



# PERSPECTIVES

A publication for parents and professionals serving individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

## EARLY INTERVENTION: The Key to Unlocking Potential

By Barbara Firestone and Laurie Stephens

It is important to emphasize that there is not a one-size fits all approach to teaching children with autism, and successful programs often combine several intervention approaches to meet the individual needs of the child.

Let's consider the facts...current research reveals that autism can be reliably detected as early as 18 months of age and that some key early warning signs appear before 12 months of age. In contrast, studies indicate that 50% of children with autism remain undiagnosed until Kindergarten. Delays in the diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder are even longer. However, many parents suspect a developmental problem well in advance of a formal diagnosis even though they may not associate these issues with autism.

When parents first suspect that their child is developing differently, it is imperative that they share their concerns with their pediatrician as soon as possible. Typically, if the pediatrician determines that there is a problem or potential problem, the parents will be given a referral to the appropriate professionals for further assessment. These professionals may include developmental pediatricians, neurologists, psychologists, child psychiatrists and/or speech and language pathologists.



Many parents report that when they related their initial concerns to their pediatrician, they were told, "don't worry," and that their child would "grow out of it." Drs. Perri Klass and Eileen Costello, co-authors of "Quirky Kids," suggest that if a pediatrician feels there is no need for follow-up, but the parents have a

lingering suspicion, they should revisit the topic with their pediatrician. If the parents continue to have concerns, they should see a specialist for further evaluation. The evaluation provides important information as to whether or not there is a problem, the type and severity of the problem and the next steps to be taken.

If a formal diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder is made, or if the evaluator concludes that there are some early indicators that autism may be present, it is of critical importance that the parents seek intervention services - the sooner the better. Although the diagnosis can be overwhelming and anxiety producing for the family, early detection and early intervention are the parents' best front-line offense in confronting the challenges. Due to the plasticity of the developing brain, children with autism have a greater chance for successful outcomes when intensive interventions are started before 5 years of age. During this window of opportunity, children can make substantial progress in many areas of development.



Prior to the age of 3, early intervention usually involves clinic and/or home based services such as behavior therapy, infant stimulation, speech and language therapy and parent training and support.

## The Hidden Curriculum

by Brenda Smith Myles

Sometimes teachers think that all kids know the rules even when they have not been told them. Then when someone, like you or one of your friends, breaks one of

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those rules you get in trouble. That seems so unfair! The rules that teachers think you know without being taught are called the "hidden curriculum." Here are some "hidden curriculum" rules that teachers might think YOU know. I hope these help you out in school!

- ✘ Do not talk to other kids in the classroom when the teacher is giving a lesson
- ✘ When the teacher is scolding another student, it is not the right time to ask the teacher a question.
- ✘ If one small thing occurs and a teacher corrects you, it does not mean that your entire day is bad.
- ✘ During a fire drill go with your class to the nearest exit. This is not the time to go to the bathroom or to ask to go to the bathroom.
- ✘ You should talk to teachers in a nice tone of voice because they will talk to you in a more positive manner. Teachers also like it if you smile every once in a while.
- ✘ When your teacher gives you a warning about behavior and you continue the behavior, you are probably going to get in trouble. If you stop the behavior immediately after the first warning, you will probably not get in trouble.
- ✘ If one of your classmates tells you to do something you think might get you in trouble, you should always stop and think before acting.
- ✘ Friends do not ask other friends to do things that will get them in trouble. Doing it will not make them think you are cool. Instead, they may think you are gullible and laugh behind your back. Tell them to do it themselves and see what they do.
- ✘ Not all teachers have the same rules for their class. Some teachers do not allow any talking unless you raise your hand. Others may allow talking if you are not disruptive and annoying other students. It is important to know the rules different teachers have for their class. The rules will always change from teacher to teacher and it will not do any good to focus on the fact that it is not fair.
- ✘ When a teacher tells another student to stop talking, it is not a good idea to start talking to your neighbor since the teacher has already

expressed disapproval of that action.

- ✘ When hearing someone speak using incorrect grammar, do not correct him every time, especially in a critical manner. The person you correct will think it is rude will be viewed as curt and as if you are trying to point out his faults.
- ✘ When you see someone in the hall at school that you are attracted to, find a way to let them know without going directly up to them and saying loudly, "YOU'RE CUTE!!!" That will make the recipient of the comment uncomfortable.

