



Succeeding in College with Autism or Asperger Syndrome

Ms. Ann Palmer

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Guest Speaker: Ms. Ann Palmer

Chantal: Hello. Welcome to a webinar, sponsored by *Moms Fighting Autism.com*. My name is Chantal Sicile-Kira. I will be your moderator this evening, and my guest is Ann Palmer. Ann Palmer has 13 years' experience working with families of individuals with autism at Division TEACCH and has coordinated a volunteer parent-mentor program

at five TEACCH Centers across the state of North Carolina. Miss Palmer is currently Director of Chapter Relations for the Autism Society of North Carolina, and she coordinates over 40 parent support groups throughout the state. Ann is also the parent of a 27-year-old person, who has been through college, and who is on the autism spectrum. She is also an author of two books and she is going to be speaking to us this evening about **Succeeding in College with Autism or Asperger Syndrome**. Hello, Ann.

Ann Palmer: Good evening, Chantal.

Chantal: Welcome to the webinar.

Ann Palmer: Thank you. I'm very pleased to be here tonight.

Chantal: I should maybe explain to the listeners that we first met-- I think it was in Arizona, a few years ago, at a national conference for the Autism Society of America.

Ann Palmer: That's right.

Chantal: And we were both presenting on our different topics. Mine was on Adolescence and yours was on Succeeding in College. Did you want to mention what the names are of the two books that you have published so far?

Ann Palmer: Sure. I'd be happy to. My first book was *Realizing the College Dream with Autism or Asperger Syndrome: A Parent's Guide to Student Success*, and that one was published in 2005. And since that one came out, I also coauthored a book called *Parenting Across the Autism Spectrum: Unexpected Lessons We've Learned*, and I coauthored that with Maureen Morrell, another parent of an adult son with autism.

Chantal: Can you tell me a little more about that particular book, since we will be talking about the *Succeeding in College with Autism or Asperger Syndrome*?

Ann Palmer: Yes. Thank you. This book, we wrote to try to put together something for parents of-- It could be for any aged child, any functioning level, at any time in their lives. But we primarily wanted to have something that is inspiring and hopeful for parents of newly-diagnosed children. Maureen Morrell is the parent of an adult son with

very severe autism and mental retardation, and he has done very-- He's done very well for himself in his life, though very different from my son, who is on the higher end of the autism spectrum. And what we've put together are sort of the lessons that we've learned over the 30 years of parenting our children, that we wish we had known when they were first diagnosed at the age of three. So just sort of some advice for parents and some of our life experiences, that have helped us over the years and might help these parents of newly-diagnosed children.

Chantal: Well, hindsight is 20/20. Isn't it, Ann?

Ann Palmer: Yes. Definitely.

Chantal: Well, I find it interesting and I think it's really great that two parents with two different types of young adults, or adults on the spectrum, have written that kind of book. Because that's the whole thing about autism, is it is a spectrum and also what works with one person may not necessarily work exactly the same for somebody else. But we still have to pull on the same attitude about having a child or a teenager, or a young adult with autism, that we're helping get ready for the real world.

Ann Palmer: Exactly. Maureen and I met each other at a mother's support group, over 20 years ago. We were both the deer with the headlights, a deer in the headlights look on our faces, when we were first trying to figure out how to help our sons. Even though our sons have different challenges and strengths, a lot of what we were going through as parents (grieving and learning to be better advocates for our kids), a lot of those experiences were very similar and a lot of the emotions that we were going through as parents, over the years, have been very similar. I've learned a great deal from her, from her experiences with her son, even though they were very different from my own with my son. I'm a very big proponent of families, parents helping each other, supporting each other, no matter where their children fall on the autism spectrum. We're really all in this together and we can all learn from each other.

Chantal: Very good points that you make there, Ann. And while we're talking about inspirational stories, I'm not sure how many of our listeners know, out there, that there has been in production for some time, a movie based on the life of Temple Grandin. And it's actually now going to premiere on February 6th, on HBO.

Ann Palmer: That should be a great movie. We're actually some sort of a premiere here in North Carolina, and I'm expected to be there. So I'm really looking forward to that.

Chantal: That's good. Well, I actually am lucky enough to have received a review copy, because I'm going to be writing an article for *The Huffington Post* on the movie. I have to say I was very nervous about watching it because-- First of all, well, we all know who Temple Grandin is. So it's hard to imagine a movie-- You want to make sure all the details are right, when you know somebody that well?

Ann Palmer: Ah-hum.

Chantal: Secondly, she's a good friend of mine, and I thought, "What am I going to do if I don't like the movie? If I don't like the way it's acted out, or it's portrayed?" Because I also have a TV and film background, so I kind of look at things a little bit differently as well. I thought, "I can't lie to Temple if I don't like this movie. What am I going to do?" Especially Temple, because she's so forthright.

Ann Palmer: Right.

Chantal: And you know, she doesn't lie. And so I was so thrilled when I saw the movie. I can't say enough good things about. It's amazing. And Temple had a lot of input into the movie. So it's very inspirational. That's a tip out there to parents. It doesn't matter where your child is on the spectrum. This is a movie to see, for professionals, and even for people who have no interest in autism. It's just a great movie, because it is very inspirational. It's great, about life in general. There's so many lessons to be learned in there, that can be applied to anyone. So enjoy it, when it comes out. When you go to the premiere, Ann.

Ann Palmer: Wonderful. I'll look forward to it. Thank you.

Chantal: Okay. So now to tonight's topic, *Succeeding in College with Autism or Asperger Syndrome*. What was your inspiration behind writing that book?

Ann Palmer: Well...

Chantal: Lead with that thought.

Ann Palmer: When my son was first accepted into college, I suddenly realized, you know, what I didn't know about this transition and what was going to be ahead of him. I looked out in the books and the literature for something that was already written about helping these students transition into college; what they would need to know to do; and especially something from a parent's perspective. Because I was scared to death. And actually, there was nothing, very little available in the literature. Then there weren't that many friends that I had, personal friends, with individuals-- with sons or daughters who had been through that process, that I could go to with my questions. And so I thought, you know, "This is a struggle for me, as a parent. I would love to be able to give something to parents coming behind me, who are also having the same questions and the same worries and need the same information." So that was sort of my inspiration. My son inspired me over the five years he was in college. And I wanted to be able to share some of his success with other parents and hopefully, give them some hope about college and how successful it can be for, for our kids.

Chantal: You basically figured it out while you were helping him, or mentoring him through the process?

Ann Palmer: That's right. You know, I had a couple of people I went to for a little bit of advice. But overall, what I've included in the book covers my experiences as a parent of an elementary school child all the way through high school. What I learned through that process, that he would need at the college level; what things I didn't do for him, that I probably should have helped him with, in his younger years, to prepare for this. Then a lot of the book is actually on his experiences in college and with the experiences, over the years, that I've heard from other parents. I do a lot of work with families. I developed a parent-mentor program, at the TEACCH program, and did that for 14 years. And through that process, I met a lot of parents who had kids who were transitioning to college as well, and so their experiences are also a part of, of what I wrote in the book. But yes. I kind of learned as I went along, about the trails and tribulations and the success, the things that we did that were right. The things-- The mistakes that he made, that we learned from. And I just wanted to share some of that information to other families, so hopefully they could learn from it as well.

Chantal: Yeah. Now, it's interesting, because my son, Jeremy, is finishing high school and he is going to be starting at community college. So I've had to do, also, my own investigation and, of course, your book

has been helpful to me. But for our listeners out there, I think that we need to maybe bring up a little bit about the difference from high school and college, at least in the terms of-- I don't know if your son had an IEP or not. Did he have an IEP?

Ann Palmer: He did. He did. All the way through school, he had an IEP.

Chantal: I think that's one thing that's pretty clear, that parents need to know, is that when your child is in high school and he's under IDEA, they have the rights, the accommodations and the modifications. But when they go on to college, there's a few major differences. I don't know. If you want to bring them up?

Ann Palmer: I'd be happy to. I can talk about some of them and if I leave out something, please add what you're learning through your process. You're right, in that the high school experience is quite different. The law that, the Federal law that protects students in higher education and in the workplace, is the Americans With Disabilities Act, which is there also to protect students, like the IDEA did. But there are no IEP's in college. A student has to qualify academically to get into college. Whereas, in public schools, as you know, they have to serve our children, even if they're struggling, even if they need a lot of help. Legally, they serve our kids with support. The college level, they don't have to serve our children, and they can't modify the curriculum, change it, for the student with any kind of disability, to give them any kind of unfair advantage. So at the college level, it's more about treating that student as an adult, as a self-advocate and not working directly with the parents, which is what we do with our children. All the way through school, we're primarily the main advocate for our kids. But at the college level, they're considered adults and they're treated as such, and parents have very little involvement at the college level and advocating for their son or daughter.

Chantal: Right. Those are the two major points. Is number one, is that there are no modifications, only accommodations, and you have to prove that you need those accommodations and you have to be able to ask for the accommodations. And secondly, it's not the parents that have to be asking. It's the students. And in fact, if the student is 18 or over, the parents have no rights to see any paperwork or anything of that sort. They always deal with the student. Is that not correct, Ann?

