



PERSPECTIVES

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

The 2006-2007 school year is here. As we start the new year, let's try to remember to celebrate diversity. As an individual, take the time to learn something new about individuals with special needs. Look for the good and comment on it. Compliment your peers, friends, family, and especially your students. As everyone has increasing demands it is even more important to take time to reach out. Because this newsletter is about Autism Spectrum Disorders, I would ask that you remember the huge challenges that sensory, academic, and especially social issues create for individuals with ASD and THINK POSITIVE! It can help us all.

Autism Walk

Date: October 14, 2006

Location: Davison at the Jack N. Abernathy Regional Park — Frank Boyce Parkway) Located off Dayton St. and Harvey Dr.)

Registration: 10:00 a.m. — 11:00 a.m.

Walk Begins: 11:00 a.m.

The Regional Park consists of 132 acres, some of which are heavily wooded. The park also includes a playscape, skate park, cleared areas for picnics and sports enthusiasts, pavilions, volleyball, tennis and basketball courts, horseshoe pits, playground area, 18 station fitness trail, 4-field softball complex complete with concession stand, and miles of nature trails.

Reprinted from: www.geneseeautism.org/calendar

I Am Not...An Autistic's Response to Prejudice

I am not an object. Don't talk about me when you are around me unless you are willing to talk to me. I am not a child. Don't make decisions for me — let

me have influence over my own life.

I am not an extension of your ego. Don't make me feel guilty for not acting in a way which reflects best upon your.

I am not a project. Don't think of me as something you are building, God already built me. He doesn't need your help.

I am not a robot. Don't assume I don't have feelings.

I am not (insert famous autistic). I don't think like him/her anymore than you think like John Wayne.

I am not worthless. Don't throw me away when you grow tired of me, but value me, my insights, and my feelings. My life is as important as yours is.

I am not a criminal. Don't lock me up when I haven't done anything wrong, but allow me to walk outside of whatever walls you may think I belong behind.

I am not a monster. Don't stay away from me simply because I do something you don't do; you do things I don't, too.

I am not an experiment. Don't test your theory on me.

I am not a defective. I don't need to be repaired. Allow me to be the person I am.

I am not a puzzle. I don't need to be "put together". You are as puzzling to me

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as I am to you, yet no one calls you a puzzle.

Reprinted from: www.geocities.com

'WOULD I TRADE IN MY AUTISM? NO'

What's it like to have a condition that society calls mysterious? Teenager Taylor Cross asks other autistics to speak up in his surprising new movie

Having a child diagnosed with autism can be one of the most devastating moments in a parent's life. But just one of many things not widely understood about this range of developmental disorders is that not all autistics retreat into a world of silence and isolation. Taylor Cross, diagnosed when he was 6, is today a comic-loving, video-game-playing 17-year-old from Thousand Oaks, Calif. He believes that his disorder, which affects his speech, concentration and personal interactions—hugs feel like "an invasion of space," he says—is simply part of who he is. For his film *Normal People Scare Me*, Cross invited other high-functioning autistics to describe autism from the inside. "The message is hidden in the title," he says. "What the [heck] is normal anyway?"

Normal People Scare Me, Taylor Cross's documentary film about autism (produced by Joey Travolta, John Travolta's older brother), will be shown in a dozen cities in the coming months, including Seattle and Chicago (May), Montreal and Hot Springs, Ark. (October), and Honolulu (December). For more information visit the film's Web site: www.normalfilms.com or www.theautismperspective.org

How About Not 'Curing' Us, Some Autistics Are Pleading

December 20, 2004
By Amy Harmon

BOICEVILLE, N.Y. — Jack Thomas, a 10th grader at a school for autistic teenagers and an expert on the nation's roadways, tore himself away from his satellite map one recent recess period to critique a television program about the search for a cure of

autism.

"We don't have a disease," said Jack, echoing the opinion of the other 15 boys at the experimental Aspie school here in the Catskills. "So we can't be 'cured.' This is just the way we are."

