I am not so far removed from the child I once was—that boy who struggled so mightily against himself.

I wonder, as I sit here now, whether there are others who share this journey, others who have known the depths of such internal strife. For though I have grown and changed, the memory of my former self remains vivid, a constant companion in the quiet moments of reflection.

In those early years, I was a prisoner of my emotions, but through effort and the loving guidance of those who cared for me, I have emerged into a life of relative peace. But I shall never forget the lessons of my youth, for they are etched into my soul as surely as any scar upon the body. I do not mourn the past, but neither do I escape it. It is a part of me, woven into the fabric of my existence.

And so, I offer this story not merely as a tale of redemption, but as a testament to the endurance of the human spirit. For we are all, in some way, at the mercy of forces we cannot always control. But it is in the act of striving—of seeking mastery over ourselves—that we find meaning, that we find strength.







## Share Your Moments With Us

Dear members of our incredible **Autism Support Group** and cherished readers,

We invite you to be a part of our vibrant gallery! Whether it's heartwarming moments, achievements, or snapshots of daily life, we'd love to showcase the beautiful diversity of our community.

Send your photos to [magkaleidoscope@gmail.com](mailto:magkaleidoscope@gmail.com), and let's create a visual tapestry that celebrates the spirit of togetherness. Your moments matter, and each image contributes to the mosaic of our shared journey.

Thank you for being a vital part of our community!