Ann Palmer: That's absolutely correct, and that was the biggest adjustment I had as a parent, and I think most parents go through. It's very important for parents to understand this change in our role. And if they do understand it, hopefully that transition can go smoother, because we're really so used to being the behind the scenes person advocating for what our son or daughter needs. We know our children best. But at the college level, they're focusing on independent. They can bring a parent into discussions but only if the student asks for the parent to be involved and actually signs a waiver that allows information to be shared with the parents. It's totally based on the student's request to do that. Any accommodation that I may think my son might need in college, I can't call the Disability Service person and say, "My son needs a note-taker." My son would have to go to that person and say, "I need a note-taker, and this is why." They actually have to ask and tell why they need, and that's very hard for a lot of our students on the autism spectrum to be able to do.

Chantal: And that goes back to knowing sooner, so that you can prepare. Because, first of all, they have to be able to advocate for themselves; and secondly, part of that advocacy means being able to recognize where they need help.

Ann Palmer: Exactly. And that's not always a real easy thing for these students to recognize as well. And I think that's where parents play a vital role, even if we are kind of behind the scenes when our children are in a higher education. We're advising them. We're reminding them. We're pointing out to them where they're struggling. Sometimes they don't actually see where they are-- where they need help. And that's where, I think, parents have a very strong role in trying, in keeping up with how our son or daughter is doing in college and helping advise them about when to ask for help and how to do that.

Chantal: Now, though, wouldn't you say that since the high school is really the transition years, when we're getting our guys ready for real life, is there a way to include self-advocacy as part of the IEP, so that they're learning these skills in preparation for college?

Ann Palmer: I think so. You know, in my opinion, what you're working on, a lot of the time in middle school and high school, are communication skills; asking for help; working in a group. These are all a kind of communication in a personal skill that will help the student be able to ask for help and to communicate with others. The college student, with

any disability, has to be able to communicate with their professor about their needs and their strengths. So this is an important skill to learn and you start it early. You don't wait until the year before they're graduating from high school to work on how to ask for help. I think students in high school can be given certain tasks or things-- goals in their IEP, such as maybe reporting something to an office, to a teacher. Working in-- volunteering in an office on campus, like the library or the guidance office, where they're having to communicate with people; where they're having to follow instructions and ask for things. Any of those kind of skills that you can work on in the high school setting, will help build on those self-advocacy skills in college.

Chantal: Very good points. So what are the most important things that you would tell a parent about getting your child ready for college? I mean, you talked, right now, about the communication skills and the advocacy skills. Are there other things that are....

Ann Palmer: I think it's important. We tend to-- When we have a son or daughter, who has a lot of academic skills, we're so thrilled that our kids do well academically. I understand the pride we have in our student, who can do calculus in middle school. But if they can't go into McDonald's and order their lunch and know if they got the right change back, you've missed something there. So what I would emphasize to parents, don't forget the functional skills, the self-help skills, things that the student will need to do. Whether they go to higher education or not, they're going to need to be able to take care of themselves physically. They're going to need to stay safe in whatever community they're in. They're going to need to communicate their needs and their challenges and ask for help. I would remind parents to put goals in that transition plan related to functional skills, and these can include anything from taking care of their self-help skills or transport-- driving or riding a bus, or taking care of their financial needs, using a debit card. These are things we often aren't thinking about at the IEP meeting in school. These are things often that parents have to do outside of school for their sons and daughters, but they're equally as important, I believe, as the academic skills that these students might need at the college level.

Chantal: Another thing that I hear a lot about, back from parents, is that a lot of times when they get to college, they get lost, in terms of their organizational skills and timelines. Because when you're in high school, you go every day to school. You know, usually you tend to go from (I don't know) 9-3, for example. And you might have different

classes if you're on a block system. But basically there's a schedule. But when you go to college, perhaps you're only taking a couple of class, but it's not always every day the same time that you go to school and that you come back. And the other thing is, there's a lot more independent work and the teachers aren't prompting you to do the work. The person has to be really able to schedule their time when they're studying and looking forward into, "Okay. This project is due on this date. How am I going to divide up the work until then?" What thoughts do you have about that, Ann?

Ann Palmer: Well, I think-- I agree with you totally, that that is definitely an issue. And I think it's very individualized, because all of our sons and daughters are different and may have different kinds of organizational skills or challenges. In my experience, with my own son and with every parent I've ever talked to, all of our children struggle in some way with organizational skills. So I would recommend that you start getting the student learning to use whatever form, a calendar that worked for them. Have them using one in high school that will prepare them for using one in college, whether it's on an electronic device, or whether it's on their computer, or whether it's in an actual physical calendar. But find the organizational strategies that work best for that particular student. Help them organize the papers they get back. The grades, help them figure out a way to charge the grades they're making in classes.

That's one area that my son struggled with in college. He didn't realize when he was flunking a class because he wasn't able to retain the grades he was making over that term. So we came up with a strategy of a notebook, where he put in his grades for every test that was returned, or every paper that returned. That served as sort of a prompt for him about how he was doing in the classes. So calendars are big and important to get used to using early. Because you're right. You're having to organize yourself in much different ways, than you do at the high school level and you have a lot of down time as a college student, between classes. Many assignments are long-term. Professors are not giving you reminders about where you should be in your reading and where you should be on your long-term assignments. So you need to break them down on a calendar to give yourself some targets to work towards, in order to get the material done in the period of time that's required.

Chantal: Very good tips. May I ask what your son is doing now?

Ann Palmer: Well, Eric graduated from college probably-- Let's see. Three years ago, and he is now working full-time at a veterinary school here in North Carolina, the same university he attended. His main interest in life is animals and has always been animals. So he's in a great environment, working with people who also love animals. It's a full-time job with benefits and we're thrilled that he has this job. He's living independently in his own apartment. He still requires support. He doesn't drive, so we transport him to doctor's appointments and the grocery store and things like that. Though he does handle his finances and pays his rent and his bills. He rides a bus to and from work. He is still quite autistic, kind of an odd guy and doesn't have a lot of friends. But he's very happy and he has a very full life. We're thrilled that he's been able to accomplish as much as he has.

Chantal: That's great. What kind of work does he do there? Does he get to interact with animals very much?

Ann Palmer: He does. Some of the day. I wish-- I wish he had a job that was fully working directly with animal care. For the moment, he is working a large part of the day in what's called "a wash room," where the cages that the animals are in, have to come through and be disinfected and cleaned and run through a big machine. Amazingly, as someone on the autism spectrum, he deals with a loud, hot, smelly kind of environment and is able to do this job. Then they also realize he needs to have more one-on-one time with animals, and they pull him out during the day to feed some of the animals they use in the research, to socialize with some of the animals. So he's having a combination of those two jobs right now. I would love for him to move towards the direct animal care part. That may be something he can work towards in future years.

Chantal: It sounds great though. That he has a job like that, with benefits, and they seem to really take him and his needs into consideration.

Ann Palmer: They do. They know he has autism and they've been very welcoming. One thing I have found is that people who care about animals are often very accepting people, of differences of people's strengths and challenges. I think they are very welcoming to him and I'm very thankful for that.

Chantal: That's great. I'm happy that he is there. Okay. Yeah. I'm sure it's a load off your back.

Ann Palmer: Well, you know, I think-- We found this job from a friend of a friend, who knew someone, who worked there, who had hired an individual with a disability before. So I think oftentimes, as we look towards jobs, opportunities for our children, it's often who you know and who might have connections and jobs of interest to our kids. I think we were fortunate, very fortunate to find the right people. That's why it's so important, I think, for families and the student to really network, and to find out who might be out there, who can provide this kind of an opportunity for the student on the autism spectrum. Because I really feel like there are people who would be happy to hire our children because they often make such great employees. It's just a process of opening that door and making the introduction. Usually our kids can do very well.

Chantal: Right. That's true. A good comment. Shall we start with some questions?

Ann Palmer: Sure.

Chantal: Okay. So here's Vicky from Patton, and she asks, "Is it better for the college student to identify themselves as having autism or Asperger Syndrome to the instructors at the beginning of each semester? Or is that dependent upon how the student can handle their individual course load?"

Ann Palmer: I think, the answer to that has to be based on individualized, of course, for each student because they are different. They are all different. I think disclosing may be important, especially in situations where the application for college might not be as strong as you would like. So maybe you would disclose to explain some of the weaknesses in the student's background, before coming to college. However, disclosure is not an all or nothing decision. And I think that's one thing we need to emphasize to our sons and daughters, that they don't have to necessarily disclose to everyone on a college campus. They may only disclose to Disability Service. Or they may only disclose to one professor.

We had a situation with my son, where he was scheduled to take a class called Inner Personal Communication. Well, obviously students on the autism spectrum often have trouble with inner personal communication and I knew this would be a course that would be hard for my son. At that point, up to that point, he had not disclosed to his

professors and this was his second year of college. And we talked about it and talked about how, in this particular situation, it might be beneficial for the professor to understand my son better, and to understand his difficulty that he had with inner personal communications. At that point, my son decided to disclose and he decided to disclose to all of his professors. And that was his choice. I do want to emphasize to the parents, whether or not to disclose is the student's choice. Again, we can advise, but we can't direct them to disclose if they're really against disclosing. It really is their decision and they are actually the only ones, at the college level, who can disclose about their disability. Again, I just think it's a personal situation. You know, everybody's own decision about what they feel comfortable doing. But I personally believe that disclose can only help the student, rather than harm them in any way.

Chantal: Yeah. Well, isn't it Steven Shore that says disclosure is dependent on whether or not your needs are met. So if your needs are not being met and you need something-- For example, if you see some accommodation to be successful at school, then you need to at least disclose to the disability person why you would need such an accommodation.