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## U-M leads effort to collect DNA on autism

Nation/World Briefs  
Thursday, January 11, 2007

Ann Arbor—Researchers at 11 universities will create a databank of DNA samples from 3,000 autism patients in an effort to identify different kinds of autism and develop treatments. The University of Michigan will lead the three-year, \$10 million effort funded by the Simons Foundation, which aims to spend \$100 million long term, the school announced this week.

## Fun Feelings Activities

Recognizing your own feelings and identifying the feelings of other people are foundation skills for developing more involved social skills such as learning to cope with feelings and responding appropriately to the feelings of other people. Below are

### PERSPECTIVES

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some ideas for fun ways to teach feelings.

### 1. Provide Multiple Examples

Feelings can be difficult to teach because they are expressed in a variety of settings, have many synonyms, and involve understanding subtle clues.

In order to teach identification of emotions, provide examples in different settings through stories, pictures, videos, real-life experiences, and role play.

### 2. Show Feelings are Important

Children need to understand that it is okay to talk about and express feelings. Demonstrate this by asking children how they feel, sharing your feelings, and discussing how you cope with your feelings and respond to the feelings of other people.

### 3. Use Natural Opportunities

When reading, watching movies, or in real-world situations, look for opportunities to discuss feelings. If the child is upset, use this as an opportunity to teach appropriate responses and coping strategies.

For example, "Josh, I know you are angry that you have to leave the playground. Take 3 deep breaths to calm your body then join the class in line." If another child is upset show how to handle the situation. For example, "Alex is upset. Let's see if we can help him."

### 4. Set Time Aside to Practice

Just as math and reading require practice so do social skills. Take a few minutes during the day to work on social skills. Since children may be overwhelmed by feelings it is important to practice expressing and responding to feelings when they are calm.

### Role Play

Below are a few games that include role play of emotions.

- ⌘ Have children select a feelings word or emotions card and act out the feeling on the card.
- ⌘ Have children select a feelings word or card and role play when they felt this way.
- ⌘ Put children in pairs. Have one child pick a feeling and act it out. The other child responds to the first child's feelings.

### Discuss Feelings

Show children pictures or drawings of facial expressions or scenes demonstrating feelings.

Ask the following questions:

- ⌘ How does the character feel?
- ⌘ How do you know how the character feels?
- ⌘ When have you felt this way?
- ⌘ What would you do if a friend felt this way?
- ⌘ What do you do when you feel this way?

### Use Art and Literacy

The arts provide a different way to think about feelings. They allow children to see the details of specific emotions and experience the look and feel of the emotion through a different medium. Art activities include

- ⌘ Have children draw a facial expression or scene showing a feeling.
- ⌘ Have children write a story about a time they felt a certain way and what they did about it.
- ⌘ Create a feelings book. On each page have a drawing of a feeling and a short sentence, "I feel sad/happy/scared when" Keep each child's book in the literacy center.
- ⌘ Focus on a feeling by having a book specifically about the feeling that includes when the child feels this way and what coping strategies to use for managing the emotion.



### More Info

The Sandbox Learning Company specializes in creating materials that can be customized for individual students. It's all available online at [www.sandbox-learning.com](http://www.sandbox-learning.com). Imagine how effective a story will be when it is individualized by incorporating a child's name and personal information.

Visit The Sandbox Learning Company to register for a FREE customizable book titled *Waiting*. It teaches the importance of patience. (Do you have students who need to learn about waiting?)

You can also sign up to receive their free newsletters and articles. Amy and Desiree invite you to print and share this information with other parents and professionals.

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## Some Online Games May Enhance Sociability

Reuters Health - Video games involving multiple players serve as informal gathering places akin to old-time pubs and coffee shops, and can thereby boost the players' social connections, researchers argue in a new study.

In their report, Constance Steinkuehler of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Dmitri Williams of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign question the perception that kids who play computer games are isolating themselves, at least when they are playing so-called massively multiplayer online games (MMOs).

