

The child must know that he is a miracle, that since the beginning of the world there hasn't been, and until the end of the world there will not be, another child like him.

—PABLO CASALS



Introduction

I once heard, “To write well, you should write about what you know well.” I know extra busy kinesthetically natured children. I was one . . . and it's been a busy thirty-six years! As a child, and to this day, I am most tranquil when in motion. Like kinesthetic children, I am happiest doing whatever I am doing—moving.

From a parental perspective, my husband and I are blessed with three beautiful, healthy, and precocious children—ages fifteen, twelve, and six. We understand how raising an overly active child can be trying. Our third child, Isabella, or Bella, is dynamically driven and has been since birth. Extra busy remains her story. She sticks to it daily. As an educator, I have been privileged to teach extra busy children of all ages and exceptionalities for over a decade. During this time, I have witnessed many parents and colleagues become overwhelmed with the demanding nature of kinesthetic children.

Why I Wrote This Book

I ventured into writing *Ants in Their Pants: Teaching Children Who Must Move to Learn* largely because my most memorable teaching moments as an educator and special educator have been those in which I have assisted extra busy kinesthetic children to channel

or redirect their excess energy in a positive direction. I wanted to share my ideas and help and inform others working with these little whirlwinds.

Ants in Their Pants is meant to inspire and foster support for those working with children who must move to learn. It is full of simple and sensory-integrated ideas for accommodating or designing a productive schedule for an extra busy kinesthetically natured student or child. The Strengthening the Home-School Connection tidbits offered throughout the book relay the importance of continuous teamwork and open communication between parents and educators when working with extra busy children. Unlike other idea books, *Ants in Their Pants* is personal, easy to read, and straightforward. It is meant to help educators and child care providers channel a kinesthetic child's excess energy in a positive direction without extinguishing the child's flame of individuality while remaining sane.

Ants in Their Pants is based on my

- experiences as a mother of an active kinesthetic child named Bella;
- experience as a special educator teaching children with severe and mild exceptionalities, including autism, Asperger's syndrome, attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), traumatic brain injury, Down syndrome, or another specific learning disability;
- experience as an educator working with kindergarteners, preschoolers, second graders, and young English-language learners;
- upbringing and experiences as child number seven in a family of thirteen very different children; and
- being a child advocate who wants to see all children happy, healthy, and marching to the beat of their own little drum.

How to Get the Most Out of This Book

I wrote *Ants in Their Pants* in a purposefully quick, been-there-done-that (BTDT) format, referring often to my experiences with extra busy kinesthetic children in my classroom and on the home front.

2 Introduction



Five more to come—
I'm second from the right.

To get the most out of this book, I suggest first skimming the section What “Ants in Their Pants” Means on page 6, where I explain my interpretation of the nature of an extra busy kinesthetic child. Grappling with this interpretation will help you comprehend the book better, ultimately enabling you to more readily help extra busy kinesthetic children.

Throughout the book I offer ideas to help you fill a Busy Bag—a toolbox of strategies, insights, and resources. One of my hopes is that you will see the importance of rotating through, sharing, and referring to this book as much as possible on those white-knuckle, rubber-hits-the-road days. Strengthening the Home-School Connection tidbits are meant to fill your Busy Bag too—one can never have too many ideas when working with kinesthetic children. Also, I'd like to add that when I refer to “parents” throughout the book, I am referring to individuals who parent a child, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, or other extended family members. Parenting is one of life's biggest challenges; it is a job that requires a community of support, especially if the child is curious, extra precocious, and has a

hands-on kinesthetic nature. Regardless of its makeup, the term “parents” denotes those individuals involved in the act of parenting.

To Survive, Get Out of the Box

I’m an out-of-the-box thinker, willing to try almost anything to make a child healthy, happy at home, and successful in the classroom. I recommend continual out-of-the-box thinking and remind educators and parents that just because something worked on Monday doesn’t guarantee it will work on Tuesday, or any other day of the week for that matter. The following two stories should explain my particular viewpoint.