From behind his GameBoy, Justin Mulvaney, another 10th grader, objected to the program's description of people "suffering" from Asperger's syndrome, the form of autism he has.

"People don't suffer from Asperger's," Justin said. "They suffer because they're depressed from being left out and beat up all the time."

That, at least, was what happened to these students at mainstream schools before they found refuge here.

But unlike many programs for autistics, this schools program does not try to expunge the odd social behaviors that often make life so difficult for them. Its unconventional aim is to teach students that it is O.K. to "act autistic" and also how to get by in a world where it is not.

Trained in self-advocacy, students proudly recite the positive traits autism can confer, like the ability to develop uncanny expertise in an area of interest. This year's class includes specialists on supervolcanoes and medieval weaponry.

"Look at Jack," Justin pointed out. "He doesn't even need a map. He's like a living map."

The new program, whose name stands for Autistic Strength, Purpose and Independence in Education - and

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whose acronym is a short form of Asperger's - is rooted in a view of autism as an alternative form of brain wiring, with its own benefits and drawbacks, rather than a devastating disorder in need of curing.

For the rest of this article go to: www.nytimes.com

Tips for Teachers

Kari Shanks Hall, M.A., OTR

Sensory integration is an innate neurobiological process that refers to the interpretation of sensory stimulation from the environment (Ayres, 1979). When a child has a Sensory Processing Disorder, information from the environment and one's own senses are not organized well in the brain. This results in problems in processing information and behaving appropriately for the task at hand. The following tips can help children who are oversensitive to light touch and who need movement to stay organized in the classroom. What's wonderful about these ideas is that they work well for all children and help them attend to and process academic information.

General Classroom Organizational Strategies

- Use graph paper to help organize math problems.
- Provide lined paper for writing assignments.
- Provide pencil grippers for children who have trouble using a mature pencil grasp.
- Remind children to use their non-dominant hand to hold the paper.
- Adjust chairs and tables to the proper height for each child. (Feet should touch the floor. Table height should be just below the child's elbow when the fist rests under the chin.)
- Keep visual and auditory distractions to a minimum.
- If a child presses too hard on the pencil, give him a mechanical pencil.
- Always present information in the child's best modality. Visual, auditory, or multi-sensory learning activities can facilitate understanding and memory.

Children Who are Oversensitive to Light Touch

Children who are sensitive to light, unexpected touch often prefer firm touch/pressure, which helps organize their behavior. Keep the following tips in mind:

- Approach the child from the front to give a visual cue that light touch is coming.
- Use firm pressure to the shoulder or back, rather than a gentle hand placement or a brush to the sleeve, arm, or face.
- Place the child's desk out of traffic, towards the periphery of the room, so that the child has a good view of who is moving and where they are going.
- Seat a small child in an adult's lap or next to a quiet child during a group gathering. Place older children to the side or in back of the group. Crowded places and situations can cause discomfort because of the possibility for unexpected bumps and brushes.
- Put children "in charge" of the back of the line. The back of the line should not be viewed as a punishment, but as a place of worth.

Children Who Need Sensory Input to Stay on Task

Some children are "sensory seekers" and become more organized and attend better to a task if they receive periodic movement input. Some ideas:

- Allow a child to sit on a baffled camping pillow filled with a small amount of air. This allows for movement without leaving the desk.
- Suggest five minutes of swinging or climbing during recess, prior to coming back to class.
- Suggest some rhythmical, sustained movement (e.g., marching, washing desks, or bouncing), which can be organizing to the central nervous system.
- Ask the child to erase the blackboard or run notes to other teachers, to allow him to get some extra movement.
- Use a rocking chair in the classroom for periodic "pick-me-ups."
- Never discipline a "sensory seeker" by taking away recess privileges or physical education — you will intensify the random movements,

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fidgeting, and outbursts.