"By providing spaces for social interaction and relationships beyond the workplace and home, MMOs have the capacity to function as one form of a new 'third space' for informal sociability," Steinkuehler and Williams write. While such sociability won't offer "deep emotional support," they add, it has the benefit of exposing players to a wide range of viewpoints and a more diverse social environment.

The effects of the Internet on society are still being debated, the researchers note in an article in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. Some claim the Web allows people to build connections and communities, while others say such virtual links are just a poor substitute for the real thing. The researchers sought to investigate the role of MMOs, in which players inhabit "avatars" or on-screen representations of characters within virtual worlds and chat with other players by text or voice, in players' social lives.

Reprinted from <http://www.autismtoday.com>

## Teaching Social Skills to Teens

Looking for more helpful resources for teaching social skills? Here's a great resource for your teenagers.

**How Rude!** Is a perfect tool to help students with social challenges better understand the confusing social world they live in.

Visit [www.AutismStuff.com](http://www.AutismStuff.com) for more good stuff.

## Teaching Kids About Hurt

One middle school found the keys to stop bullying and violence—and is setting a national example.

BY BOB KATZ

He was a mid-term transfer from another town. But with a massive wine-colored birthmark nearly covering his face, the eighth grader quickly stood out. Worse, his school file was thick with reports of fights and suspensions.

And so upon his arrival at Walnut Middle School in Grand Island, Nebraska, counselor Mary Ann Richards didn't waste time. "Were you ever teased or taunted at your previous school?" she asked the boy.

Yes, he nodded.

"What did you do?"

"I punched them," he said.

Richards saw a classic setup for the familiar middle school cycle of taunting and reactive violence.

But Walnut was ready.

Over the past four years, this school of 780 kids has transformed itself from a place all too familiar to local police to a celebrated winner of a National Schools of Character award for 2003. Walnut was the only middle school of 10 so honored by the Character Education Partnership, a consortium of groups focused on developing moral character in students. But the transformation was not easy, or accidental.

With its ethnically diverse population (30 percent Hispanic and 5 percent Asian), the school faced some formidable challenges. Then, as today, most of its students received free or reduced lunch and many were transient—their families drawn to the commercial hub by opportunities in the agricultural and meatpacking industries.

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They also fought—a lot. In the year before launching a character education program, Walnut reported nearly 150 incidents of assault and fighting, of which almost 50 were referred to police for possible prosecution. “Basically, this was us being desperate and saying, ‘enough’s enough,’” recalls Richards. Adds Walnut principal Vikki Deuel. “We had a whole vipers’ nest of bullies, and nobody was helping our kids make better choices.”

Using methods developed by the Bully B’ware program and by Tom Jackson’s Activities That Teach, Richards and Deuel, along with Rick Ressel, a police officer on full-time loan to the school, set out to systematically re-educate the students. Here’s what they started:

**Bully prevention classes.** Every new sixth grader attends three such classes early in the fall and seventh and eighth graders receive “refresher” classes. The goal: to redefine bullies as weak not strong, activate bystanders to be part of the solution, and create an atmosphere that inspires respect for differences. Importantly, students are also taught that verbal and sexual harassment and taunting—which some think is a “normal” part of growing up—are forms of bullying and may be illegal.

**Anger management groups.** Kids who teachers and staff identify as bullies, or the targets of bullies, join support groups, which meet weekly to discuss issues of self-awareness.

**The Purple Hands Pledge.** This national campaign centers around a pledge that students recite at the start of each school day: “I will not use my hands or my words for huffing myself or others!”

“It seems simplistic,” says Deuel, but it’s been a great tool for building an atmosphere of tolerance and peaceful problem solving. The measures of success: assaults have plummeted to a fraction of what they were before—and kids are making marked achievement gains.

While only the counselors and Ressel conduct anti-bullying workshops, the entire faculty has played a role. But not all accepted the responsibility at first. “One math teacher told me he wasn’t interested in teaching social skills,” recalls Deuel. “My answer was, if we don’t start teaching social skills, we won’t have time to teach math.”

And what became of the transfer student with the temper? Richards recalls walking the hall with him

on his first day and watching students gawk at his birthmark. She could feel the tension and anger rising in him.

