



PERSPECTIVES

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

Summer Camps

The summer break is fast approaching. Here is some information to help plan some activities.

- Thomas the Tank Returns and Bob the Builder will be featured at Crossroads Village on August 17-19 & 24-26, 2007. Tickets are available at www.ticketweb.com/thomas or call toll free at 866-468-7630.
- Special Needs Activities—Grand Blanc Parks & Recreation, phone: 810-694-0101.
- Southern Lakes Parks & Recreation, phone: 810-591-0080.
- Jack’s Place for Autism at OU, phone: 248-370-2424 or www.oakland.edu/jacksplace. Offers many free activities.
- Easter Seals Genesee County, Inc. 1420 W. Third Ave. Flint, MI 48504-4897 Phone: 810-238-0475
- Michigan Assistive Technology Resource provides some information on camps for children with special needs. www.cenmi.org or 1-800-274-7426
- For-Mar Nature Preserve and Arboretum 2142 N. Genesee Rd Burton, MI 48509



Offers activities for individuals with special needs and the whole family, day camps, fishing, insects, junior chef, rhythm & movement, etc.

For more information, call the Nature Preserve at 810-789-8567 or the Arboretum at 810-736-7100, ext. 6 or go to www.geneseecountyparks.org

- Michigan Summer Camps—www.camppage.com/michigan.htm

- Amaizing U Summer youth camps and activities such as drama, camp imagination, growing up green for younger children and math, science, music, and writing camps for 5th to 12th grade children. Phone: 810-767-9490 or www.AmaizingU.com



Being Social

Posted March 25,2007

Once I spoke to a group of middle school students about social understanding. I asked for a volunteer who was “very athletic.” Everyone pointed at a brawny young man, who came willingly to the front of the room to aid in my demonstration. I then asked for the “most social” student. Again, the students immediately identified an animated young lady who smiled and skipped to the front of the room to join the class athlete.

I then handed a rope to the athlete and asked him to demonstrate to the class how to play tug-of-war. He struggled with the rope as he debated how to pull the ends in the same way that teams would do it in competition with one another. Soon his classmates began calling out, “He can’t do it alone! He needs someone else!” I thanked him for his cooperation, and moved on to the class socialite.



My charge to the young lady was to ignore the presence of her audience,

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while demonstrating what it means to be social. She looked puzzled by the assignment, while classmates called out, "She can talk to herself!" I asked, "When was the last time you saw someone talking to herself and thought about what a social person she was?" They all laughed. This was followed by further debate and discussion about what it means to be social. I found that while many students can readily identify "social" when they see it, it's a much more difficult concept to define or to understand.



As we strive to teach social understanding, we cannot assume that our children or students understand the meaning of being "social," or the value or need for socialization!

Laurel Hoekman, Executive Director, The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding.

Reprinted from <http://graycenter.wordpress.com/>

Visual Strategies helps The Webster family deal with tantrums...

Imagine having a beautiful, bright-eyed son who is born with ten fingers and toes. He crawls, babbles and plays according to all the developmental charts. Then, at about one-and-a-half years old, he stops making eye contact with anyone and his verbal skills all but disappear. To make matters worse, your pediatrician tells you that your child is deaf, which you know in your heart isn't true. This is exactly what happened when we were told that our youngest son, Mitchell, had autism.

We weren't sure where to turn. Whenever we took Mitchell anywhere away from the house, he would have a tantrum. We couldn't take a quick trip to the grocery store without him making a scene. When Mitchell would have a tantrum in a public place, I would try everything I knew to help comfort him. Many people would give me nasty looks and assume that my child was just wild and undisciplined. Because children with autism look normal, people assume they are.

After consulting several doctors, the Autism Society and other parents of children with autism, we were led to a book that would change our relationship with our son. When we were first dealing with Mitchell's autism, we were given so many different opinions about how to help our son. The one thing that everyone kept telling us was to read Linda Hodgdon's book "Visual Strategies for Improving Communication." It gave us an easy, practical method of communicating with Mitchell. Since using the principles in Linda's books, we find that Mitchell's tantrums are less frequent and more manageable.



Linda's book gave us the idea to use pictures to communicate with Mitchell. We took photos of places and activities for Mitchell and typed the description on the bottom of each photo. Whenever we go somewhere, we show the photo to Mitchell. When he understands where he is going, he won't have a tantrum. We carry these photos on a portable ring and Mitchell now uses this photo ring to communicate where he wants to go and what he wants to eat."

Linda's book has given us so much. The ability to communicate with our son and have our son communicate with us is a gift we thought we'd never have. —Vickie Webster

Reprinted from: www.usevisualstrategies.com

Shopping List for Leesa!