Some children also need extra sensory input to their mouths and hands in order to organize their behavior, such as:

- Drinking from water bottles kept at desk (send them home weekly to be washed).
- Chewing on a straw, a coffee stir stick, or rubber tubing placed on the end of a pencil.
- Fiddling with something in their hands (keep a bucket or fanny pack of "squeezies" handy; a "squeezie" is a small object that is soft and can fit in the hand, such as a balloon filled with flour, a soft ball, a dog toy, or a koosh ball).
- Hanging by the arms on the monkey bars for 20-30 seconds at a time.
- Pushing/carrying heavy objects (e.g., carrying books, moving desks, or "pushing" against walls).
- Carrying a backpack weighted with books or bags of dried beans (this should be worn for only 15-20 minutes at a time, with an hour or two between wearings).

A reading corner with a bean bag chair makes a wonderful place to escape from too much stimulation and get ready for more focused desk work. Children might enjoy reading or sitting under the bean bag chair more than sitting on it.

Reprinted from: www.spdnetwork.org

Autism Spotted at Age 14 Months

Early Autism Detection Widens Window for Effective Treatment

By Daniel DeNoon
WebMD Medical News

June 2, 2006 -- Autism in children can be detected as early as age 14 months, a new study shows. Autism is rarely diagnosed before a child is 3 years old. Cutting that time in half means less precious time lost in getting autistic children the treatment they urgently need -- when it's likely to do the most good.

The new finding comes from researchers including Rebecca Landa, PhD, director of the center for

autism and related disorders at Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore. Landa tested motor, language, and visual skills in the younger siblings of autistic children. Such children are 100 times more likely to be autistic than other children.

"At 6 months of age, babies with autism were no different than anybody else," Landa tells WebMD. "By 14 months, though, kids with autism are different in both language development and motor control. They are not globally mentally retarded. Whatever is wrong with them, it influences their motor system as well as the development of their language system."

Using tests of motor and language development at age 14 months, Landa says, allowed her to predict autism in 70% of children ultimately diagnosed with the condition. The prediction isn't the same as a diagnosis. But it offers these children a chance for early treatment. And the earlier a child enters autism treatment, the better that child's ultimate outcome.

Autism expert Jana Iverson, PhD, of the University of Pittsburgh, calls the Landa finding "a huge step forward."

"This is a huge improvement in our ability to pick up kids who might be at risk and get them involved in early intervention," Iverson tells WebMD. "Right now, it is hard to get a reliable diagnosis before age 3. Parents feel they are missing really valuable time in getting kids involved in early intervention." Landa and colleague Elizabeth Garrett-Mayer, PhD, of Johns Hopkins University, report their findings in the June issue of the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.

Parent: Child Seemed Normal...

Jennifer Maloni's already had a child with autism. Dominic's odd behavior -- instead of playing with his toy cars, he'd line them up in order of size -- led to a relatively early autism diagnosis at age 21 months. At that time, her second son, Dylan, was 6 months old.

Knowing Dylan was at increased risk of autism, the Mt. Airy, Md., resident enrolled him in Landa's

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study when he was 13 months old. His first evaluation indicated he had autism. By age 18 months, he was diagnosed.

"Dylan was very different from Dominic -- his signs of autism were very, very subtle," Maloni tells WebMD. "If I hadn't had him in a study where they watched him for hours on end, they would not have picked up on it. I was able to get early intervention for him right away."

Autism clearly has a strong genetic component. But genes aren't destiny, Landa says.

"Your brain development isn't just engineered by your genetics. Your experience plays a role in your outcome," Landa says. "So if a toddler isn't attending to social cues and develops these patterns of behavior that make it hard to engage with others, the child isn't getting learning opportunities. It becomes a vicious cycle. We want to disrupt this cycle, to teach children how to engage with objects in diverse ways. We teach them to have joint interactions with people that are rewarding." It isn't easy. Maloni says she tries to engage her sons in social play "every waking moment." But the results are more than rewarding.

"Normal kids, when a parent walks out the door, the child is screaming, and when they come back they are glad to see them. But our children didn't even notice we were gone," Maloni says. "Now we walk through the door and they run over to us. They are happy when we are there and know when we are not there. It is very gratifying."