Ann Palmer: Yes. That's right. And how much you disclose can vary as well. You don't need to give the definition from the DSM-IV of Asperger Syndrome, but you can explain a difficulty you have in communication; or socially, or working with groups. There are different ways of disclosing your needs without giving your whole life history. Then, again, you choose who you disclose to and how much information you give. It doesn't have to be verbal. That's one way-- My son decided to disclose to his professors by a written disclosure and that was much more comfortable for him to be able to describe his personal needs and his learning style. That was much easier for him to hand to a professor, or to email to a professor, rather than going into their office and striking up a conversation about his autism. So there are different ways to do it. I really encourage parents to talk through this issue with their students early. Don't wait until they're in college. It's important that they understand this option and that it can help them, if they need help at the college level.

Chantal: Now, does a professional need to supply a letter or some confirmation, that an accommodation is needed?

Ann Palmer: Yes. And actually, I would recommend that any school that a parent or family is looking at considering, you should talk to the Disability Services office at each of these schools. Many of them will have, on their website, sort of a list of what documentation is required. But in order to receive any accommodation at the college level, the student has to qualify for that accommodation because of a disability. And so there will be some sort of a report that is required, that gives the diagnosis. And whether or not it should be signed by a psychologist, or a medical doctor, or whatever, will depend on the university and what kind of disability it is. So check with the school first, to find out what kind of paperwork is required to disclose to Disability Services.

Chantal: Very good. Thank you for that, Ann.

Ann Palmer: Ah-hum.

Chantal: Here's a question Adelia Hernandez, in Chicago. "How do we research and choose a college for my son with Asperger Syndrome? The city colleges of Chicago do not provide any guidance for students with autism. My son is very high functioning with straight "A's" in high school. I really need some advice as to where I should start."

Ann Palmer: Okay. Well, all colleges should have a Disability Services office, if they receive any kind of Federal funding money, which almost every college does. They have to have Disability Services available to students, at their college campus. The city colleges in Chicago, that she mentions, I'd be surprised that there aren't some sorts of accommodations or Disability Services Office there. Maybe they don't have a lot of experience with autism spectrum disorder students, but they would have some sort of accommodations available. But I would recommend that, again, that the family meets with that office at every school they're considering, and talk to them about what kind of accommodations are possible with the diagnosis that your son or daughter has.

In my book, I actually list a number of questions, possible questions you might want to ask the Disability Services person. Because you're trying to find out, not only what kind of academic accommodations there are but are there any other supports available on the campus? Does the Disability Service person have experience with people and training, about people with autism spectrum disorder?

And I think also, you want to consider a number of things when choosing a college, besides the levels of supports that are available. You want to think about, "Does the student need to go to college close to home? Are they going to commute or are they going to live on campus? If they are going to live on campus, do they need to be in close proximity to home for the support that the family can give them?" They also want to think about the size of the school. Some our students have sensory issues. So going to a very large campus with a very large class size might be difficult for a student who has a lot of sensory issues. So the size of the school may be important for the student. You also want to choose a college that offers a curriculum of interest to that student. You know, they're going to have to take a lot of courses that are required, that may not be around their interests, but you want them to be able to balance those maybe harder courses with courses that they would enjoy and do well in. Then also, like I mentioned, you want to find out what services that college has possible for students with ASD.

Chantal: Right now, I know, from having received emails from people and then looking into it, it really does depend where you are located. It's true that all colleges have some sort of Disability Services, because it's a Federal law. But not all colleges are really used to Asperger's or don't have an understanding. They're more used to the type of disability, where somebody shows up in a wheelchair or with a cane, but not so much with processing difficulties, or perhaps can't handwrite; so they need to actually type everything out; or that need more time processing. And so I've noticed that that's a kind of issue that seems to happen at least the community college level in certain areas. Right now, the way we used to advocate when our kids were younger, we now have to advocate at the college level. Have you been getting feedback sort of like that as well?

Ann Palmer: I have. But one thing I've noticed, I present quite often to the head organization, Association for Higher Education and Disabilities. At those presentations, the audience is primarily Disability Services folks, who work at community colleges and larger universities around the country. What I'm seeing is that the interest in learning more about students with ASD is growing and that these Disability Services person are realizing that they may not be as prepared for these students coming as they would have liked, and they're pretty hungry for information about our kids. So I'm finding that it's changing. That you're right. There are Disability Services people, who are used to working with more of the classically physically disabled students. But there is a trend

that's changing, as we see more and more of our kids being able to go into higher education. These individuals are needing the support through the Disability Services and they're having to adjust their knowledge base. I'm excited about the fact that they're learning more, that they're having more students and hopefully that they're becoming more aware of the needs of students with ASD.

Chantal: That's great. I'm glad to hear it too. Okay. Here's Joanne in San Diego. "I have been looking for a way to assess my daughter for a career. The assessments given are all based on self-evaluation questions, which as you know all too well, self-evaluation is not the best method for those on the spectrum. How do I direct my 20-year-old, who is in college, to take classes that fit her not-yet-discovered career goal? Looking for assessment in San Diego or an online parent assessment for the best field to enter her into. If you have suggestions."

Ann Palmer: Well, that's a very good question actually. I think that too is changing and improving. I think in the past, Vocational Rehabilitation folks, through our school system, their ways of assessing vocational skills and behaviors and needs was not really appropriate all the time for students on the higher end of the autism spectrum. It didn't really get to the needs of these students and the interest of these students. But one of the best assessment tools that I've seen-- And again, everyone has their own opinion about what works well. But one of the best assessment tools, and a more recent one that's come out, is the TTAP (it's the Teach Transition Assessment Profile). And this is a very extensive evaluation assessment, that could be appropriate for students from 5th grade on and through adulthood. And it includes an hour and a half, I think, of direct observation of the student. Then multiple hours of interviews with someone (a caregiver in the home situation, or someone in the work situation or the school situation). So it's not just a self-assessment. They're actually observing. They're testing the student for the different functional, independent functioning. They're the student on leisure skills, on vocational skills, on vocational behavior, functional communication, interpersonal behavior. So they're really looking at the whole piece, in my mind, of some of our strengths and challenges of these students. It gives a much more accurate, I believe, assessment of what's possible for that student and where are their needs, and what should we be working on, to help them achieve those, their goals?

So that's one assessment. Chantal, you may know of something more in the California area. But that is one of the more dominant

assessment tools here in North Carolina, that's used for students with ASD.

Chantal: I'm not that familiar with assessments at the college level. But I will say, for this person who's based in San Diego, that I know an educational psychologist who has worked with students in college. I don't know if this person could be helpful, but she might know of those types of assessments. So I'm going to give my email address now. If Joanne or anyone else who wants that, wants to email me. I'll be happy to send you the contact information for this educational psychologist. Her name is Deborah Plotkin. My email address is my last name without the hyphen and I'm going to spell it for you after I say it. It's SicileKira@mac.com. And that's spelled SicileKira@mac.com. My name, again, is SicileKira, and that's @mac.com. So hopefully-- If this person doesn't have, or isn't able to help, I'm sure she would know where to send people for information about assessments here in San Diego.

Ann Palmer: Great.

Chantal: Okay. This is Marcy in Encinitas. "My son is only in 6th grade, but I am already getting anxious about him being able to graduate from high school and go onto college. We toured my alma mater over the summer and it really sparked his interest. What is the best way for us to start setting the course for him to succeed at this?"

Ann Palmer: Well, my first reaction, before I answer the question is to remind the parent not to be too anxious. That it's very easy to be anxious about the future for our kids, but I want to remind her that our children are lifelong learners and your son is in 6th grade. There are going to be all kinds of skills that your son will develop over the years. So it's impossible, at this point, to really predict what he will be able to accomplish and what the future will hold. You know? It's easy to get worried about our kids' future and I understand. Personally, I did the same thing. I think it's also good to remind ourselves that time will teach him many things and he may develop the skills that you imagine now are impossible.

One thing I would suggest to this parent is to work on those skills in middle school and high school. I mentioned this before, that he's going to need, as an adult, not just the academic. To again, to work on the social, the communication skills, the life skills. Help the student. I think one of the most important things you can do is to help the student accept

and understand their disability, not only their strengths and what they do well, but their challenges and to be able, and feel comfortable, asking for help. I think some of the saddest stories that I hear of, of students going to college and failing, are those students who need assistance but do not want to ask for assistance or help, because they don't want to be singled out in any way. So the most we can do as a parent, to help our sons and daughters feel comfortable with who they are (the good, the bad, the challenges, the strengths), the better they will do at the college level, I believe. And also start putting some goals in the IEP, I think, for this mom. Maybe think about some of those organizational skills they're going to need, that they may not have. Or those communication skills, and puts some goals in the student's IEP to help build on those skills and to help them be a good self-advocate.

I have an article on my website that may be of help to this particular mom. My website is www.annpalmerautism.com. On that website is an article called, *Surviving Middle School with an Included Child with Autism*. That gives us a number of organizational strategies, at the middle school level. That may be appropriate for her son who's now in middle school, I believe.

Chantal: Right. But you're right. You can start some groundwork on things that are going to be needed later on. Because they're life skills regardless of whether they go into college or to work, they need those self-advocacy skills and those communication skills. I think the most important thing too is that they realize their strengths and their deficits. They know that it's okay that they're not perfect. No one's perfect. So they have to recognize-- Everyone has to recognize that we all need help. It doesn't matter whether we're on the spectrum or not. It's great to teach how to ask for help. And another great skill to teach is networking, because Ann was talking about earlier, how that's how we get work. That's a skill that doesn't come naturally to people in the spectrum. And networking starts with learning about how to ask for help.