Grocery shopping was unbearable! We hated taking Leesa, our daughter with autism, to the grocery store. She had nothing to do. She would get our attention by breaking away and make us

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chase her all over the store. When we would go past certain items, Leesa would emotionally demand that we must buy them. For us, taking Leesa to the grocery store was so unbearable we had to seek help.



Vinda Stitt, a teacher's aide with 20 years experience working with children with autism, came to our rescue. She went grocery shopping with us, and then the following week Vinda gave us this ingenious solution. She suggested that we make up a list of items that Leesa would get during our grocery shopping. Vinda told us we could simply make up a list for Leesa by cutting and taping each label to a 4 by 6 index card of the items. She also told us that we write the name of the item on the index card and put the index cards into a photo portfolio arranged in the order we would come across them during our journey through the store. After Leesa gets the item, she removes the item's index card from the photo portfolio and puts it in an "All Done" box.

This solution worked immediately. Leesa now has something she loves to do. Within a few short weeks, I bought a digital camera and started taking pictures of the items we buy at the store. We have expanded our shopping list and Leesa now gets almost every item that we buy from the grocery store. All we have to do is follow Leesa around the store pushing the shopping cart behind her. Our shopping trips are enjoyable now for all of us!



Reprinted from www.usevisualstrategies.com

You too?! Common stories from an UnCommon Parent

Alyson Beytien

Sounds of Silence; Sounds of Joy
WHEN OUR SON JOSHUA was two years old, we were told that he had the "signs of a child with autism." We were sent to a child psychiatrist in our

area who had supposedly done his internship in developmental disabilities and was an "expert" in autism. That visit would change our lives forever.

Josh and I waited 45 minutes (an eternity!) in the waiting room of this doctor. The waiting room did not have toys, books or anything remotely important and necessary to young children, even though the sign on his door read *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. When the doctor finally breezed into the waiting room, he told us to follow him into his office, and *gee, sorry, he was a bit late*. The room he led us to was literally his office—not a special place in which to see patients. There was an open candy bar on his desk, two chairs, a coffee table, lamps, and a wall of books—not a toy or play area in sight! He began our appointment by saying, "I haven't had time to read your file. Why are you here?" I began to stumble and stammer through the words I had been given to describe Josh's behaviors, and the possibility that he might have autism. The doctor said, "Oh yes, Mrs. Beytien. He has autism and there are plenty of medications that we can give him."



I spent the next ten minutes trying to keep Josh calm, and myself steady enough to ask coherent questions. As I babbled my way through questions and comments, this doctor finally held up his hand to me and said, "Mrs. Beytien! What is it you want from me?" I told him I wanted a diagnosis; a prescription for speech therapy; and a plan for how to help Joshua. He then uttered the following statement: "Mrs. Beytien, children like this never speak. Have you and your husband grieved over the loss of your child, and planned for his institutionalization?"

In the days ahead, our efforts to grasp the finality of this doctor's statement left my husband and me as silent as our children. We were unable to comprehend the world we had been thrust into. Like our children, we could not seem to process all of the information that was coming at us.

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Everything seemed off-kilter. We struggled to understand how to act, speak, and behave in the world of silence and despair that this doctor had conferred upon us.

We grieved, learned, and struggled for a period of time. When clarity came, it thrust us into a very different world than that which had been portrayed. Our "autism world" is loud; full of sounds, laughter, and movies playing non-stop! Our autism world has squeaked, grunted, and groaned its way into a life of joy, work, and constant commitment. There is no such thing as *silence* in an ABA therapy session!!

Our home has been deafening at times with screams of frustration and words propelled by anxiety. The air has been punctuated by the off-key sounds of self-stimulation. The shouts, moans, screeches, scripting, and giggles are constant. And we are grateful for each and every sound!

On most days, I can hear a variety of "autism sounds" in my home:



- Josh repeating his current favorite movie script while searching the Internet AND watching a DVD—all at the same time!
- Zach, jumping up and down while watching the Lion King, screaming "Look Out!" and singing all of the songs; Zach, making our ceilings shake, and light fixtures rattle
- The beep and clang of Spencer's Gamecube, Playstation, and computer games
- The slam of the bathroom door every morning when Zach heads for the bathroom
- The whirl of the pizza cooker each morning as Zach makes his breakfast of Jack's Frozen Pepperoni Pizza, cut in half, then cubed when cooked
- The buzz and clank of innumerable trains running in the basement
- Josh's printer, chugging away in the morning as it prints out four pictures off the internet—ONLY four—not two or five, and all of this before his breakfast can be eaten

- The beep of the microwave each morning as Spencer fixes his breakfast of pancakes or waffles (every single morning!)
- The laughter of my husband as he continues to tease Spencer about dating girls

The sounds of autism are joyous, and frustrating, and memorable, and illuminating, and critically important in our lives. These sounds let us know that life is moving forward; that the boys are progressing, living, and enjoying their lives. I am immeasurably glad that "Dr. Doomsayer" was unbelievably wrong! We did not "lose" our children. We found ourselves instead.