With warmth,  
**Kaleidoscope**

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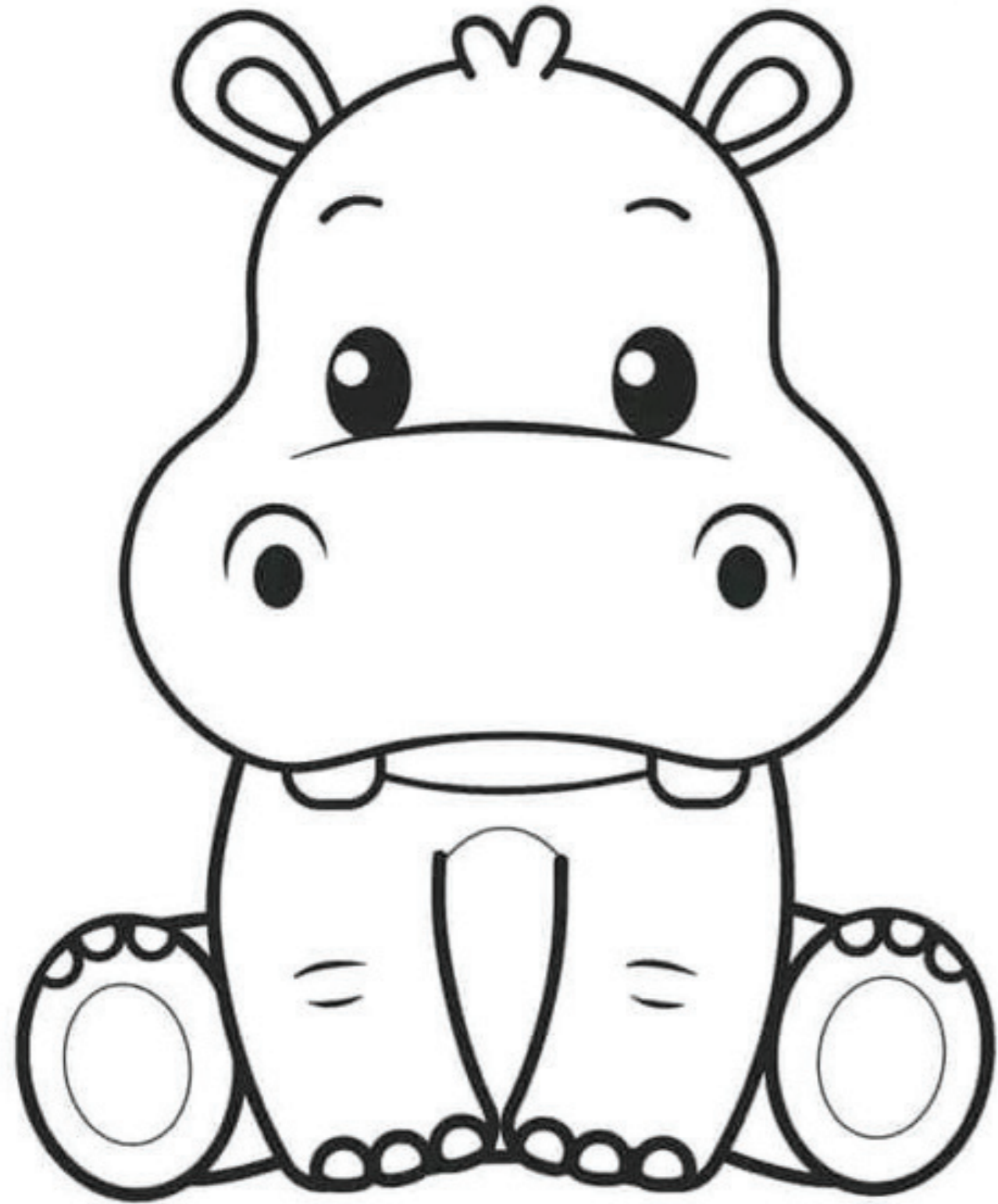
