

## **GOING GREEN: Six Easy Ways to Improve Your Health, Your Home & RELAX! (especially families w/children diagnosed w/ Autism & other Special Needs)**

Parents often find themselves wondering how to be environmentally responsible, budget conscious and most importantly, provide whatever their children's needs require. Now that our society has finally begun to focus on reducing the negative impact of our society on the environment we focus on utilizing products and services that support that end result. We use the term "green" to indicate anything that reduces energy consumption, carbon emissions, or waste of natural resources. The benefit to the Earth is clear, but there are benefits to our own mental and physical well being that are often overlooked. People can be profoundly affected by their environments, and children, particularly those with special needs, are even more susceptible.

Children with special needs, disabilities and behavioral disorders are as unique as fingerprints. Each child requires a different type of support. But there are several general principles that apply to everyone, particularly those with special needs.

A child's surroundings are often given far too little consideration. Parents typically focus on the obvious – for example, the "typical" subject matter may be introduced into the bedroom of a little boy: primary colors, trucks, race cars and sports. Without realizing it, his parents can be exacerbating an already heightened sensitivity to color, light and pattern. The materials we utilize are equally significant. The basic materials we use often emit undetectable fumes, gases and chemicals. These can be unhealthy, if not harmful. Unfortunately, sometimes we are unaware of the damage until it is too late.

To provide the utmost healthy environment for your child, try giving special consideration for the following suggestions:

1) Paints and finishes release low level toxic emissions into the air for years after application. The source of these toxins is a variety of VOC's (Volatile Organic Compounds) which, until recently, were essential to the performance of the paint. Fortunately, this is no longer the case. There are several brands of paint that have significantly reduced VOC's, or are 100% VOC free. There are more than a few brands that maintain excellent coverage, fast drying time and are available in a variety of colors and shades. Benjamin Moore's Aura Guard and FreshAire Choice paints are a couple of great choices... the scent is minimal, and has a natural citrus origin.

2) Color has a great deal of impact on our emotional state. Consider how the color and lighting of a room makes you *feel*, you may realize that you have an immediate, and in some cases, visceral response. Your child will most likely have an immediate and more significant reaction, and if the colors provide the wrong kind of stimulation, the emotional response may lead to aggressive behavior, either verbal or physical...conversely, they may also completely withdraw or shut down. Soft blues and greens tend to calm and are often colors your child may naturally gravitate to if they are feeling in need of tranquility and re-assurance. Yellows and pinks are mildly stimulating depending on their level of brightness. Shapes and patterns have to be utilized carefully as they can assist one child and negatively affect another. Visual chaos is very important to consider when deciding upon a pattern or design element. To be safe, stick with one and use it sparingly or as an accent. Don't combine too many colors, shapes or patterns in one space.

There is no color or pattern that is ideal for children diagnosed with autism or various special needs as each child is different. Pay close attention to your child's individual needs, and whenever possible, consult a specialist, but always trust *your* gut – Mother's KNOW stuff! Intuitively... so if something doesn't sit well inside you, get a second, third, fourth opinion,,, until you feel satisfied - *but don't ignore your gut!*

3) Bring elements of nature indoors. Plants, whether real or artificial (let's face it, we don't all have a "green" thumb) make a big difference. Large or small, greenery, or some element of nature in general, always makes a positive difference. Try a cornstalk dracaena, a great "green" indoor house plant. They are physically appealing, robust, easy to care for and are great for providing oxygen while feeding on carbon dioxide and filtering the air. This is a benefit to ALL of us!

4) Spend time outdoors in the sunshine, Vitamin D is important (as long as you have on good sunblock!) **Go** where it's **green**. Sunlight, greenery and fresh air have a natural tendency to raise our spirits. Remember that special needs children have a heightened sensitivity to sensory stimuli. What we feel as adults, they feel much more intensely.

5) Tactile elements can have a profound affect on a child's sense of connection to his or her environment. The experience of feeling the roughness of tree bark, getting wet in the rain, smelling flowers, or touching different types of rocks or sand provides interactivity and stimulation. Since children with special needs are often very sensitive to texture, experimenting with these elements in the outdoors can help us find the objects that will be most effective in their home environment.

6) Sound and music can be key factors in creating the optimal environment. Soundscapes can be very effective at soothing an agitated child, or stimulating one that's withdrawn. Music can have a strong positive influence on mind and spirit. Experiment, see what your child responds to, and incorporate it into their environment appropriately.

By acquiring a better understanding of these principles, parents can create an environment for their child that is healthy, comfortable, and emotionally supportive. These improved surroundings will allow for a happier, well rested and tranquil child...better able to connect with parents, family members, and friends.

With some basic design knowledge and an understanding of your child's specific needs, you can make a profound difference for them and your family! For more specific information, you can find my book, "Unique Kids. Unique Surroundings." on my site, [www.brushoflove.com](http://www.brushoflove.com) or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

No matter what you do, remember to always start **With a Brush of Love!**

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