

# Collecting Expertise

*Let's TALK Kids*

Claudia Quigg

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Last week, I listened as a man told me all about Asperger's Syndrome. His son has been recently diagnosed, and I was impressed by the significant amount of knowledge he had gathered on the subject in a very short time. He described to me the symptoms his son was showing. He told me about the impact on his school work, behavior and relationships. He talked to me about theories as to the causes of this syndrome. And he told me about the plan for therapies and accommodations he and his wife and their doctors and their son's teachers were putting into place.

His son's diagnosis had been made five days prior.

In the aisle at the grocery store over the weekend, I ran into a friend who was planning her daughter's wedding. This professional woman had perhaps never seen the inside of a bridal studio before last month but this week she is talking about bridesmaid dresses, flowers, caterers and gift registries as though she has earned a Ph.D. in Wedding Planning.

Monday morning at the office, a mother was telling me that her son has discovered dinosaurs and is fairly obsessed with them. He wants to know everything he can learn, and she is describing their shared research like a paleontologist. She is using words like "Prosauropods" and "Archaeopteryx," and probably even spelling them and pronouncing them correctly. (Frankly, I wouldn't know either way.) She told me that, before her son became interested, she knew next to nothing about dinosaurs.

As I think about these three parents, I am touched by the same attribute which they all represent to me. The task of parenting is nothing if not a Journey of Collecting Expertise.

When we have a baby, we learn quickly about feeding and diapering and bathing. We study the causes of colic and learn how to calm a fussy baby.



Only weeks before we had no need for such information, but now we will stay up half the night reading anything we can get our hands on.

The first time our child runs a temperature, we dive for the baby care books and websites to look up potential causes and treatments. When the pediatrician pronounces a diagnosis (anything from an ear infection to leukemia) we

learn everything we can about it in order to understand and work for a cure.

Children never stop needing help from their parents, and parents continue to learn about whatever needs or interests their children present to them. Their interests become our interests. Their challenges become opportunities for us to learn how to contribute support.

Parents live a cycle of recognizing that they are amateurs and then finding out what they need to know to bring some degree of mastery to their current situation. Whether it's an ear infection or All-Things-Bride, parents humble themselves to become learners about topics they might never have explored on their own. No matter how accomplished in other areas of their lives, parents are willing to start at the beginning in whatever task their family demands.

This vulnerability—as old as time and as universal as humankind—is what inspires me most about parents. Where there is great love, there is great interest. And where there is great interest, a Journey of Collecting Expertise will inevitably ensue.

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