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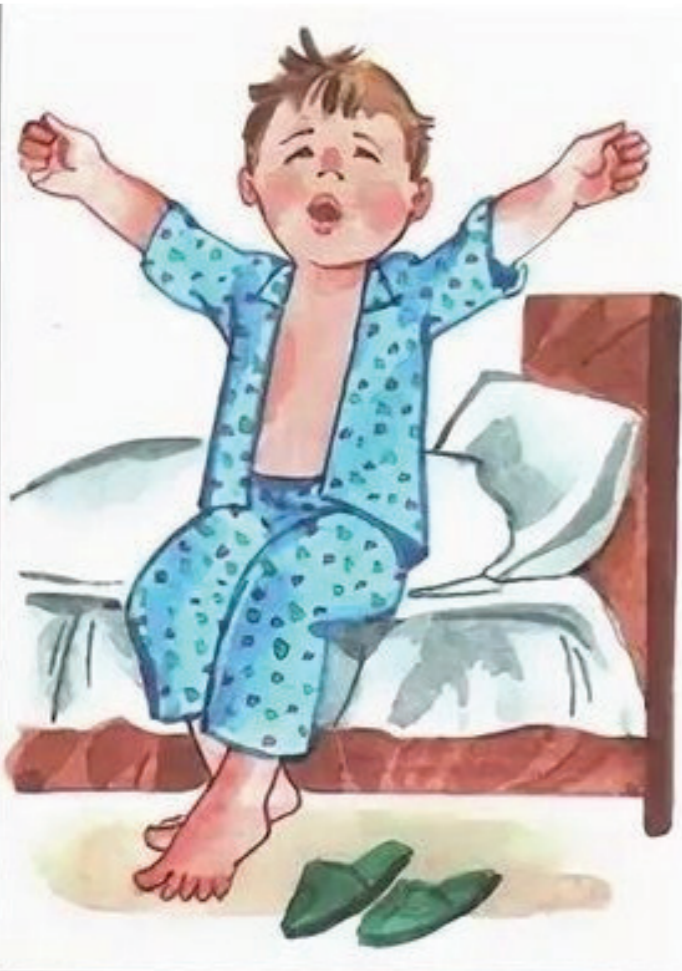