Okay. I'll confess. My favorite sound *is* silence, but *only* if it means that the boys are blissfully sleeping!

Reprinted from Autism Spectrum Quarterly, Winter 2006

Autistic boy a mystery writer and now a champion speller

Didn't talk until he was 3; today, at 10, he excels

By Karina Bland

Ten-year-old Theo Vermaas won the spelling bee last month at Broadmor Elementary School in Tempe, the first time he's ever won anything.

This also is the first time Theo, who is autistic, has been part of a regular classroom, doing the kinds of things typical fifth-graders do.

He writes short mysteries that include characters from school, like the principal, who appears as an evil witch in his latest story. At recess, he plays kickball with other kids, racking up 72 home runs so far.



Statewide, 3,574 autistic children are in public schools, often taught in separate programs or classrooms.

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The goal is to get them, like Theo, into regular classrooms, says Camela Cooper-Cook, program specialist for special-needs students in the Tempe Elementary School District.



"We want them to have all of those rich school experiences," she says. Autism is a neurobiological disorder that interrupts normal development of language and socialization. Many people with autism also have unusual ways of learning or reacting to noise or other stimuli. That can make being in a regular classroom difficult.

So, when it's appropriate, those students join other kids for music or recess. The law requires that special-needs students be in the least restrictive environment.

Of the eight students in the Structured Education for Alternative Learning Styles, or SEALS, program at Broadmor, two are in regular classrooms with the help of an aide.

In the morning bustle of his classroom, Theo doesn't seem much different from the other kids, except it's cold outside and he's in shorts and a T-shirt. His mother says he doesn't seem to feel the cold and won't wrap up.

At the start of the school year, Theo would write just a few lines but only if he had to. Now he is producing stories that cover five sheets of notebook paper, with plot twists and dialogue.

After morning announcements, Theo stands in front of the whiteboard to read his story about graffiti that mysteriously appears at the school and how a young detective must figure out who did it.

He reads too quickly, and Gibbons puts her hand on his shoulder: "Go slow." This is the first time she has taught an autistic child. She treats Theo as much like her other students as possible. The way she sees it, "They all have strengths and

weaknesses. They all have the ability to learn and grow. You have to give them that opportunity."

His classmates clap when he's finished. He grins and pulls on his bottom lip. When called to read aloud, Theo used to stand with his back to the other students. Now he tells his classmates that his next story will be about a huge fissure that surfaces at school and swallows Gibbons. (The class is studying land formations in science.)

Theo writes his mysteries in a day. His own story has been years in the making.

Theo didn't speak until he was 3, said his mother, Meiny Vermaas. He wouldn't say "Mommy" or "Daddy," but he would spell out the words on an electronic toy.

"I saw this very brilliant child basically trapped because he could not express himself," she said.



Her husband, Wim, teaches molecular genetics and genomics at Arizona State University. Their 17-year-old son, Josh, already is a senior at ASU. He's studying computational math, physics and biochemistry.

But, in first grade, Theo spent as much time in the principal's office as the classroom. He would throw tantrums, sometimes a dozen a day. A developmental pediatrician diagnosed him with autism.

His parents decided against medication and instead follow a treatment regimen based on the thinking of a group called Defeat Autism Now, which views autism not as a brain disorder but as a metabolic disorder that affects the brain.

Theo has been through neurofeedback and sensory integration learning to help him deal with all the sounds, textures and movement of his world.

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Meiny Vermaas credits that regimen with her son's being able to stand on stage in front of a cafeteria full of people for the spelling bee.



Theo will compete in the district competition on Jan. 24. School officials don't know for sure if he's the first child with autism to compete because it's the child's ability to spell that matters, not his disability.

Since he won the school spelling bee, a new character has appeared in his stories: "Theo, the Spelling Bee Champion."

Reprinted from www.autismtoday.com

Welcome to SUN News—a weekly update for The Gray Center Social Understanding Network!

What is friendship? Most definitions of a "friend" focus on the recipient of affection and assistance. In other words, we tend to define our friends by what they do for us, or how they make us feel.

Is our tendency to view friendship in this manner consistent with our goal to promote social understanding?