As they get older and they're living on their own and they have need of a plumber, how do you find a plumber? Well, do you just look in the Yellow Pages or do you remember that, "Oh, you saw a plumber's truck at your neighbor's down the street. Well, you're going to find out, "Did that plumber do a good job?" You'll just call that plumber if it worked out. You know, we never-- People with autism don't think about those kinds of things, but that's how people get help for themselves. That's how things work in the community.

Ann Palmer: Exactly. And I think we can, as parents-- It's a constant learning field here, as we're seeing how we make decisions; how we take care of ourselves and advocate for ourselves and our children. We can teach things like that to our children from elementary school on, just by talking about the experience they just had and what they learned from it and what-- You know, how we made that decision. These are ways that we can work on the self-advocacy skills, that you're describing. You know, I want to also suggest that it's okay that when your child is in 6th grade, to not know what's coming and to not know if college is even going to be possible. I didn't consider college-- I did, like many parents did, when my son was diagnosed at the age of two. I gave up the idea of college. That was part of my grieving process, that I went through, coming to terms with accepting who my son was. I think it wasn't until 8th grade, when I think they sent a form home from school that we were supposed to sign up for the courses he would take in high school, in 9th grade and I needed to decide at that point, would he be on a college track? That was the first time, I ever seriously considered it. At 8th grade, he would never have had the skills to do what he was able to do when he went to college. So a lot happened between 8th grade and 12th grade, and that will happen with all of our kids. There's a lot of growth, physical and maturity and academic growth. Everything is on a growth curve in those years and you really can't possible predict. So if you're the parent of a 9th grader now, and you're thinking, "This all sounds extremely impossible for my son or daughter to be able to do," in three years, a lot can change and a lot could be possible. You know, people need to leave that door open in case that is a door that your son or daughter will grow through.

Chantal: And I want to add two comments about it. The first one is, there are a lot of neuro-typical people that don't go to college either.

Ann Palmer: Right.

Chantal: So college does not mean-- You know, look at all the people that went to college that don't have jobs, to begin with.

Ann Palmer: Ah-hum.

Chantal: So it's not necessarily something bad if your child never goes to college, and it's too early to really worry about that in 6th grade. Just as Ann said, anything can happen. The second point I would like to make, is to give the example of my son, who is severely impacted by

autism, who spells out, on a letter board or on a light writer. He passed the California Exit Exam on his first try. We gave it to him as a baseline. Now he's finishing his classes. I never thought he would graduate from high school. That was not a goal for my son in my mind at all. I never thought he would. The new Director of Special Education, who said, "Oh, your child has "x" number of credits. Have you ever thought about him graduating?" And we had thought, "Well, maybe he'll go for the GED," because we didn't know, until recently, how much he really understood of what was going on around him. They said, "No. Well, you know, he could actually graduate from high school, if he can pass the California Exit Exam," which is a test that's given to everyone here in 10th grade. And you have six tries to pass it. Well, they just gave it to him when he was 19, and he passed it on the first try. Okay?

Ann Palmer: Oh, great.

Chantal: So now he's finishing and now he's going-- Actually that's where I was today for the first meeting at the community college. I just went in the background but he went with his support person. Because now Jeremy needs a communication partner or support person with him, which is harder, but easier in a way. Because it's obvious that he needs somebody with him. But again, he has no modifications of the work. He only has an accommodation, in that he has a note-taker and he has the right to use different letter boards and he has extended time on exams. But other than that, he has to do the same amount of work as everybody. But here's the caveat, with my son, and you know, it really pains me because I would like him to be very independent. I've managed to get him to the point where he know that he's smart and he can do all this work, and he loves to learn and he writes. That's what he wants to do. He wants to write. But because of his motor difficulties, it's really hard for him to do a lot of sequencing and to finish a lot of tasks that are needed for independent skill living. That's our big struggle all the time. You know? It's really hard. But it's more like as if somebody who had CP or motor difficulty. We still struggle with that. It has nothing to do with intelligence. It has to do with motor control and motor initiation and all these areas. We take for granted that we can just move our bodies but for some people, like Jeremy, it's really difficult. But anyway, the point is you never know.

Ann Palmer: Right.

Chantal: Our life's totally changed within three years, in terms of direction for what my son might be capable of doing. And in terms of him, it's really improved his quality of life because he loves to learn. That's his number one thing at the moment.

Ann Palmer: Well, that's a great interest and skill to have actually. That's wonderful.

Chantal: Exactly. Okay. Now here's a person. Joy, in Irvine. "My young adult son, with Asperger Syndrome, is going to junior college again, in a few weeks. And he needs an aide to help him with studying, staying on task, organizing his work and to communicate with the professor. Where would I find this person? How much would he get paid and what educational background should he have to do this job?"

Ann Palmer: Well, first of all, the Disability Services folks on the college campus can help a little bit with some of that. They should be able to help with some of the organizational skills, setting up some way for the student to better organize himself and do his task. And also, they often can be involved in educating the professors, raising their awareness about the autism spectrum and possibly helping the students disclose or explain to the professors their needs. So some of that can be done within the school setting without having to hire an outside person. But not all colleges are they willing to do that, have the time to do that, have the expertise to do that. There are paid coaches that are out there. I think they're often called Life Skills Coaches or college coaches. And we have some in this area, not a lot. Many are psychologists who do this as part of their practice.

In terms of educational level, they typically are counselors or psychologists. But you want somebody who has a lot of experience with the autism spectrum, because the needs of these students can be very different from the needs of another student with another kind of learning disability. So you want them to have that experience. Here, in North Carolina, the college coach that we have in this area, who's very good. I think her fees are typically-- Can be like \$50 an hour and she's available to maybe help students and their families in the transition part, between high school and college, to help prepare them for the skills they're going to need. Then she also has a number of students she works with, who are in college now. She meets with them on a regular basis; helps them look at their calendar; do their schedule; advocate; help them learn the best

ways to advocate for themselves; and how to deal with some of the social and sensory, different kind of issues that come up on a college campus.

So I think, you know, what you'll need to do-- what this parent will need to do is kind of research it a little bit. See if there are any local psychologists who offer this service. Then also ask the colleges you're considering if there is a Counseling Office there. They may offer some of this support. They could possibly help the student a well.

Chantal: Good point. Here's a question from Dave Hamilton, in York, Pennsylvania, and I love this question. "My child adult has succeeded in college. What do I do now?"

Ann Palmer: That's a very good question. I thought it was very interesting, over the years, when I have heard adults on the autism spectrum talk about college and talk about what comes next. Many of them speak of college as sort of a Nirvana, where they're in an environment that is somewhat protected, and they're in an environment where they can study till their heart's content, topics that really interest them. To many of these adults, this is a wonderful environment to be in and they thrive in this environment. However, they also speak to the fact that once they're finished with college and many go on to grad school, because this environment is so attractive and comfortable for them. Then when they have to get a job, they end up having a lot of difficulty. I think that's a very important question.

What I personally did, when my son-- Well, actually, one way you prepare (and I did this starting in middle school), is I made sure that my son had some sort of volunteer work, preferably in an animal-related field. So if you can figure out your son or daughter's interests and get them some sort of work experience. Typically volunteer work is a great way to get the foot in the door, where they're not having to pay you but they're willing to have you come in and volunteer sometime. And even the parent can go with the student to the volunteer work, which is what I did with my son initially. That gets the student to have some experience in what a job is all about and helps him work a little bit on those work skills that they're going to need.

I also had the benefit of having a job coach for my son initially. I don't know what's available in Dave's area, where he lives. But I would research a job coach, what job coach resources are out there in his community, that he might be able to tap into. The job coach services a

wonderful role in being able to work directly with the graduate of college and transition them into a workplace. So they might help find a job. They might help with some of the training that the individual is going to need to do that job. They can go in and communicate with the administration of the job, the boss, to sort of talk about the individual coming in to work. There's a lot of ways a job coach can be a great resource for a student or an individual with ASD transitioning into a job.

So that's one option. That may or may not be appropriate for his son. Then what I mentioned earlier about it's who you know. I think Dave - I would suggest to Dave that he network with other families in the autism community where he lives. Find out who knows someone who might run a business, who would be interested in hiring his son or daughter. So network and find out what's out there. Then lastly, there's a wonderful. It's Temple Grandin and Kate Duffy's book, *Developing Talents*. I'm sure you're familiar with this book, Chantal.

Chantal: Yeah.

Ann Palmer: It's a wonderful book that really helps in a lot of the same kind of-- The kind of question that Dave is asking. How to determine what your skills, your interests are, what kind of job would be a good fit for you, and then how to go about finding a job in that area and how to present yourself; what to think about in terms of job behaviors and planning to-- Skills you need to learn to be able to survive in the workplace, which can be a difficult environment for many of our loved ones with ASD. Those are some of the ideas that I have about that.

Chantal: Another idea, I mean this person doesn't give very much information. But if they succeeded in college and they made a lot of contacts in the college, there are jobs on college campuses as well.

Ann Palmer: Right.

Chantal: If it was an environment the child really-- the adult child was really comfortable in, maybe that's an option as well.

Ann Palmer: I think that's a great idea. And the fact my son works on the same college campus that he attended is very comforting to him and was a much easier transition for him because he's already familiar with the campus. He's close by to places that he's been, restaurants and social opportunities are there, that he's familiar with. So it was a good

transition for him to not have to have-- go through a whole lot of changes, from leaving college to going to full-time work.

