

ABRAHAM LINCOLN once said that God must have loved retarded children very much; that is why God made so many of them. I believe my autistic child, Yu Tang, is not retarded, but still one of God's special children.

In today's world, success is measured by worldly standards. For example, the child who becomes a member of the MENSA society (for those with high IQ) is deemed successful. So are those children who are potential president's scholars or gifted in a particular area such as music, arts or science. Parents will go to any lengths to make their children first in class and excel in every conceivable area.

So is an autistic child a failure? What about his parents? Most parents would be shattered to learn that their child is autistic and I would be lying if I do not include myself in that number. Had we done any wrong to deserve this? Fortunately my wife and I overcome our self-doubt and we are grateful to our parents who treat and love their autistic grandchild no less than their other grandchildren.

Our lifestyle changed and most of our decisions have been influenced one way or another by Yu Tang. He has grown playful and each time he learns a simple task, he brings genuine joy to everyone at home.

The autistic child likes to be left alone, but it would do him more good to get him involved with the family. So we get him to sort out the laundry, fetch the cordless phone or TV remote control and join in with siblings in colouring picture books or reading storybooks. It helps him to open up and also to learn new tasks.

The autistic child is a child of the Universe no lesser than any being in this world. I believe parents are given an autistic child for they are special in God's eyes, and are gifted to love and care for their special child. Try to make your child your joy and every little learning will make you proud.

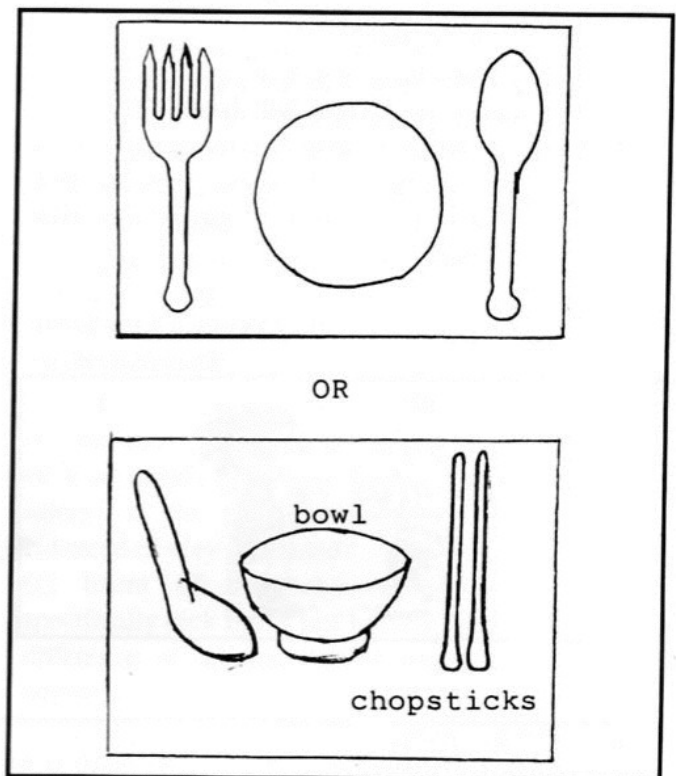
Yu Tang's Father



Finger painting by Johnny, eight-year-old STEP student

DURING the parent training course at the Department of Social Work and Psychology (NUS), visual prompts were discussed to help autistic children understand better. One mother describes how she has used the idea for teaching her son.

I have found a nice way of teaching my five-year-old son Zaki to learn a task during meal times. I have drawn two pictures of how to set the table and have pasted them near the dining table and on the fridge. Your child can look at the picture and, with your guidance, set the table. Hope this works for you!



Pasted or placemat style.

Dr Vera Bernard-Opitz has suggested a similar method using a place-mat with a picture of a meal setting drawn. All the child has to do is match the utensils to the place-mat. This method is very good if the child finds the pasted version difficult.

After the child has mastered the task you can slowly wean him off to set the table i.e., without looking at the picture. Whichever method works, remember to praise your child and to give a little reward after the meal as an incentive for the next table setting exercise.

Zaki's Mother