Spotting at-Risk Kids

Landa says every parent with a family history of autism -- or who suspects that a child may not be developing normally -- should have that child screened for autism by age 18 months if not sooner. "Parents usually just look at whether their child walks on time and talks on time," she says. "They might not pay attention to the kinds of objects a child gravitates toward, or lack of diversity in play, or failure of a child to give and show objects. But if you specifically ask parents about certain behaviors, it can be a wake up call for the parents. That is why I advocate screening."

Autism strikes 1 in every 166 children -- it is not rare. A simple one-page, 23-item questionnaire called the M-CHAT helps identify toddlers who need further testing. The test can be found on the Internet, but Landa warns parents to take the completed test to a health care professional for evaluation. The test is not meant to be scored by the person taking it.

Identifying a 14-month-old child as at risk for autism is not the same as an autism diagnosis, Landa warns. Children vary widely in their speed of development.

"Kids who aren't talking or walking or have developmental delays; children who have problems with social reciprocity, who are not very responsive to having their name called, who are not responsive to silly little teasing games, who are not giving objects to you and giggling with you and playing turn-taking games -- those things are really big red flags," she says. "But developmental fluctuations at this age are not uncommon. So when we talk to parents of children under 24 months of age, we should be talking about social communication delays and risk for autism, rather than laying out a diagnosis at this time."

Reprinted from www.medicinenet.com

Another View

with Linda Hodgdon

3 Essential Communication Skills for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) vary in severity of symptoms, skill level and ability to learn. The number of children identified with ASD continues to soar. The result is an increasing need to provide quality education for more and more students.

By definition, students with autism spectrum disorders have significant challenges in communication skills. Effective communication is a foundation for successful social interaction and appropriate behavior. Therefore, educational

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programming must place a major emphasis on communication training.

Target the skills a student needs to learn most

We need to make sure that we are teaching the most important skills first. Regardless of what training program or educational methodologies that are chosen, we need to teach skills that will make the most difference for students. Communication training should focus on three foundation skills. Competency in these areas will prepare students for more advanced learning.

1. Establishing a Social Connection

One of the most common observations of students with autism is that they do not engage well with other people. It is a myth that all children with autism are 'in a world of their own.' Some are aloof and do avoid social contact. Others may be socially indifferent or disconnected or socially awkward. One of the most important areas to target for teaching is the student's ability to engage with others. That is a foundation for effective communication and successful social participation.

2. Understanding Others

These students have significant challenges in understanding. They can have difficulty understanding the communication of others, interpreting social situations, or understanding the meaning of facial expressions and body language. They may not understand changes in routines or the rules for appropriate behavior.

It is common to hear someone describe a student by saying, 'He understands everything I say.' That is generally not true. Many behavior problems and social skill challenges are the result of a student having difficulty understanding.

Helping students better is a critically important part of communication training. Using **visual strategies** is a highly effective way to give students information, provide structure in their lives, and teach the skills they need to learn.

3. Communicating Wants and Needs

Students must develop an effective, reliable way to let others know what they want and need. We all desire that students learn to talk, but that may not be the first goal. Some behavior challenges can come from the frustration of not being able to communicate effectively. Teaching another form of communication, such as pointing, first can help reduce that frustration.

Remember that communication is more than just speech. An effective communication system includes many forms: pointing, gestures, pictures, written language, and more. Teaching students to use a variety of forms can reduce their frustration and help them communicate more effectively to get their wants and needs met.

Make sure students master the basics. Becoming socially connected, understanding the communication of others and expressing basic wants and needs are the foundation skills for greater social success.

Reprinted from: www.usevisualstrategies.com

Area Youth Entering Painting In Michigan State Fair

By Jan Rynearson

"The King's Yawn," a painting of the head of an immense lion by Jacob Hoffman, 14, of Fenton Township, has been entered in an art exhibit at the Michigan State Fair. He is the son of David and Holly Hoffman. The fair begins Aug. 24 and runs through Sept. 4. The family plans to visit the fair twice during this time.