And I think we also need to think about, with many of our kids, that transition to work may not be best if it's to a full-time job. That may be hard for a student to go straight into a full-time job. Maybe working part-time building up to a full-time job.. Maybe a good way for the student, the individual, to transition into the change that they're going to need to make.

Chantal: Oh, yeah. I think that's a good point to make there. I've helped a few students and parents with this aspect because a lot of employers, and also a lot of parents, are not really aware that their adult child may have still some of the same issues as when they were younger, in terms of processing and overwhelm. So that they get really tired from having spent a few days on a job. So, for example, I've been able to help with job coaches to arrange with jobs for people with Asperger's, where they didn't understand. They thought maybe the person with Asperger's didn't want their job, didn't like the job, because they'd end up calling in sick. But you know, particular people maybe can only work two or three days in a row and then they need a whole day off to recuperate. It's just from all that processing and overwhelm. So a lot of times, as Ann said, they can't work full-time. But a lot of people don't realize that. It's not a laziness thing. It really has to do with the amount of energy that it takes for the processing and the difficulties they have.

Ann Palmer: Right. I think when one of our loved ones gets a job and it's a good fit and they want to keep that job, they'll still need some support in order to follow up on their job, do it well, be able to work with their coworkers, to be able to report to their boss, ask for help when needed. All of those skills are needed in that level as well, and I think it's important to stay involved in the individual's life as much as possible to advise, to help them see some of their challenges and understand their strengths and what they're good at.

So disclosing of the job place is another-- It's very similar to that disclosing issue, we talked about in college, you know, whether or not you disclose at a job interview. I really think, again, it's very individualized and it depends on that if that person can do the job without any kind of accommodations. Are they going to totally blend with their coworkers and have the total skill set to do the job. And if not, then disclosure may be

something that needs to be done. That's where I think individuals tend to rely a little bit on the parents' advice in helping with that process, because it can be a tough decision.

Chantal: Right. Okay, here's a question from Anna Tilcoat in Big Bear. "I have a 16-year-old that is autistic and MR, who wants to go to college but can't pass the stats for the SAT. He reads at a second grade to a third grade level. Writes at the same level. Math is the same level. He wants to work in the movie industry as an actor or a movie maker at the Disney College, here in California, near Magic Mountain. What can I do? I'm trying to be realistic and tell him the truth, but not kill the dream?"

Ann Palmer: Oh, that's a very difficult situation, and I think most of us, as parents, have been through something similar. When Eric was very young, he always said he wanted to be a National Geographic Photographer. That was his goal. Now, he had never picked up a camera. He had no interest in taking pictures. He just really liked the idea of sitting in the tree watching lions or all day or whatever. That was a dream job for him. I remember trying to explain to him the reality of what he was suggesting. It's sort of a joke now, but I think I said something to the effect of, "Well, they don't sell baloney where you'd be in the safari in Africa as a National Geographic Photographer." He's a very picky eater. As soon as I said something very straightforward like that, he said, "Oh, okay." And he sort of moved on to something that was a little more realistic.

I think what this parent-- I don't understand how difficult this situation is. You want to encourage the individual. You don't want to dash their dream. But you also want them to have some realistic hopes and goals. I think community colleges nowadays offer a lot of opportunities for our kids, no matter what their abilities, academic levels are. There are life skill courses offered at community colleges for people with disabilities. Maybe that would be a way that this woman's child would be able to have a college experience. Maybe it won't be in academic, strongly academic courses. But in more life skill kind of courses. So that would be one opportunity. I think also, if I was this individual's parent, I'd be looking at the movie industry and other types of jobs, or ways they could use their interest in that area, that would not be the same as the movie producer or director. Something that might be more realistic. What other jobs are available on a movie set, that this individual could do? And I would be trying to-- In whatever way they can communicate and understand, try to explain the differences to them. Not focusing on what my child can't do,

but on what the person in this job would need to do. Then that becomes more of a positive thing. "Here's some goals to work towards, because if you want to be this person in the movie set, you need to know how to do this." I think that's a little bit easier way to address it. It's not a perfect answer. Chantal, maybe you have another point of view about that. I just know it's a difficult situation and many of us have gone through it.

Chantal: Well, I had an idea. Was that perhaps, you know, they're in Big Bear, so I don't know if this exists up there. But finding-- Like here, in this area, we're starting to get now, which only existed in L.A. before, was theater or drama or acting little groups for people on the spectrum. You know? Or people with differences. So that, people can practice little different-- You know, they're small productions. But you can find out what the different jobs are in say a theatre production, which is kind of not the same as movie but has some things that are quite similar and it could give a little idea of what is this like realistically? Because it could be that once he actually saw what the work was, he really wouldn't be interested.

Ann Palmer: Right.

Chantal: So that's another idea too. But the other thing we have to keep in mind with all these kinds of situations is, yes, our kids have autism and it's terrible, you know, for some of these things. But that kind of a dream of a 16-year-old, even a neurotypical 16-year-old who is very smart, if they wanted to go work in the movie industry and be an actor or movie maker, it's still very hard. It's still not necessarily realistic. You know? I think we have a little bit of that dream here in California, because we live here. But you know how many people go to Hollywood and fail. So we, as parents, I mean-- We have to remember that. Even if they were typical, it would be a very hard thing for them to do. But I like the idea of trying to see if there's a theater group or something, where they could participate or see what the different aspects are. As Ann said, find out more about what other jobs there are around the industry-- Because if they'd just like to be around a set, then there are maybe other jobs they can do. So good ideas there, but I don't know how realistic they are for up in Big Bear.

Ann Palmer: Yeah.

Chantal: Okay. Anita in Las Vegas. "What services are available in high school and college for my kid to start attending college?" Hum.

"My son has Asperger's. He is in middle school now?" That kind of would be just like what you're been saying before about community colleges. Right?

Ann Palmer: Right. I mean, I'm not sure if she's talking about specific accommodations. She might be talking about that and we haven't gone into a lot of detail with that. I know there are different programs and transition kind of programs going into a college, that she may want to know about or be interested in looking up. The main accommodations-- A lot of the accommodations at the college level, whether it's a community college, a university or whatever, are going to be similar to many of the ones you know of from high school. Extended time for testing, a separate setting for testing, writing in the booklet as opposed to filling in the little circles. There's some of those accommodations. Then there are a number of accommodations related to note-taking, where you would actually have an assign. You would have someone in the class who would take notes for you or you can tape-record a lecture. So there are accommodations related to where you sit in a classroom, if that's needed. Priority registration is an accommodation at the college level, a service that's there. A single dorm room is something to consider. If the student is going to live on campus, living in a dormitory can add a lot of stress. The sensory issues, the social issues of living in a dorm, sharing a room with a relative stranger, sharing a bathroom with a number of people.

These are all issues that can be challenging for a student with ASD. So maybe you look into whether a university offers a single dorm room option, which is what we used for my son. We felt like it made a big difference in his ability to be successful in college. He had a place he could go to after a stressful day in class, where he can close his door and have quiet and it's his space and it's his time. That was a relief for him to be able to do that. My son would not have done very well sharing a room with another person. He's not a very social person. He'd be a lousy roommate. In reality, it turned out that the single room was still on a wing of a dorm suite in a dorm and he was near a lot of students. He could be as social as he wanted to be, but he could also close that door and have time to himself. So those are some of the accommodations to think about, to ask about. The other one that I think about is some sort of transition program. The parent will need to look into what's available in their area. many of the community colleges and some of the universities now are offering transition programs, where a high school student can actually take a class, while they're in high school, at the college level. That way, they get some experience of being on that campus of what the

college level academics are like and those kind of transition programs can be very beneficial to our students with ASD, who may need a little practice before they get there.

Chantal: Okay. Moving right along. Because I've got lots of questions to answer still.

Ann Palmer: Okay.

Chantal: Lori in Grand Rapids, "My son has very mild Asperger's and does not receive services. In college, he hopes to _____. I'm not sure if I should talk to the coach ahead of time, to let him know that my son sometimes has reactions to situations that are not easy to decipher or understand. I found that in the past it is inevitable that something will come during the season, which requires the coach to be flexible and understanding in a situation where he may normally not be."

Ann Palmer: I believe that anyone who is trying to support your son or daughter in a situation, whether it's a professor, or a coach, a Girl Scout Leader, whatever the situation would be. If they can benefit from understanding more about the student, then they should be told the needs of that student in whatever form is best and dependent on what they actually need to know. The only thing I question from this parent is that at the college level, informing the coach about the student's needs has to be done by the student not by the parent. So when she asked about whether she should talk to the coach, she should not talk to the coach. She needs to work with her son to come up with a way to talk to the coach, to explain the information the coach needs to know, for that student to be most successful playing tennis or whatever the situation is. So that would be my first point. Is that I do believe it's important to disclose whatever is needed for that individual to know, to be successful in that realm. But it needs to be done at the college level by the student actually and not the parent.

Chantal: Right. Okay. Linda McAndrews, from Bluebell. I am a parent of a 22-year-old with Asperger's Syndrome. He is in college and has difficulty with the classroom conversational dialogue that goes on between students and teachers. I've asked to sit in the classroom, in the back, very inconspicuous and have trouble almost every time I bring up the subject to the Disabilities Office. Also, we have found a way around the situation by having him in the online division of the college. He made Phi Seta Kappa with a 3.8 QPA. I guess that's supposed to be GPA. Why

do colleges continue to prevent adequate accommodations to occur for a student to need a little extra note-taking help. Also, what do you suggest?