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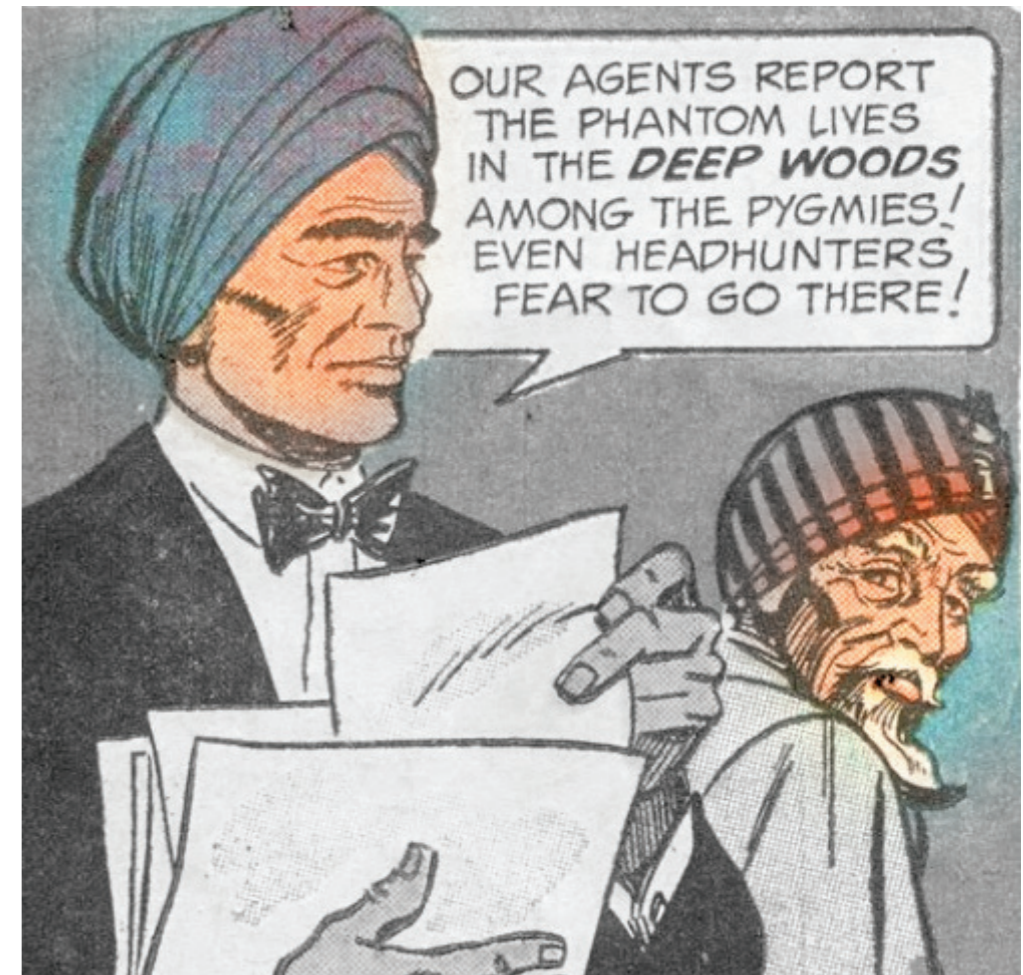
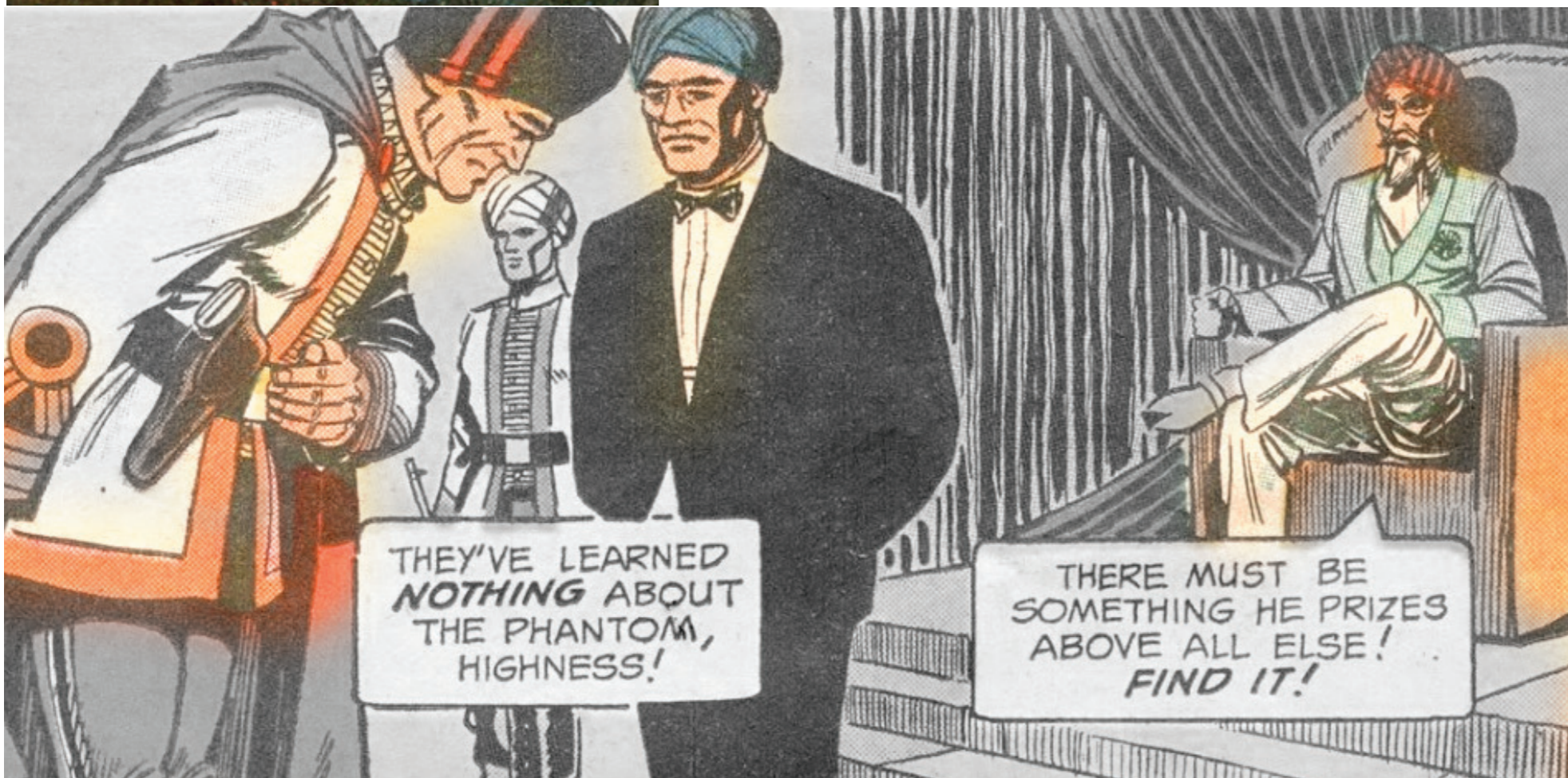