A few months ago, my sixth-grade son wrote the following for a school project (names have been changed)

"Friendship means a lot to me in so many different ways. In order to be a good friend, you should encourage others, and find out what interests they have. Spending time with your friend is also a good thing to do. I have become a good friend with Kevin. We have a lot of the same interests. Kayla is also very nice. She seems to be a great encourager, and I admire her for that. A good friend seems to look at someone on the inside, instead of the out."



Ben has many friends in middle school. Yet his

definition of friendship does not focus only on how friends make him feel or what they do for him. Instead, he looks at how he can BE a friend to others!

Often, parents and educators are concerned about whether individuals with ASD "have friends." Those with the diagnosis are also eager to have someone be a friend to them. Perhaps we're missing the greatest opportunity in the world to promote social understanding! I wonder if we would teach our kids to BE a friend, rather than "getting" or "making" friends, if the world of friendship would prove to be more open to their attempts.

The truth is, we have no control over other people's actions, responses, or reactions. When we make attempts at friendship, we do not know how they will be received. The only thing we have control over is our own actions, responses, and reactions.

What then makes a good friend? Our list may include attributes such as honesty, affection, helpfulness, a willingness (and ability) to listen and compromise, shared interests, enjoyment of time spent together, etc. To encourage friendships, let's try to teach our children how to exhibit these traits, rather than simply looking for them in others. We may find that it's contagious!



If you're working with young children, you may be helped in this area by the book, "Share and Take Turns" by Cheri Meiners. If you're interested in learning more about the general topic of friendship in children, consider the book "The Friendship Factor" by Kenneth Rubin.



Other resources which can provide additional information about autism and friendship include those by Michelle Garcia Winner, Tony Attwood, Teresa Bolick, and Yoko Yoshida. All of these resources (and many more) can be purchased at through our online bookstore at www.thegraycenter.org/shop. (Or visit our Grand Rapids office to borrow materials from our resource

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Conferences

Date	Title & Location	Speakers	Fee	Contact Info
May 3, 2007	Challenging Behavior in Individuals w/ ASD Grand Rapids	Michael Powers	Varies	413-499-1489 www.neei.org
May 4, 2007	Autism: A Spectrum of Wonder & Possibility Plymouth	Anne Carpenter, Sean Barron, Barbara Protopapal, Luke Tsai	varies	Julie Whipple 517-882-2800 www.autism-mi.org
May 4, 2007	Autism & A.S. Kalamazoo	Dr. Temple Grandin, Jeanette McAfee, MD, Jerry Newport	Varies	1-800-489-0727 www.FHautism.com
May 4, 2007	Bridging the Gap? Theory & Practical Strategies to "Jump Start" Learning in Children with Sensory Dysfunction Detroit	Catherine Chenin Schneider, OTR	Varies	www.crosscountryeducation.com 615-331-4422
May 10, 2007	Educating Students in the Least Restrictive Environment: The What, Why, & How	Dr. Richard Villa	\$85	Cindy Gruno www.mcesa.k12.mi.us 989-631-5892, x129
May 10-11, 2007	Imagine...Everybody Works Presented by ASA & APSE: The Network on Employment Bloomington, IN	Multiple	\$250	www.autism-society.org
May 18, 2007	New Developments in Special Education Detroit	George P. Butler, III, Esq.	\$279	1-866-352-9539 www.lorman.com

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library or peruse our local bookstore)

I'd like to close with two fitting quotes; "The only way to have a friend is to be one." (Ralph Waldo Emerson) "The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend" (Abraham Lincoln)

Reprinted from www.thegraycenter.org



Websites on ASDs

- ☞ Autism Society of America: www.autism-society.org
- ☞ Autism Society of Michigan: www.autism-mi.org
- ☞ Dr. Tony Attwood: www.tonyattwood.com
- ☞ Asperger's Information and Support-OASIS: www.aspergersyndrome.org
- ☞ Liane Holliday-Willey: www.ASPIE.com
- ☞ Free pictures of visual schedules, etc.: www.usevisualstrategies.com
- ☞ Picture Exchange Communication System: www.pecs.com
- ☞ TEACCH: www.teacch.com

Genesee Intermediate School District
Special Education Services Center
2413 West Maple Avenue
Flint, Michigan 48507-3493
Phone: 810-591-4877
Fax: 810-591-4548



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 under Publications tab, then click on the newsletters link. Scroll down to find Perspectives. Publications from past years are also archived there.

Autism Spectrum Disorders DVD Workshops

The Autism Spectrum Disorders DVD Workshops are held the 2nd Tuesday of every month. View topics of upcoming workshops online at www.geneseeisd.org

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

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.

Have a great summer!

