

## THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF BEING A TEACHER AND A PARENT TO AN AUTISTIC CHILD

*by:*

**Shermin D. Atienza**

*Teacher III, Orani National High School-Main*

Being a teacher and a parent is a juggling act, but when you add a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) into the mix, the challenges can be even greater. (National Institute of Mental Health, 2020) defined ASD as a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges. These challenges may include difficulty with social interactions, communication, sensory processing, and repetitive behaviors.

As a teacher, who is also a parent of a child with Autism Spectrum Condition, the experience can be both uniquely rewarding and demanding. It requires a delicate balance of navigating both the educational system and the world of special needs parenting. Let us explore the joys, struggles, lessons learned by experience and how these have shaped her approach to teaching and advocacy for students with special needs.

Having a diagnosed ASD child presents unique challenges that can be difficult to carry through. Some of the challenges include:

**Time management:** Balancing the demands of teaching and parenting can be overwhelming, particularly when it comes to managing time effectively. Teachers who are also parents of autistic children must juggle their classroom responsibilities with their child's therapy appointments, doctor's appointments, and other special needs-related activities.

**Emotional toll:** The emotional toll of caring for an autistic child can also spill over into the classroom. Teachers may find it difficult to maintain a professional demeanor when they are dealing with personal stressors at home.

**Understanding the educational system:** While being a teacher may give a parent a better understanding of the educational system, utilizing it to our advantage as a parent of an autistic child can be challenging. It can be difficult to advocate for a child's needs within the school system, particularly if the school is not equipped to handle special needs students.

**Finding a balance:** Teachers who are also parents of autistic children may struggle to find a balance between their teaching and parenting responsibilities. They may feel guilty for not being able to give their child as much attention as they need, and at the same time, being unable to give their students the guidance and quality education they deserve.

**Unique challenges of autism:** Finally, teachers who are also parents of autistic children must deal with the unique challenges of autism itself. They may need to adapt their teaching approach to accommodate their child's learning style or may need to learn how to communicate more effectively with their child.

On the other hand, when a teacher has a child with special needs, it can also help them shape their teaching practice in a variety of ways. Here are some examples:

**Increased empathy:** Teachers may develop a greater sense of empathy towards their students who have disabilities. This can lead to a more patient and understanding approach to teaching, and a better ability to relate and connect with students who have similar challenges.

**Individualized instruction:** Teachers can adopt a more individualized approach to instruction. They may be more likely to recognize the unique needs of each student and adapt their teaching methods accordingly.

Collaboration with parents: Teachers may be more likely to seek input from parents and work collaboratively with them to support the child's learning. This can lead to a more effective partnership between the school and the family – a start of a stronger bond between an educator and the stakeholders / community.

Personal and professional growth: Teacher may develop new skills, gain better understanding of different learning styles, and become more adept at problem-solving and creative thinking.

Making a difference: Finally, by providing support, understanding, and encouragement to your child and your students, teacher can help them reach their full potential and achieve success in school and beyond, making a difference in the lives of children with such unique individualities.

Being a teacher and a parent to a child with special needs is really challenging yet rewarding. It can be a difficult journey that requires patience, understanding, and a lot of hard work. However, it also provides unique opportunities for personal and professional growth, deeper relationships, and lasting impact in the lives of children. The challenges faced by teachers and parents of autistic children can be significant, including navigating the educational system, managing the emotional and behavioral needs of the child, and juggling the demands of work and home life. However, through collaboration, understanding, and commitment to learning, these challenges can be overcome. Ultimately, this role offers a unique opportunity to create a positive and inclusive environment for all students, and to support differently abled children as they work to achieve their full potential.

*References:*

National Institute of Mental Health. (2020). Autism Spectrum Disorder. Retrieved March 10, 2023, from National Institute of Mental Health:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd/index.shtml>