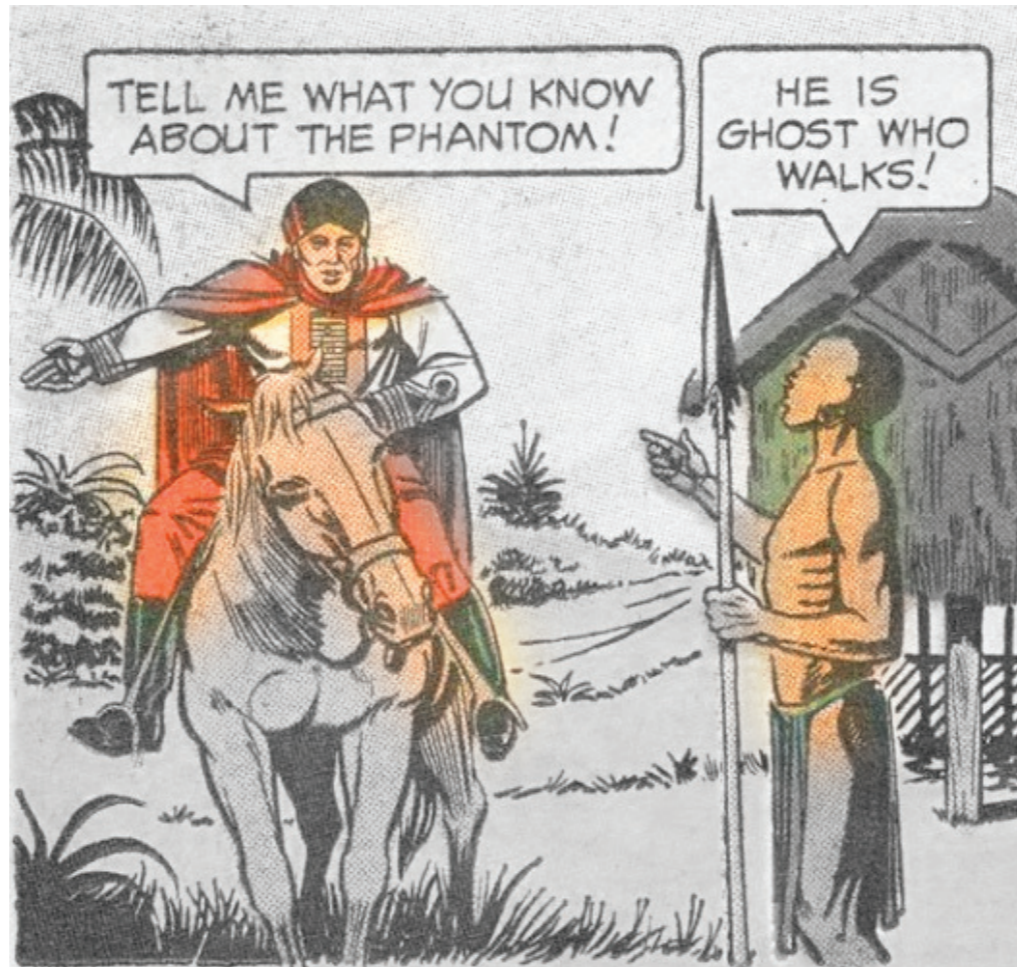
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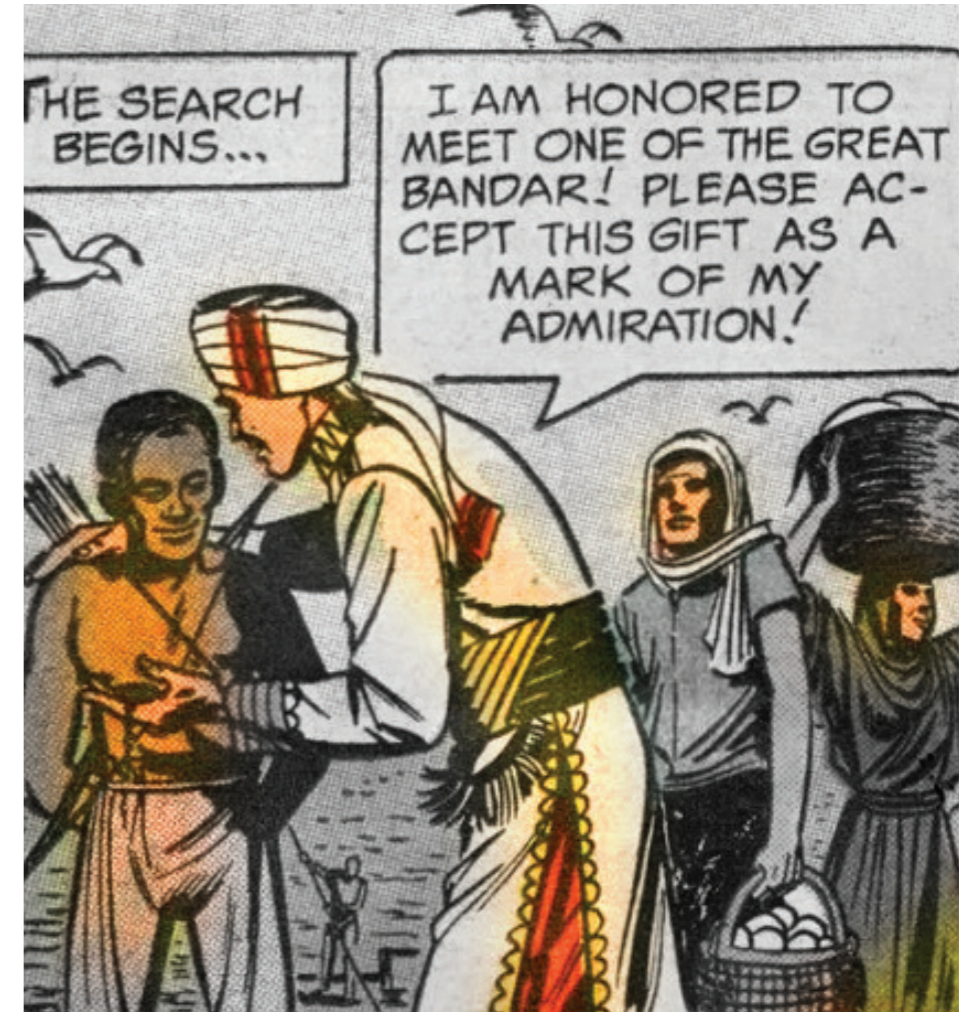