Story 1: When Bella was two-and-a-half years old, for some reason she found comfort and enjoyment sitting in her empty infant bathing tub. I’ll never forget how her cute, chubby build fit snugly within it. After lunch one afternoon, she wanted a few leftover spaghetti noodles to nibble on while she sat in the tub stacking blocks. I indulged her. She stacked and slurped away for about five minutes before her extra busy nature reasserted itself.

In the short time it took me to walk from the kitchen to my bedroom, drop my rings on my vanity, and walk back again, Bella had taken the bowl of noodles from the countertop and dumped them into her tiny tub. I reentered the kitchen to discover her squishing and jiggling warm, wet noodles between her fingers and toes, squealing with delight. I was speechless. At first I scolded her and quickly cleaned up the mess. The following day, however, I noticed her eyeing a bowl of jumbo shells.

“What the heck?” I thought.

And from then on, to her delight, three to four times a week I cleaned out the tub, put down a drop cloth, and dumped a batch of lukewarm, sticky noodles into it. This activity proved itself worthwhile and educational. I thought Bella was one of the luckiest toddlers on the block, attempting to pronounce “whole wheat,” “linguini,” and “fettuccini” and exploring their different textures. I especially enjoyed watching her put oversized rigatoni noodles on each finger and exclaim, “Mommy, look!” and then slurp them off her pudgy digits one by one. Many of my friends found the activity



Busy Bag Trick

Quit worrying about what others deem pertinent, much less what the latest trend seems to be. Concentrate on being as creative, hands-on, and sensory-integrated as possible. Lock into the child’s personality, interests, and learning style.



Busy Bag Trick

Teaching extra busy kinesthetic children isn't easy. Realize you can only do your best. Consider setbacks little lessons that can go toward stuffing your Busy Bag.

wasteful and messy, and saw it as teaching my child to play with her food. We agreed to disagree.

Story 2: Bella was colicky from birth to three months of age. She cried continually from about 6:00 to 9:00 nightly. It was a difficult time, to say the least. Fortunately, a girlfriend of mine saved us with an unusual tip: “Aerial,” she said, “do exactly as I suggest. It got me through Haley’s crying spells. Wrap Bella snugly in a light blanket, put her in her infant carrying seat, and set it on top of your dryer. Put one of your husband’s shoes inside and turn it on air dry.” Amazingly, the vibrating dryer and loud thudding of the shoe calmed Bella. I quickly wrote down the idea and have since passed it on many times.

It’s important to remember that as you start thinking outside the box, surviving a kinesthetic child’s nature will come more easily. It will become second nature. Networking with friends, educators, colleagues, and parents to gain new ideas is also extremely helpful. Ultimately though, focus on what’s best for the child. Anecdotally log the outcomes of your trials—triumphs and flops. Chances are you’ll look back one day, read them, and laugh.



Strengthening the Home-School Connection

Ask parents to write a profile card for you, listing their child’s personality strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. Other topics could include family dynamics, favorite toys, likes, dislikes, pets, favorite books, or anything special or of interest to the child. Use the questionnaire in chapter 1 to assist in creating one. Set up a conference before each school year with the child’s parents to discuss extra busy habits. Use the meeting to review the profile card and encourage parents to point out problem areas, such as “Dante will continually stare out the window if you seat him next to one.”

All suggestions will help meet the child’s individual needs. Remain in close contact with parents after the meeting.

When I refer to children as having ants in their pants or being extra busy, I mean young children who are natural kinesthetic learners, who *must* move to learn. Extra busy kinesthetic children are rearing to go, go, go, and they continuously want to know why, why, why. Extra busy kinesthetic children are often precocious and have larger-than-life personalities. They see life as a daily series of miraculous experiences and are often known as being bright eyed and bushy tailed. At times their curiosity seems unstoppable.