Although he's done a lot of sketching, this is the first real painting he's accomplished. "It's mixed-media," said Jacob, "watercolor and acrylics. I worked from a photograph of a lion, making all types of changes so it didn't look plagiarized. Altogether, it took about five hours."

A friend and neighbor, Mike Clapp, did the matting and the framing was done by Lovey's of Fenton.

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Conferences

Date	Title & Location	Speakers	Fee	Contact Info
Sep. 26, 2006	The Cognitive World on the Spectrum Autism Support Center Auburn Hills, Michigan	Bill Nason, Psychologist	Varies	www.autismsupportcenter.org 248-276-8132
Oct. 6-9, 2006	DAN — Defeat Autism Now Seattle, Washington	Multiple speakers	Varies	www.DANconference.com 866-208-0207
Oct. 12, 2006	Socially Impaired Children & Adults from A.S. to Social Phobia Novi, Michigan	Davis Goldstein, Ph.D.	Varies	www.pesi.com 800-843-7763
Oct. 20, 2006	Visual Strategies on Tour Detroit, Michigan	Linda Hodgdon	Varies	www.quirkroberts.com/tour 248-879-2598
Oct. 24, 2006	The Emotional World on the Spectrum Auburn Hills, Michigan	Bill Nason, Psychologist	Varies	www.autismsupportcenter.org 248-276-8132
Nov. 8, 2006	Life Strategies: Surviving & Thriving with ASD Grand Rapids, Michigan	Multiple Speakers	\$75	www.thegraycenter.org 616-954-9747
Nov. 16, 2006	Challenging Behavior in Individuals with ASD Detroit, Michigan	Michael Powers, Psy.D.	\$149	www.neei.org Carolyn 413-499-1489, ext. 1

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"I've always liked to draw, but I do almost everything in black and white. I actually like to draw cartoons, fantasy figures and caricatures." A lover of reptiles, he enjoys drawing them, particularly dinosaurs.

Jacob attended Lake Fenton Schools through the fourth grade. Along with his brothers, Dave, 15, Michael, 12, and Andy, 8, he is now homeschooled by his mother and just finished the seventh grade. The family is active at Tyrone Covenant Presbyterian Church.

Diagnosed as being autistic at the age of 3, he was 7 before he could maneuver a pencil properly.

When the Hoffmans realized Jake's emerging artistic ability, they encouraged it and this last year Jason Bellinger has been tutoring him in art.

What's his next project? He is going to do a special painting for a member of his family as a Christmas gift, which he will be starting soon.

After being interviewed, the talented boy quickly sketched a dinosaur in a matter of minutes. He

worked intensely, creating the creature.

Reprinted from Tri-County Times, Sunday, August 20, 2006, Page 21A

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.

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 the past 2 years are also archived there.

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Autism Spectrum Support Group

Date: Thursday, November 2, 2006
Place: GISD, Special Education Services Center-North (SESC-N)
GenNet room
5075 Pilgrim Road
Flint, Michigan 48507
Phone: 810-591-4494
Time: 6:00 p.m.



A panel of parents of children with ASD will share their experiences and insights. Come ask questions and share your stories.

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

Support Groups

- × Autism Support Group of Genesee County:
www.geneseeaautism.org
- × Autism Support Group in Flushing: Christina Franklin (810) 732-1776
- × Linden Community Schools Support Group for parents & guardians of children with an autism

spectrum disorder: Moilanen (810) 591-9138 or 591-0708, Nyman (810) 591-9174

- × ASA/Oakland County Chapter Events:
www.asaoakland.org
- × Jack's Place for Autism: www.oakland.edu (click site map, then centers)

Autism Spectrum Disorders DVD Workshop

Autism Spectrum Disorders and the SCERTS Model

Date: October 10, 2006
Place: GISD, SESC-N—GenNet Room
Time: 4:00 p.m. to approx. 5:45 p.m.

Dr. Barry Prizant presents a comprehensive approach to enhance social communication and socio-emotional abilities for children with ASD. This research-based model is applicable to classroom, home, and community environments for children in early intervention and through elementary school. It provides an overview and demonstrates the model's application for 2 different populations.