Well, if the person is note-taking, somebody else should be doing that and not the parent. It's not the parent sitting the back of the room, that's going to be doing the accommodations. Don't you think?

Ann Palmer: Yes, definitely. I would-- I'm to all surprised that every person she's talked to about it or suggested this to has been against it. Because they are going to definitely frown on a parent coming into a classroom. The interesting thing about college and accommodations, as opposed to modifications in high school is that accommodations are a way for leveling the playing field at the college level. So for example, they can't alter the curriculum or give any unfair advantage to a student because of any disability. I think what the accommodations do is they make the academic environment manageable. So without fundamentally changing the curriculum. So having anyone in the classroom, is going to be taking notes for them or telling them to put their hand down and not to interrupt the teacher or to gee him any kind of advice on an ongoing basis in a classroom will definitely be frowned on by the college. They will not allow that. I don't know of any colleges who would. So I would suggest that this parent look into note-takers, as you suggested. Any kind of a resource like that on the accommodation that can help the student. But the parent will not be allowed to come in, because that's sort of an unfair

Chantal: Right. That's a very good comment. Here's from Emily in Oskaloosa, Iowa. "Are there any books on Asperger's Syndrome for working adults? My son is graduating from college but terrified to go out on the workforce. He waited five years to finish his degree, because he knows that when he finishes, he has to have a change and find a job.

Ann Palmer: There are books out there. You know, Chantal, you may know. I know your books are a good resource for parents. I think the books by Steven Shore and the books by Temple Grandin, in particular, are especially helpful in directly relating to students with ASD. They're written by individuals with ASD. In the workforce, how to advocate. Steven Shore's wonderful book about advocacy. You'll need to remind me of the title of that.

Chantal: Tell-- Oh, gosh.

Ann Palmer: It starts with Tell. You're right. I can...

Chantal: *Ask and Tell*. Is it *Ask and Tell*?

Ann Palmer: That sounds right. *Ask and Tell* is a wonderful book about disclosure but also about how to get ready for a job and work with coworkers and things like that. The one, the *Developing Talents* book, that I mentioned, that's Temple's book is really good in the workplace. The Autism Society of North Carolina, where I work, has an incredible-- The largest autism-related bookstore in the world. They have a number of books that are specifically targeting work and vocational skills and so I would highly recommend that you go to the Autism Society of North Carolina website and go to our bookstore and browse what books are there, under that topic. And you can even call the bookstore and talk to one of our staff people, and they read all the books. So they can sort of give you a synopsis of each of the books and kind of direct you towards the books that are being, you know, are the most popular, that the parents seem to find helpful. So that's a great resource.

Chantal: I think it is because I know that there are a few books out there, that I have seen over the last few years, but I couldn't tell you the name of them. Also, it depends on the specific challenges that the adult child is facing, in terms of why he's afraid to go out.

Ann Palmer: Right.

Chantal: Maybe he'll overcome that fear that he has.

Ann Palmer: I know there's-- Here's-- It's *Ask and Tell: Self-Advocacy and Disclosure for People on the Autism Spectrum*. It's Steven Shore's book. Then there's another book called, *Asperger Syndrome Employment Workbooks* and that one's by Roger Meyer.

Chantal: That's the one I was trying to remember.

Ann Palmer: Yes. That would be a good resource as well.

Chantal: Good. Okay. Here's Sheryl from Southwick. "Is there any known financial aid other than the usual government subsidies, Pell grants, etc., or scholarships for those on the autism spectrum? That's the first question and then I'll ask the second one after that. Do you know of special financial aid for people on the spectrum?"

Ann Palmer: I know of a few. There's not a lot that I know of. But I know that there's some scholarship programs. The CVS Pharmacy does a charitable trust, where I think they give \$1,000 scholarship per year to students on the spectrum. And the Autism Society of America administers this scholarship. There's also an Ohio Autism Scholarship program, that can give up to \$20,000 a year, if the student with autism attends a private school. And then the Eden services also I've heard, offer money towards a student with autism attending college. So there are different programs out there. There's not many as there are with other disabilities. There's number of books out there and I'm sorry. I don't have the name of them, where you can actually look up any kind of financial aid for college students and it would include any college student. But I believe they also have one for a specific disabilities that you may be able to access.

Chantal: You would think that at the high school, somebody would be able to point those out to them.

Ann Palmer: They should. The Guidance Office, the Guidance Counselor should have that information. Actually if they don't have, they should be the ones to help research it because they need to have that information for other students as well.

Chantal: That's a good point. And the second question that Sheryl had was, "How do you go about finding a college that has a program geared to those on the autism spectrum?" Now I know there's a couple of organizations that actually have colleges in certain areas, that are now geared towards students with.... Are you familiar with those?

Ann Palmer: Yes. I am actually. There are two different programs that come to mind. First, the college living experience is one. They have five different locations, I believe, across the country. Austin, Fort Lauderdale, I think. DC is one of them, Monterey and Denver. The issue with these programs (this one and the one I'm going to mention next) is that they're quite expensive. So families need to recognize that. But I think at the college living experience, the tuition alone is over \$33,000 a year. So it's not cheap. What they do is offer a program that not only works towards the academic inclusion of the student on the autism spectrum in university classes, but they also work on living skills, independent living skills, self-help, social skills. It's really a very inclusive program that covers a lot of areas. The other one that's similar is the college internship program and they, I believe, have four locations. One

in Massachusetts and Florida, Indiana and Berkeley, I think is the other one. The tuition there ranges-- It's based on the level of support that the student needs. And it can range anywhere from close to \$40,000 to over \$70,000 a year and that's just for tuition. So again, it's expensive but it sounds like a wonderful program for families who can afford that.

And then another program that's very well known in the field is Marshall University's program that they have students with ASD. It's an actual-- It's different from these other two programs I mentioned, and that is a college-- You have to be accepted into Marshall University as a Marshall University student. Being on the autism spectrum and getting into this particular program on campus, they offer special support for not only academic but college living. They have dormitory rooms that they supervise and the student gets a great learning experience, as well as academic support. So that is a, I think, a program, a model, that many colleges are looking at doing, where they have a smaller program within the university that is specifically targeting to support those students with ASD. So that would be another university that I would look into, if that's the kind of program you're looking for.

Chantal: Very good. Good ideas, Ann. Good resources. Okay. Here's one from Bernadette Gonsalves. "It's an 18-year-old high school senior does not have all the skills needed to enter college (example, cannot write a research paper) but has the credits to graduate due to past school issue. Are there any suggestions for transition from high school to college? The student is high functioning and on the spectrum and is expecting to attend a college in September. However, he lacks the skills and follow through to complete the applications appropriately and assists on handling everything on his own and does so." You know what that's like, Ann. I don't know personally, but you've heard of people like that, who think that they can do it all, but actually they can't. How do you help somebody like that?

Ann Palmer: It's very frustrating, I'm sure, for the parents dealing with that situation and I've seen many, many times. It's very discouraging. When you know they can be helped but they're not willing to ask for the help or accept the help. I think, unfortunately, in that kind of a situation sometimes when you've done everything you can to advise the student, to receive help or to lower their expectations or to be more realistic about what they can and can't do. I think sometimes, unfortunately, they have to fail to realize that they don't have the ability to do it without help. We don't want any of our children to fail ever. But

sometimes, when you've done everything you can. If they're an adult, they're their own guardian, there isn't much you can do to step in there and change things. It's very disheartening as a parent to see that happen. But maybe not being able to get into a school because they can't follow through with the application process will be a learning moment for that student, where he's realize, you know, take a step back and realize, "Okay. I need some help because it didn't work the way I wanted it to do, on my own."

I would, again, be patient, to try to advise as much as you can about what is important for that student to know. Sometimes look into somebody else, maybe that the student respects or cares for. Maybe someone more their own age, that they would take advice from better. Maybe another college student, somebody who's older, been a sibling, or someone who's been through college before, to be able to give them some advice about the steps for getting in and what they might need help with. That might come easier from someone that's not mom or dad. I would try that avenue as well.

Chantal: That's a very good point. Sometimes it's very difficult for children to take advice from their parents.

Ann Palmer: Yeah.

Chantal: Okay. I know, going through that right now, helping my daughter. Actually she's doing all her college applications but I've insisted that I should at least just read to make sure that they're-- Or that somebody should read for the grammatical errors because it doesn't matter who you are, you always make mistakes when you're writing so much. Anyway, but obviously it's not the same kind of situation but I do have to say that I noticed the college applications are much more complicated then when I was doing it for myself. And I won't tell the listeners how many years ago that was.

Ann Palmer: Yeah. We won't go there. I won't do the same.

Chantal: Yeah. But it is much harder now, I have the feeling.

Ann Palmer: It is. It's much more competitive and much more stress on the student to do these applications.

Chantal: Yes. Okay. Dedra Carbone in Severna Park. "How do you help your child with the difficult task of organizing and keeping track

of their own work? High school has been such a challenge in the second year, and we're still nowhere ready for college level application.

Ann Palmer: Well, we touched on this a little bit already. Haven't we?

Chantal: Yes.

Ann Palmer: I think the organizational skills are probably one of the hardest areas and we should expect that to be a challenge for any of our kids at the college level. And I think what I mentioned earlier is the need to help that student develop a system that works for them, that they're comfortable with, that they can practice before they get to college as way to organize themselves, doing more-- What I mentioned earlier, about using calendars, electronic devices to help keep track of their schedules and appointments and things like that. It's not going to be something overnight, that's going to be fixed. And I think that's probably one reason why it's important that our students disclose to Disability Services at the college level, because that organization need that so many of our students are going to have at the college level require, I think, special accommodations to get through them. So that they're not holding them back from being successful in college.

