

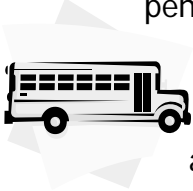


# PERSPECTIVES

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

## SUN News

In our area of West Michigan, school children, parents, school staff, and retailers are gearing up for the back-to-school season. Store aisles are filled with shoppers gathering notebooks, binders, pencils, calculators, and crayons.



Teachers are designing bulletin boards and preparing lesson plans. Custodians are polishing floors even as administrators finalize calendars and other details. Families are fitting in last-minute vacations and outings before their children head back into the classroom.

For students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), "back to school" may generate either excitement as they anticipate a return to a comfortable routine (for many, the lack of structure during a vacation can be very difficult), or apprehension as they contemplate new, and perhaps unknown, details such as schedules, classmates, teachers, and more.

Following are just a few suggestions for helping students ease back into the school routine after a summer (or other) break:

1. Start the routine before it's needed. Don't wait until the night before school starts to set an earlier bedtime (or an earlier wake-up time the next morning). Begin easing into the school schedule a couple of weeks before school starts. And consider adding other elements that will be present once school starts, perhaps breakfast at an earlier time, and some late afternoon "homework--working on flashcards,



creative writing, etc. as a way of getting prepared for academic pursuits.

2. Provide students with as much information as possible about the upcoming transition. Can you visit the classroom and meet the teacher? Have a play-date with one or two new classmates? Practice getting on and off a school bus? Drive the route from home to school (and back)? Get a copy of the schedule, and help familiarize the student with it? This type of information--especially the hands-on variety--can ease a lot of anxiety and prepare students for what lies ahead.

3. Enlist necessary assistance. Do you need to write a letter to your child's teacher to help that person better understand your child? Perhaps you can discuss your child's sensory needs with an occupational therapist to line up some strategies for dealing with increased sensory difficulties with the return to school. Are there other parents who can provide valuable information about the school routine, or strategies they've used to help their children acclimate to a new school year?

I'm sure that many of you reading this article have additional suggestions for easing back into the school routine. I hope you'll share those on our blog at



### Inside this issue:

Legos & Autism Therapy	2
Autism the Way I See it	3
Bullying in School	4
Activities for Downtime	5
Conferences	7

www.graycenter.wordpress.com. Other readers will benefit from your experience and creative ideas!

Reprinted from www.thegraycenter.org

**OUCARES**  
**Oakland University**  
**Center for Autism Research, Education and Support**

Annual Family Fun Day



When: Saturday, October 4, 2008  
12:00 p.m.—4:00 p.m.

Where: Oakland University Recreation Center

- ☺ Information fair with over 20 agencies
- ☺ Moonwalks
- ☺ Interactive activities for the entire family
- ☺ Art, Games Fun!

☺ Sensory Room staffed by Kaufman Children's Center

☺ Caricatures

☺ Swimming from 12:00-2:00 (bring your own towel)

☺ Form more information visit us at [www.oakland.edu/oucares](http://www.oakland.edu/oucares) or call 248-370-2424



## Legos—a Building Block in Autism Therapy

"They're willing to be social creatures — as long as they can get this Lego thing built," said aptly named Daniel "Dr. Dan" Legoff, pediatric neuropsychologist.

About 15 years ago, during post-doctoral training in Honolulu, Legoff noticed that his autistic patients, most of them boys, ignored a playroom full of toys — except for Legos. A hallmark of autism is an obsessive dedication to one or two interests or activities — typically involving taxonomies, mechanical systems, hierarchies.



"A couple kids came with Lego creations they made at home," Legoff recalled. "In the waiting room, these kids started talking to one another, which surprised their parents. These are kids that don't have any friends because they're socially rejected or isolated." Thus was born the Lego Club.

To force communication and collaboration, Legoff assigned rotating roles. The "engineer's" design had to be acceptable to the "builder," who had to get parts from the "supplier."