Let’s look more closely at characteristics of very active children. Extra busy children move excessively due to a kinesthetic nature. This nature is driven by intense curiosity, a need for continual tactile experiences, and the requirement to move in order to concentrate and learn. It demands environments, schedules, and guidelines for using excess energy that are different from traditional teaching or parenting methods.

Extra busy kinesthetic learners are naturally more active and have more physical energy to expend than other children. They often display habits common to extra busy children. These habits can be trying at times, but not for long periods of time. Extra busy habits can be managed with consistency, creativity, sensory-integrated tools and techniques, varied play, and a structured environment that incorporates proper sleep and nutrition.

Busy Personalities

I highly recommend a wonderful children’s personality book for your Busy Bag: *The Treasure Tree* by John Trent, Judith DuFour Love, and Cindy Trent (1998). This beautifully illustrated book uses four animals—an otter, a lion, a beaver, and a golden retriever—to describe four basic personalities of children. According to *The Treasure Tree* my children can be described as follows.

Phillip James, “PJ,” is fifteen. He fits the description of an otter. Otters love to socialize, a key characteristic of this personality type.



Strengthening the Home-School Connection

Start using a daily communication notebook with the parents of an extra busy child at the beginning of the school year. A communication notebook stays in the child's backpack, and parents and educators write back and forth in it daily—relaying praise or changes. The purpose of a communication notebook is to stay on top of extra busy habits.

PJ is popular at school, loved by everyone, and can easily work a crowd. Like otters, PJ tends to rush through things (especially his homework), paying little attention to detail. He loves to hang out in his messy room (otters are notorious for untidy rooms), listening to music or talking on the phone.

Next in line is twelve-year-old Farrah. She has a golden retriever personality. Retrievers are loving, sensitive, and empathetic. They make friends easily but do not readily welcome change. Reassurance is important to golden retrievers. Farrah, like a retriever, is a people pleaser—very helpful, loyal, quiet, and melodious.

Now Isabella. Bella is our roaring six-year-old lion cub. She is goal oriented, forceful, and insistent. When Bella sets her mind on something, watch out! Lions tend to boss everyone around. They often display a my-way-or-the-highway attitude. Bella keeps us on our toes with “Let’s do it now!” Lion personalities are also fearless and vibrantly vocal.

As you ponder each child’s personality, keep in mind Dr. Lawrence Shapiro’s statement that a young personality is about 49 percent nature and 51 percent nurture (2003, 3). The four types described in the book are only a spectrum for categorizing personalities. Granting that a “lotter” (a lion-otter combination) or “golden beaver” (golden retriever–beaver combination) may exist a few days out of the week, the book targets the child’s strongest characteristics. *The Treasure Tree* also has a helpful checklist to fill out to learn more about a child’s individual personality strengths.

What All Children Need, Especially Extra Busy Kinesthetic Children

An extra busy child often reminds me of a puppy, needing guidance, constant supervision, and plenty of creative and supportive chew toys to get through the day.

Luck plays no part in positively raising or teaching these children. They require an extra helping of everything, especially

unconditional love
quality and quantity time
consistency
security

Each of these needs intertwines with three additional needs.

Unconditional Love	Quality and Quantity Time	Consistency	Security
Acceptance	Consistent	Routines	Support
Affirmation	Continuous	Reasons	Strength
Affection	Care	Rules	Speech

Strengthening the Home-School Connection

In a newsletter for families, consider making these suggestions: Rise early enough to get ready before the children wake. This will allow for an attentive breakfast with chit-chat about the upcoming day or a few morning cuddles. Go out on a family date together. Remember, children are only small for a brief period. Enjoy this time—you'll never get it back.

Unconditional Love

Extra busy children need daily doses of unconditional love expressed through the three A's—acceptance, affirmation, and affection.