Chantal: Right. Okay. Here's one. We've touched on this a little bit but I think there's more we can add here. This is from Lori in Martinsburg. "My son is a sophomore in high school. What should I and the school need to be doing now to help him be prepared to attend college? He does well academically but he struggles with social interactions, in school." I want to say one thing, that I keep forgetting to bring up. But one big thing that should be started even younger, but definitely needs to be looked at in HGH school, if they don't have it under control then, is self-regulation.

Ann Palmer: Ah-hum.

Chantal: That's life skills. We don't hear that much talk about it but that's really-- It doesn't matter whether they end up in college or work; if somebody doesn't have self-regulation over their sensory processing, under emotional stuff, then it's going to be really hard for them either at college or at work. Don't you agree? Because if you have a student who has an IEP, these are the kinds of things you want to make

sure being addressed in an IEP, so that it's a part of a goal and objectives. Wouldn't you say, Ann?

Ann Palmer: Oh, definitely. That self-regulation. I think you need to consider, "How does the student deal with anxiety and stress." If they already have those issues while they're in high school, they're going to definitely have them at the college level, where things may be even more stressful. So coming up with some sort of a program that was a self-involved program where they know how they're anxious and then they have a solution, a strategy for dealing with that anxiety and regulating themselves; being able to know the best way to calm themselves down. What they need to do. I think is extremely important. That was a very good point. I forgot the beginning of her question. What was she, in particular, asking about? Can you remind of that?

Chantal: Well, she wants to know what she and also the school should be doing now to help him be prepared to attend college. He does well academically but he struggles with social interactions, including working with others on group activities in school.

Ann Palmer: Okay. Right. I would recommend, as much as possible, to include things in the IEP, where the student has to be more social, has to communicate more. So either some sort of reporting goals, where the student has to come to a teacher on a regular basis and talk to them about what they're doing; reporting certain information. That's a good goal in school, to kind of work towards; learning how to be more socially interactive. I think what we can do, as parents, number one is respect our sons' and daughters' opinions. I think we take for granted sometimes, we make decisions for our kids oftentimes because it's a lot easier than going through the long process of them making the decision themselves. I think one thing we can do as parents is to respect the fact that they're adults and that they have feelings and that they need to be able to express those feelings and make their own decisions. We need to step back a little bit, let them make decisions, let them be ongoing. Ask them their opinion or how something felt or whatever. Any of those kind of interactions will give them some experience with advocating for themselves, expressing themselves and working on some of those social interaction difficulties that this parent is mentioning in that question.

Chantal: Right. Good points. Okay. Joe in Belmont, "Up until this past school year, in regards to my 15-year-old Asperger son, the school stated very loudly, 'You don't want to stigmatize him and make him feel

even more different with special ed, do you?' That's how they scared me away, when I even first inquired about an evaluation for my son."

Ann Palmer: Well, you know, you may have a similar experience or not, Chantal. But I found, over the years, that special education actually was a benefit for my son in school. Sometimes he needed more one on one, or a smaller setting, to work on the skills he needed. And when he was struggling, he needed a smaller setting. Then those things he learned, those skills he learned in those special settings actually gave him the skills he needed to be fully included at a later age. So I never felt that his diagnosis stigmatized him or kept him from being able to achieve everything that he could achieve. Now that was all personal experience. And it may be different for different parents. First of all...

Chantal: It sounds...

Ann Palmer: I'm sorry?

Chantal: It just sounds to me like the School District here is trying to avoid taking any responsibility. You know? Because...

Ann Palmer: Exactly.

Chantal: I think that this person needs-- This parent just needs to realize that it's their right to ask for these evaluations and to put them in writing and to just focus on what help that they get for their son.

Ann Palmer: I agree. I agree. That's exactly what I was going to say. They do have the legal right. Yes.

Chantal: Exactly. It's not a stigmatism. It's what you make of it. And if it's something that's going to help you-- Anyway, once you're out of school, no one has access to those records except you anyway.

Ann Palmer: Right.

Chantal: The thing that worries me is if the school has that attitude, then do all their services have that attitude? Or is this one particular person?

Ann Palmer: Right.

Chantal: That would be a concern that I would have. I think that the parent would need to first rightfully ask in their-- With the letter. Look up your rights on special education, because you have rights. Then also know the kinds of things that would help your son, because then you will know what kind of things you're looking for, to have supports for him. Because you're right in looking at this now before he leaves school.

Ann Palmer: Exactly. Because those-- Especially in the terms of evaluations and assessments. Because the colleges require current evaluations, within three years typically. So you shouldn't waive any evaluations when you're already-- If you already have an IEP and evaluations come up and it's time for an evaluation and the school says, "Well, we probably don't need to do an evaluation for Tommy because we know him well and we know what works well." You need to say, "Yes, we do need this evaluation because it's very important to have current information as my son goes through this important transition to adult life and still have those assessments." And for somebody who is considering an evaluation and assessment, you need to have it done as soon as you can and especially in the school setting, where you don't have to pay for that evaluation and you need to have that information to make that important transition for the student and know exactly what they're going to need. So I agree with you, that all the parent has to do is make a referral, is to ask for an evaluation and legally they have to supply that within a certain period of time.

Chantal: Every State has a Protection and Advocacy Office. You can look online and usually these offices provide, in plain English and also in many different languages, answers to questions about the parents' rights. That's what will help you to know the right way of doing what you need to do.

Ann Palmer: That's right.

Chantal: Okay. Now, this is kind of a long question and it's not necessarily just having to do with college, but I think it's an important question to answer. You're going to listen to me reading a little bit here. It's Donna in Fairhaven. "How does a middle school student get her classroom reading completed when she uses a reader's advice and does not want to use it in class because it makes her stand out. Do you have any suggestions of such devices that may be easier to use or less obvious to others? Some background. The school does not allow modifications to her schedule to allow her extra time in the Resource Room to read her

reading assignments because her schedule and that of the staff only allow two times in the Resource Room on a six-day cycle, and it is not even on the same days of the week. We have suggested the library. But again, the school says that she has to go to all her other scheduled classes, so that leaves no extra time or staff to read in the library. They have not made any accommodations to allow for her reading, so they just keep reducing the amount of information she needs to know or read. She does not have a reader at home, but can listen to some of her text on CD's provided RFBD but only if the school assigns the reading and trains her on how to locate the reading assignment on the CD and allows her to bring the RFBD recorder and player. This has not happened either. So as an included student, she has generally not had access to all her texts except when it is read aloud by her teachers in class. Do you have suggestions on what the school should be doing in order to provide a way that she can have access to the same amount and type of information as her classmates. Her inclusion in the regular classrooms and according to the standard schedule is providing her with a limited education. She would have access to more textbooks and other educational materials if she were allowed to go into another learning environment during some of her regular ed classes and to do the reading with the staff or a limited number of other students who have difficulty with reading: dyslexia, print, disability."

Ann Palmer: I think you're probably more knowledgeable, Chantal, about the different technical devices that can be helpful to students. But it sounds to me, from this parent's question, that the school is not-- Her rights are being violated, you know, her child's rights are being violated, in that they can't lessen her educational curriculum because they don't have staff available to help her with the reading or that they can't fit in a time for that.

Chantal: Right.

Ann Palmer: It doesn't sound to me like the I-- I don't know what's in this student's IEP, but it needs to be in the IEP, what the student needs to be successful and I think the school has to follow that and not limit the amount of educational exposure that the student has because it doesn't fit into a schedule. They have to make the schedule work for this individual student. So I would suggest she talk to an advocate. I don't know which State? Is this in California? I'm not sure what the system is there.

Chantal: It says Fairhaven, but I don't know what State that is. But again, every State has Protection Advocacy.

Ann Palmer: Right.

Chantal: And so if you don't have access to an advocate, that's what I would do. But the thing that concerns me here too is that they're not allowing you to have the equipment to take home. It's interesting. Because I gave a talk in-- A presentation in New York, in Upstate New York in the Fall, and I was really surprised to find out that many of the students there leave their assisted technically devices-- Their augmentative communication devices at the school. They're not allowed to take them home.

Ann Palmer: Oh, that's ridiculous.

Chantal: And how can you do that? That's like taking somebody's wheelchair away from them.

Ann Palmer: Right.

Chantal: Because the law is that-- If these are what you need to get your education, then you should have access to it.

Ann Palmer: I agree totally. Yeah. There needs to be some more communication with the school about this. If the parent needs to read up on their rights and their child's rights. Also, maybe if they need an advocate with them at a meeting to help them advocate for their child, they should do that. It sounds like there are definitely some options that are not being offered here, that could make this problem go away.

Chantal: Well, I wish that person luck. But really you can't give up. You have to insist on the school giving your child access. I mean, it's such a waste.

Ann Palmer: Right.

Chantal: Because they need to be doing what's right for her.

Ann Palmer: I agree.

Chantal: This is Elsie, in Newburg. "My son is 10 years old and his teacher has told me that they see him going to college. However, only one teacher is actually working with him. She now has him doing 2nd and 3rd grade spelling, math and some global studies. What do I have to do to encourage his primary teachers to work towards him being mainstreamed?"