Jonathan's year-old group, one of eight at the center in Voorhees, has reached the club's premier level — "master builder" — so now members devote their sessions to producing stop-action videos. These are shown at the Lego Club's annual "film festival," attended by adoring fans (relatives).

"I feel bringing Lewis here has brought him out of himself," said Karen Roberts, mother of one of the filmmakers. "He's loved Legos since he was a tiny kid. But before this, he didn't really socialize a lot."

Lynda Shanahan, Jonathan's mother, said: "I wouldn't say he has dramatically changed since coming here. The diagnosis is like layers; Peel away one problem and another comes up. But I have seen growth. This has helped him get a group of friends where he fits in. It's built his self-esteem." Legoff has published two

### PERSPECTIVES

A publication of GISD's Special Education Services Center

Jan D. Russell  
Assistant Superintendent  
Special Education Services

Compiled by  
Becky Downing  
Teacher Consultant  
for Autism Spectrum Disorders

Layout & Design  
Text Processing  
Patti Dombrowski

### GENESEE INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Thomas Svitkovich, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
2413 West Maple Avenue  
Flint, MI 48507-3493  
(810) 591-4400  
TDD (810) 591-4545

[www.geneseeisd.org](http://www.geneseeisd.org)

studies of its effectiveness in medical journals. He has given presentations to several school districts. And he has done collaborative research on the methodology with Simon Baron-Cohen, a distinguished psychologist at Cambridge University's Autism Research Centre in England. In a small study submitted for journal publication, Baron-Cohen and colleagues found Lego therapy more effective than a better-known social skills intervention at reducing autistic behavior. It also was better at improving social interaction on the playground, apart from the therapy group.

Reprinted from gardengalval. Thanks!

## MakeBeliefsComix.com



Free [www.makebeliefscomix.com](http://www.makebeliefscomix.com). The simple comic strip really isn't so simple. It can help children and adults share their ideas. It's a therapy tool

to help the deaf and the autistic communicate. It's a resource to encourage writing skills and to practice vocabulary or storytelling skills. And it all comes together at this site, where you choose a human or animal character, pick their mood, fill in a talk or thought balloon (in English or Spanish), and—boom—you have comic strip. Created by author Bill Zimmerman and illustrator Tom Bloom, this site is creative fun for all ages.

## Keyless Lock

[www.independentliving.com](http://www.independentliving.com) The Keyless Lock is a push button padlock. There is not a turning a dial. Just punch the number code in. \$5.95.

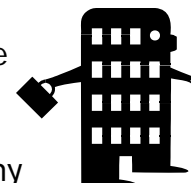
## Autism the Way I See It Missing Brain Circuits in Autism

By Temple Grandin

Professionals in the field often refer to autism as an "information processing" disorder. Many

individuals on the spectrum do exhibit difficulties in taking in, processing and then utilizing information. When talking with parents I like to explain brain functioning using the following analogy, to help them gain a basic understanding of some fascinating new research that is uncovering how our thinking and information processing occurs.

The normal brain is like a big corporate office building. On the top floor is the CEO's office and then all the other departments are housed on the different floors of the building, such as accounting, advertising, sales, operations, and research. Each department has many communication connections within itself, and to other departments via telephone, fax, email and text messaging. The CEO's office has connections to every department in the building so it can oversee and manage the workings of the various departments.



The CEO's office is analogous to the frontal cortex in the brain. Researchers refer to disorders in the frontal cortex as "executive function" problems, impairing an individual's ability to process and organize information, create plans and sequences and to be flexible in their execution, to self-regulate responses, and achieve goals.

Research by Eric Courchesne in San Diego has shown that many of the long-distance circuits that connect the frontal cortex to other parts of the brain fail to develop. The local circuits within each brain 'department' are normal, but circuits BETWEEN brain departments are abnormal.

Dr. Courchesne explains that there are two types of brain tissue: grey matter and white matter. