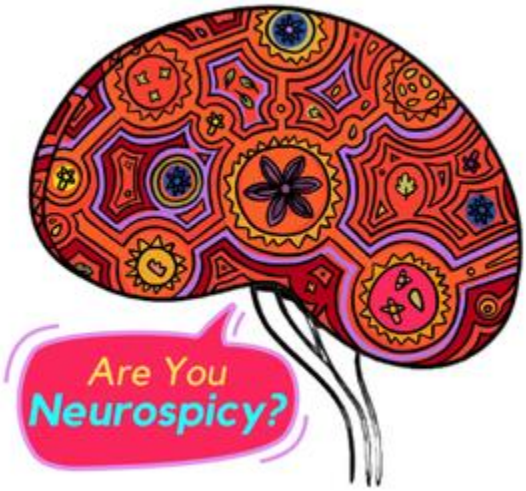
Just a taste!
Excerpts from the upcoming book!

Neurospicy



A *Parent Empowerment* Guide

Life Hacks for Families
with Neurodivergent Young Adults
Reaching for Launch

By Rick Silver, MD
With contributions from the Thrive Emerge Clinical Staff

THRIVE
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CHAPTER 2
GETTING READY FOR SUCCESS:
CREATING THE "EFFECTIVE PARENT PERSPECTIVE"

Lazy. Slow. Could do so much better if…
Irritating. Childish. Emotionally overwrought…
Unmotivated. Avoidant. No idea of what she likes…

For kids who are trying to do their best, these words hurt. They don't solve problems. They don't open larger possibilities for growth.

As parents of neurodivergent children, we've all thought or said these things out loud from our frustration.

But if we want to create good solutions that lead to our children's success, we need to adopt an Effective Parent Perspective -- one that moves us from a sense of helplessness to one of being empowered in our parenting choices.

What if in those difficult moments, we reached deep inside for a positive vision of the child we have been gifted with? This is the essence of the strengths-based, neurodivergent-affirming approach.

***Try this exercise**: How can I create a more Effective Parent Perspective?*

- *Do I set good limits and deliver consequences that provide a clear direction?*
- *Do I try to make too many decisions and send the message "I don't think you can handle this without me"?*
- *Is it hard for me to let go of my expectations, or do I help them create the best choice for themselves?*
- *When I'm frustrated and frightened, do I get critical and angry -- or find a way to let it go?*

Here are some tips about how to build a more effective approach to parenting your kids:

Be Curious. How the neurodivergent brain sees the world can be fascinating, intriguing and enlightening. Try stepping inside your child's viewpoint -- how they view social situations, how their energy might wane quickly throughout the day, how they need high levels of stimulation. All these are keys to unlock your child's inner world: how life lands on them and shapes their experience.

Try This Exercise: *Spend a few minutes with your teen or young adult exploring how their brain experiences the world. Here are some questions you might ask:*

- *Do you think in pictures or words?*
- *When you are with people, do you get intuitively how social interactions work -- or do you try to learn social rules from movies or books or online?*
- *Do you feel like you have a "freight train brain" -- like there are so many thoughts that you can't keep track of them?*
- *Sometimes do you feel "empty" -- like you don't know who you are deep inside?*

Stay Positive. We are powerful players in our kids' development. Research tells us that our words and actions literally rewire their brains -- and that rewarding words build neural pathways leading to increased self-esteem and resilience -- two important ingredients for success! (See Hum and Lewis in *Neural Mechanisms of Emotion Regulation in Children*, in **Handbook of Self-Regulatory Processes in Development** edited by Karen Barrett et al).

> ***Try this exercise**: Monitor your frustration and anxiety just before you are ready to react to your kid's behavior with a negative statement. Instead, take a deep breath and a slow exhale -- and create a neuro-affirming statement. Search for – and praise – even the smallest sign of progress. Feeling loved is growth-enhancing!*

Parent, Heal Thyself. Raising your neurodivergent kid is a long, tough journey. Being stressed, drained and overwhelmed are common experiences for parents. Having walked this path ourselves, we understand how important it is to replenish your reserves. Here are a few ways to "pull down your oxygen mask first" – so you can better care for your child:

Try these:

Exercise – I'll make it simple: work up a good sweat, three times a week. At times, it's the best medicine I can prescribe!

Sleep – take care of insomnia, sleep apnea and irregular sleep habits. You need your brain to be at peak performance – impossible to do if you are chronically fatigued and sleep deprived.

Community/ Partnering – Noone can do this alone. Buddy up – with your romantic partner, a friend who "gets it" or with a support group. Talk, cry, get it off your chest, find ways to get through one day at a time.

Relax – not just fun stuff, but techniques that take you out of fight-or-flight and into what we call "ventral vagal" - the relaxation response. Consider: meditation, yoga, prayer, breathwork, walks in the woods, relaxation apps. Try a few things until you find what you like best.

Practice Gratitude – Yes, life is hard. And even so, we are all blessed – to be alive, to be surrounded by nature, to be loved. Do your 'Gratefuls' every day: "Today, I am grateful for…" Breath, pause, take in this moment.

Deliver the Necessary Consequences. Families often struggle with setting and keeping boundaries with their kids. But without clear expectations backed up by natural consequences, kids end up running the family, not the parents. So the kid is never challenged to do the difficult work of growth -- and unhealthy patterns go unchanged.

This statement from a parent illustrates the difficulties -- and benefits -- of setting clear limits with appropriate consequences: "Even though it was really hard, the last time he threatened to hurt himself, we got him to the ER for a psychiatric evaluation. Usually we just let it go -- which just encouraged him to repeat that behavior. But we sent a message that seems to have stuck: those threats are not OK. His dad and I feel a lot safer and more in control now that we did this."

Family dynamics like this are complex and require support and skill building from professionals. We tell our families that we can't do the work of helping their kid launch without consistent support from home.

> ***Try this exercise**: Reflect on your patterns in your family. Are you comfortable with setting limits and expectations and then delivering tough consequences if necessary? Does one parent do this, but not the other? Or do you shy away from a "tough love" approach because you're afraid for your child, or perhaps uncomfortable with conflict?*

Improve the Parental Partnership. Good communication is an art -- and all of us have a lot of room to grow. Not that you and your partner have to agree on everything, but your neurodivergent kid needs consistency. Their challenges with self-regulation need to be modulated by a safe, predictable parenting environment. If you've tried to work on better communication with your partner and it continues to be a struggle, get professional help. For a bad metaphor: remember that your parenting is the car that will carry your kid into a successful future -- and they can't make the journey without a working vehicle.

> ***Try this exercise**: Set up a time for you and your partner to work on parenting consistency. Pick a situation with your kid that you commonly deal with. Each of you write on a piece of paper where there is a "match" in your parenting approaches and where there are conflicts. For the conflicts, each of you spend a few minutes openly listening to your partner's perspective. This is not a problem-solving time, or a time to "drive your points home". Instead, simply listen. After one person has spoken, the listener can discuss how they might use their partner's approach to deal with a tough parenting situation.*

Build Emotion-Based Communications. One key parenting job: help your kids learn to access their own emotions as a resource for healthy living. This includes emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, self-expression and co-regulation/ bonding.

> ***Try these when interacting with your teen or young adult:***
> - *Rather than problem solving or advice giving, ask them what feelings they are having about a challenging situation.*
> - *If they are having trouble naming a feeling, ask them to identify where it is showing up in their body. A broad framework to use: fear sits in the belly, sadness and longing in the heart, and anger in the jaw and face. Joy is felt all over the body.*
> - *Encourage them to use their feelings to identify the pros and cons of their possible choices: "I feel great when I think about graduating." "Not going to class makes me feel badly about myself."*
> - *If their feelings get overwhelming, help them look into a self-regulation approach such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) for very concrete ways of managing emotions.*
> - *Encourage them to use a trusted friend or family member during tough times to help with support and finding solutions.*

Make room in your talks for your child's emotional reactions to life's events. Encourage self-expression and naming feelings. Validate their inner voice. Help them seek solutions to their problems using emotions as guides to "right action."

A STRENGTHS-BASED, NEURO-AFFIRMING EXERCISE

By Alyssa Fenix, M.Ed.

Here's an exercise to practice a neuro-affirming reframe. Think of your kid's most challenging qualities – the ones you worry about the most -- related to their neurodivergence. Write them here:

_____

Now reframe each one as a strength or positive trait. The chart below can give you some ideas. Write those here as well:

_____

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE	**AFFIRMING, POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE**
Limited attention to detail	Looks at big picture, gestalt
Hyperactivity	High stamina, enthusiastic
Difficulty with structure	Creative, innovative & willing to take risks
Gets bored easily	Eager to try new things, values novelty
Disorganized	Flexible
Not logical	Idea generator & creative
Goofing off	Good sense of humor
Risk taking	Courageous, adventurous & entrepreneur
Failure to follow directions	Out-of-the-box thinkers, inventive
Stubborn	Persistent, tenacious & hyper-focused
Not a good team player	Independent, autonomous & charismatic leader
Difficulty taking orders	Independent thinker

Create an affirmation for yourself that anchors your intent to practice a neuro-affirming perspective. You might use a self-statement like: "I will remember to offer my child many honest, small praises from my neuro-affirming list every day." Write that here:

_____

Create a neuro-affirming behavior plan for yourself: "The next time I notice myself getting aggravated with my kid, I will STOP, breathe deeply, recognize my feelings (fear, anger, hurt, etc.), let them go a bit, think of how their behavior can be seen as a positive, and offer them that observation in a calm, loving statement."

And please: BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF. Becoming a strengths-based parent in the midst of all of our challenges isn't easy. But with time, we can begin to offer our kids glimpses of a vision of themselves that reminds them of how wonderful, unique, loved, and valuable they are!