Ann Palmer: That's a good question too. I think, you know, when you have student on the autism spectrum who has a lot of skills and sometimes teachers look at their grades, or their performance academically and see a certain thing and sort of don't see underlying difficulties, social difficulties, communication difficulties. That's why we often have to be such strong advocates for our kids, to make sure the teachers understand their challenges and their strengths and what they're capable of doing. I think it sounds like this teacher needs some more awareness not only about what that student's skills, her son's skills are and abilities are, but also maybe about the autism spectrum and what is possible. I don't know what trainings are offered at this particular school for the teachers, but I would-- You know, oftentimes, the teacher may have limited knowledge about issues related to ASD and they think they know, because they may have worked with one other student in the past with ASD and therefore that worked for that student, so it will for this one. It sounds to me like maybe the teacher needs a little more knowledge about...

Chantal: And the other thing that I wanted to mention is because they talk about-- This parent talks about having the child mainstreamed. The child does not have to be caught up at the same level as everyone in his class, in terms of the academics to be mainstreamed. Every student has the right-- In fact, the schools have to show why the child is not being taught in regular education. So, for example, even for years before we knew what my son was capable of understanding, he had a little bit of speech, a little bit of Peck's, but we didn't what he was understanding. I insisted, and it was in his IEP, that he would go to two mainstream classes a day. I did that-- I was not allowed-- I could not base that on an academic need, but I based it on a social need. Because in my opinion, I didn't know and I didn't really-- It's not that I didn't care, but I mean, my son was going to do the best that he could do whatever his potential was. But I know that he was always going to live in society and in society, what do you need to do? You have to learn to sit and you have to learn to wait. And I thought, "Be with a group of people." And I thought, "He needs to go and sit in these classrooms and be with people and at least

maybe he could learn by watching what they're doing as well." It's a good thing that I did that because that's why my son, now that he's able to communicate, can communicate that he knows so much because he remembers he learned everything when he was sitting in these classrooms. That's another thing, is your child may be able to pick up. So even if they argue with you that he's not academically ready, it doesn't matter. Because he can be catching up with the academic work in the classroom. It's all based on the goals and objectives. so I don't think you need to wait for him to catch up to have some form of mainstreaming. Don't you agree, Ann?

Ann Palmer: I do. And unfortunately, with the overworked teachers and the large class size and everything else that teachers deal with, we often see less support for mainstreaming because frankly, it takes time. It takes someone's work. Someone needs to go with that student into that classroom and maybe they don't feel like they have time to do that. Again, it goes back to the protections under IDEA for that individual child. What does that child need to be successful? And if going into a mainstream setting, be exposes to not just the academics, but as you were discussing, some of the classroom behaviors and the things, the social piece of being mainstreamed. Every child has the right to do that and they can't say, "We can't do it because we don't have the time." That's not an option. I think it sounds like this parent may need to advocate a little bit harder for that, like you did, and encouraging that mainstream experience if that is what her son really needs.

Chantal: I know. It's so hard because we have to be advocating all the time. I did want to say, because I sound like I'm being really strong about this. I always advocate but I always advocate in a nice way. I've always been assertive, not aggressive.

Ann Palmer: That's very important.

Chantal: Yeah.

Ann Palmer: That's one thing we spend a lot of time educating our supervised parent advocates across the State, at the Autism Society. We spend a lot of time talking to parents about how to make your point in a way that is supportive and not condescending or-- You have to go into a relationship with the teacher or principal or whoever it may be, respecting their job and the stresses that come with their job. Then hopefully, they also respect where you're coming from and what your

concerns and fears are for your son or daughter. It's definitely a relationship you have to work on. I think you're right. Advocating can be done-- Very strong advocating can be done with the support of the teacher, you know, at the same time you're telling the teacher you love how she teaches and you're supportive of what she's doing in the classroom but you're also advocating for what your child needs.

Chantal: And a lot of times too, it could be that the teacher agrees but the teacher doesn't have the support. But the teacher does not have the power that a parent does. A parent at an IEP meeting can request these things that gets written in the IEP, if everyone's in agreement on the team. And therefore then, they must supply the person who's going to accompany a child to mainstreaming, if that extra support is needed. A teacher cannot necessarily ask for that. The School District will say, "Well, we don't have the money." But they're not allowed to say that to a parent. If the team agrees that this will be beneficial for the student, then they need to provide that person. So oftentimes, I've talked to the teacher to find out what does the teacher need to give my child the education that the teacher believes he should be receiving? How can I help the teacher? And oftentimes it has meant, at an IEP, of me bringing up and asking for supports that the teacher can't ask for.

Ann Palmer: Right. And so we can benefit. We can actually help them advocate for what they need for their students in their classroom. I agree. It's a wonderful part-- It can work really well as a partnership, if you work together.

Chantal: Exactly. Okay. Here's a question from Denise, in Whittier. "I have a 6th grade student who has difficulty during social interaction with peers. The student has a difficult time when she loses a game and believes everyone hates her. Are there any strategies that you used that assisted your son with interpersonal skills?" I know that's not really a college question, but it's preparing for the future.

Ann Palmer: Yeah. I think it applies as well. You could be talking about an elementary school student going through an experience that or something similar at the college level. Again, it's individualized because all of our children are different. Personally, my son is one of these individuals, on the autism spectrum, who is not very social and he's okay with that. He doesn't care that he doesn't have best friends. He never cared that he wasn't invited to the party that they were talking about at school. You know, he was not feeling excluded or left out, and I think of

that as a blessing sometimes, that he was not feeling badly about not being a part of the mainstream totally. But a lot of our students and our kids are really anxious to be social and to be excepted and really struggle to have those interpersonal relationships. I think *Social Stories*, Carol Gray's *Social Stories*, if that's appropriate for the student, it can be a wonderful way of trying to teach other people's perspective. And I found a lot of parents I know have used those in developing social skills. And I don't know if this particular parent has social groups available in their community. I never found just putting my son in a mainstream setting with other kids, doing a social activity was necessarily going to be beneficial because he really needed more. He needed it to be simpler and broken down and a little more structured. And he could be very social if knew ahead of time what he was going to have to or there was some sort of a script or it was a smaller setting of kids and things like that.

I would also look into any kind of speech therapy or OT therapy service in the community, that might do social skills training. Because many of them will do the small group, kind of social interpersonal skills. Those are some of the options. I'm not sure-- And also, I found that siblings are a great way to try to teach some of these social awkwardness, these skills that the students are going to need using siblings, but also siblings of people on the autism spectrum can be much more patient say with another child with autism because they've lived with their own sibling on the spectrum and understand it a little more . I would look for informal kind of social settings to work on some of these skills.

Chantal: A very good point. Now we only have a few minutes left. It looks like there's a few people that hooked on late that are asking questions that we've already repeated. So I'm just going to ask you to summarize. Because one of the questions, for example, is from Michelle in Santa Clarita, "I would like to know if there is an IEP as well in college for kids with Asperger, as well as there is in grammar school? Janice, in Arizona, says, "What type of classroom is a child with Asperger's going to have?" Marie in Los Angeles, says, "What kinds of colleges accepts kids with Asperger's?" So if you could just summarize, in a couple of minutes, what you've been saying about, you know, the IEP versus ADS.

Ann Palmer: Okay. Well, first of all, at the college level, a student cannot be discriminated with any disabilities so they can't not accept the student simply based on the fact that they have a diagnosis. However, they cannot accept a student because they can't meet the criteria that is set for all students to get into that college. So that's the difference. And at

the college level, there is no IEP, and actually IEP, at the high school level, is rarely even looked at my the college at the time of talking to Disability Services and trying to get accommodations. They really aren't looking at that information. They're looking for a current diagnostic evaluation (fairly current, within three years) by a professional who describes the actual disability and how it affects that student will or won't qualify for certain accommodations at the college level. Again, the parents' role in that. Attain, the emphasis is going to be on the student asking for the accommodations, being able to describe why they need help, what their diagnosis is. All of that is going to be done through the student and not through the parent.

Chantal: Right. Very good summary there, Ann. So my guess, this evening, has been Ann Palmer. Ann, will you please repeat, again, the names of your books and also they could get information on you? For example, your website?

Ann Palmer: Thank you, yes. One of the books, the one I spoke about mostly tonight, is *Realizing the College Dream with Autism or Asperger Syndrome*. And then the other book, that is specifically written for parents and supporting parents going through this journey, is *Parenting Across the Autism Spectrum* and it was authored by Maureen Morrell and myself. My website is AnnPalmerAutism.com. And you can find information about my books and some articles there and be able to contact me through that website, if you have any other questions.

Chantal: Thank you, Ann.

Ann Palmer: Thank you very much.

Chantal: You're welcome. Hold on. Okay? Don't go away.

Ann Palmer: Okay.

Chantal: I'm going to ask the listeners, if they have any feedback, to please call (877) 211-0212 and to press 1. I'm going to repeat the number. You can give your feedback on (877) 211-0212, and then press 1.

I also want to tell listeners, that our next webinar is going to be Dr. Carl Hillier, of the San Diego Center for Vision Care and his topic will be, *Vision Therapy: Vision and Living Within the Autistic Spectrum*. That

will be on February 18th. So February 18th, we'll be talking about vision therapy and vision processing, which is really important to learning. Many of our students on the spectrum have challenges in those areas. So I want to thank, again, Ann. Thank you so much.

Ann Palmer: Thank you, Chantal.

Chantal: And to our listeners here, I hope you'll listen in again next month, on February 18th. Until then, live the life that you want to and actually create the life that you would like to live in.