But a strange thing happened. Nobody teased him. Nobody taunted. Some kids actually said hi. The boy then enrolled in classes to build anger management skills. But while at Walnut, says Richards, he rarely had to use them.

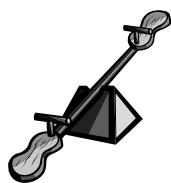
FOR MORE, contact: Mary Ann Richards at [mrichard@esu10.org](mailto:mrichard@esu10.org) or Vikki Deuel at [vdeuel@esu10.org](mailto:vdeuel@esu10.org).

## Welcome to SUN News—an update for The Gray Center Social Understanding Network!

My four-year-old daughter loves to teeter-totter with her older brothers. However, she is at a real disadvantage in that activity because she weighs dozens of pounds less than they do. Left to her own resources, she would spend the entire time in the air while they sat on the ground—definitely a dull prospect for both of the participants!

Rather than fault her for being too light, I step in and provide modifications to enhance her success. Giving a push on her side of the teeter-totter drops her to the ground, and releasing her brings squeals of delight as she rises up high into the air again.

A social interaction is much like a teeter-totter. It



takes two or more participants to engage in a social interaction, and both-or all-need to be working hard, paying attention, and making necessary adjustments to ensure the success of the interaction.

Much of what society views as “success” (graduation, completion of a task, a promotion, winning an award, owning a home, or going up and down on a teeter-totter) is based on—or is achieved only through—an ability to be successful in social interactions.

Like my daughter’s struggle to teeter-totter with brothers who weigh more than twice as much as she does, a large percentage of the population struggles to be successful in social interactions. In fact, one in 150-300 people is diagnosed with an autism

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spectrum disorder (ASD) . Due to the nature of this diagnosis, most of them find that their greatest hurdle in life is interacting successfully with other people...

Autism is more than a diagnosis. People with ASD are children, siblings, students, college students, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, and friends. They may be professors, scientists, bus drivers, or newspaper carriers. They connect with us at home, school, or in various places in the community, including our workplaces. They have much to offer us, beginning with their unique- and often refreshing- perspective on life.

We can play an important role in promoting social understanding as we work to balance the social teeter-totter with individuals with ASD. Rather than dwelling on their differences or difficulties and watching them squirm, adults and peers, family members, friends, and colleagues are capable of stepping in and giving explanations, accepting differences, or making modifications to ensure their success. Approached in this balanced manner, social interactions are much more enjoyable—and successful- for everyone!

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Reprinted from [www.thegraycenter.org](http://www.thegraycenter.org)

## PAC Library

The Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) has a library of books, DVDs, & videos on various special education areas. Many of these resources are about autism spectrum disorders and can be checked out at GISD's SESC-N, 5075 Pilgrim Road, Flint, MI 48507. For further information contact Marcia Clark at 591-4881.

## Research Newsdesk

### Key Differences in Brains of People with Autism

In a pair of ground-breaking studies, brain scientists at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh have discovered that the

anatomical differences that characterize the brains of people with autism are related to the way in which those brains process information.

Previous studies have demonstrated a lower degree of synchronization among activated brain areas in people with autism, as well as a smaller-sized corpus callosum (the white matter that acts as cables to wire the parts of the brain together). This latest research shows for the first time that the abnormality in synchronization is related to the abnormality in the cabling. The results suggest that the connectivity among brain areas is among the central problems in autism. The researchers carrying out these studies have also found that people with autism rely heavily on the parts of the brain that produce visual imagery, even when completing tasks that would not normally call for visualization.

“Human thought is a network property. You think not with one brain area at a time, but with a network of collaborating brain areas, with the emphasis on collaboration. In autism, the network connectivity (the bandwidth or breadth of connectivity) through which the areas communicate with each other may be limited, particularly in the connections to the frontal cortex (a common integrator for many brain areas), limiting what types of networks can be put to work,” said Dr. Marcel Just, co-author of the studies and director of Carnegie Mellon’s Center for Cognitive Brain Imaging.

Both studies focused on people with autism who have normal IQ scores. In one study, the researchers used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), during a Tower of London task, to view which parts of the brain were activated in people with autism compared to the parts of the brain activated in a control group of normal participants. In a lower of London task, participants must—in a set number of moves—rearrange the positions of three distinctive balls in three suspended pool pockets to match a specified pattern. This requires a person to strategize and plan several moves ahead.