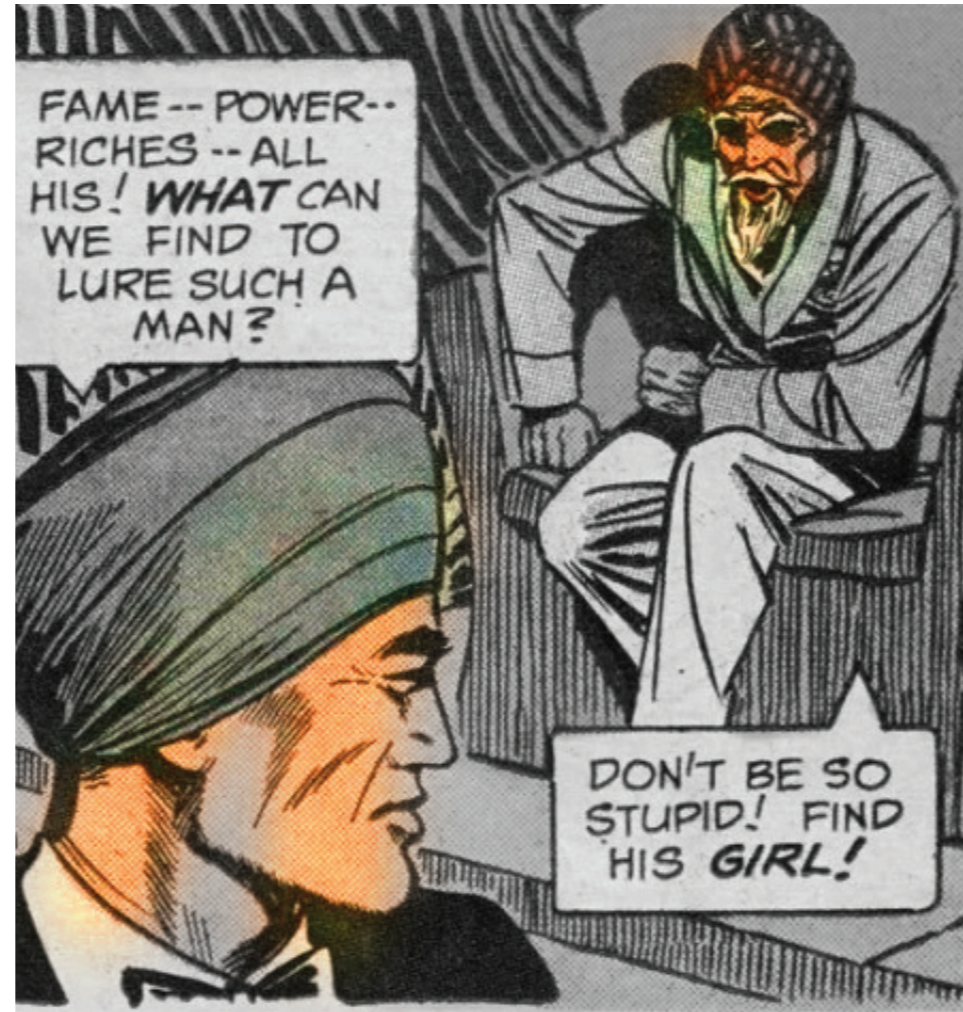














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