Giving daily doses of the three A's not only expresses and models unconditional love but also helps extra busy children grow into loving, confident individuals. Make it obvious to an extra busy child that she is an accepted, honored member of the group. Give praise when appropriate, being careful not to build false pride—too much praise can backfire. Ways to express unconditional love appear throughout the book. Here are some to get you started:

- Set limits, boundaries, and rules for an extra busy child to exist within. Consistently stick to them!
- Enforce consequences for behaving inappropriately and disregarding established rules.
- Listen and talk to the child attentively throughout the day.
- Maintain constant, deep eye contact when speaking with the child.
- Never compare children to one another.

Quality and Quantity Time

There is no better investment than spending time with a child. Children need daily doses of quality and quantity time expressed

through the three C's: consistency, continuity, and care. Try not to confuse quality time and quantity time; they are not the same. Twenty minutes of focused attention speaks volumes more than an hour of just being in the same room watching television together, for example. Here are some more ideas that will allow you to spend quality and quantity time with children:

- Be a multitasker.
- Hold regular classroom meetings.
- Cut back and learn to say no.
- Arrive fifteen to twenty minutes before the children to prepare for the school day, and make copies beforehand.
- Leave your classroom ready for the next school day.

Consistency

Extra busy children and consistency go together like peanut butter and jelly. Yes, it's that important! Extra busy children not only need consistency, they thrive on it. A predictable, structured home and classroom make an extra busy child feel safe, secure, and loved.

Extra busy children need daily doses of consistency expressed through the three R's: routines, reasons, and rules. Consistent routines give extra busy children a sense of stability. Rules establish boundaries, limits, and respect for others as well as health and safety guidelines. Rules should be reasonable and explainable. Children can benefit from understanding age-appropriate, realistic reasoning behind rules and limits. For example, "Paul, we use glue sticks during math time because glue sticks are not as messy as bottled glue. We use bottled glue for our art projects." One reason is enough; thereafter give a response similar to this: "Because I am your teacher, and I have set this guideline." Here are two more ideas for beefing up consistency:

- Post a schedule and follow it.
- Question what your "no" really means. Is it wishy-washy or firm? Do your students walk right over it, or do they know you mean business when you say it?



Busy Bag Trick

Post an extra busy child's daily schedule.

Try to establish a sense of structure and purpose for each day. Make sure the schedule is understandable to him. For prereaders, including pictures with the schedule is helpful. Posted schedules work well at school and at home.



Busy Bag Trick

A child who hears "no" a hundred times a day will eventually tune it out. Use it sparingly.



Busy Bag Trick

Extra busy children are successful in the classroom and at home if busy behaviors are addressed and viewed from all angles by everyone. All parties need to work together. Encourage family members to offer tips about what is working at home, where control over the child's environment is easier. Every attempt should be made by educators to be receptive and flexible with suggestions.

Security

Secure children prosper developmentally. An extra busy child will naturally feel secure if her needs for love, time, and consistency are met. Granting an extra busy child security is possible with daily doses of the three S's: support, strength, and speech.

Extra busy children need a sense of group identity. A sense of belonging will strengthen their confidence and give them security during times of change or intense transitioning. Extra busy children feel support when a network of friends or extended family is present. A gentle, enthusiastic, yet firm teacher can provide ample security for an extra busy kinesthetic child as well. To help strengthen children's security

- Prepare extra busy children for change. If you are aware of an upcoming intense transition like a field trip or a substitute teacher, let the child know in advance. Springing things on extra busy children can be difficult.
- Take care of yourself. You will be more productive as a parent or educator if you take care of yourself. This includes eating right, exercising regularly, getting adequate sleep, relying on a support network, and taking time for you.

Ten Common Characteristics of Extra Busy Kinesthetic Children

I've experienced ten characteristics common to extra busy kinesthetic children, ages one through eight, and outlined them here. The characteristics are often outgrown, or they become milder as the child ages. The characteristics seldom cause failure in school if tackled quickly, properly, consistently, and creatively. The characteristics intertwine but tend to work in intense sets of three—with excessive movement often taking the number one spot.

Excessive movement remains Bella's number one extra busy characteristic. Bella's number two characteristic is her noisiness.