The results of the experiment confirmed the authors’ previous findings that people with autism suffer from reduced synchronization and reduced

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## Conferences

Date	Title & Location	Speakers	Fee	Contact Info
	Amazing Youth Programs-workshops So You Want to be an Actor What it Takes to be a Music Star So You Want to be a Writer Little Ninjas, ages 3-5			www.amaizingu.com
Feb. 15 & 16, 2007	Putting the Pieces Together Conference Midland, Michigan	Richard Simpson Martin Kutscher	Varies	www.mcesa.k12.mi.us 989-631-5892 ext 172
Feb. 23, 2007	Autism & Asperger's Syndrome Columbus, Ohio	Temple Grandin Mary Wrobel		www.futurehorizons-autism.com 1-800-489-0727
Mar. 5, 2007	Setting Up a Classroom Using the Pyramid Approach to Education Clinton Co. RESA, Michigan	unknown	\$150	www.ccesa.org 989-224-9574
Mar. 15, 2007	Bullying Conference GISD, Davis Building, Auditorium ABCD Flint, Michigan 6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.	Nick Dubin	None	Please call Marcia Clark to register at 810-591-4881
Mar. 23, 2007	Practical Strategies for Working with Students with A.S. & High Functioning Autism Grand Rapids, Michigan	Kathy Morris	\$185	www.ber.org
Mar. 23 & 24, 2007	The Sensory Toolkit Lansing, Michigan		\$200	www.maspot.org JeanYoder@jcisd.org
Mar. 24, 2007	"You Can't Put a Square Peg in a Round Hole"...Transitions from school to adult life Wing Lake Development Center Bloomfield Hills, Michigan	Joe & Marilyn Henn  Watch for more info.		www.asaoakland.com
Apr. 30, 2007 & May 1, 2007	2 Day PECS training Detroit, Michigan	Christine Cavarretta Jill Weagenare	\$245	www.pecs.com 1-888-732-7462

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connectivity among distant brain regions, which helps to explain why some people with autism have normal or even superior skills in some areas, while many other types of thinking are disordered. The findings of this study particularly implicate the lower synchronization between the frontal cortex and other portions of the brain. In addition, it appears that key portions of the corpus callosum seem to play a role in the limitation on synchronization. In people with autism, anatomical connectivity—based on the size of the white matter—was found to be positively correlated with functional connectivity,

which is the synchronization of the active brain regions. The researchers also found that the functional connectivity was lower in those participants in whom the autism was more severe. This study will be published in the journal *Cerebral Cortex*.

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## Websites on Cyberbullying

- 🔗 Cyberbully: <http://www.cyberbully.org>
- 🔗 Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Cyberbullying  
<http://www.fightcrime.org/cyberbullying/>
- 🔗 Cyberbullying Resources for Youth, Families & Educators: <http://www.mindohfoundation.org/bullying.htm>

## Perspectives

Perspectives is now on the GISD website at [www.geneseeisd.org](http://www.geneseeisd.org) under Publications tab, then click on the newsletters link. Scroll down to find Perspectives. Publications from the past 3 years are also archived there.

## Autism Spectrum Disorders DVD Workshops

The Autism Spectrum Disorders DVD Workshops are held the 2nd Tuesday of every month, except in April, which will be on April 3rd. View topics of

upcoming workshops online at [www.geneseeisd.org](http://www.geneseeisd.org)

- ⌘ Move arrow over Training tab
- ⌘ Click on Professional Development
- ⌘ View by alpha for Autism Spectrum DVD Workshop

## Autism Spectrum Support Group

When: Thursday, February 8, 2007  
Time: 6:00 p.m.  
Where: GISD, Special Education Services-North  
5075 Pilgrim Rd., Flint, MI 48507

Over sensitivity or under sensitivity to touch, taste, smell, sound, or sight? Unusually high or low activity level? Problems with motor coordination? Jimmy Colley, GISD occupational therapist, will help us understand why. He also comes with a bag of tricks to help those with sensory integration problems!

If you plan on attending or have questions, PLEASE call Becky Downing at 810-591-4868. Hope to see you there!

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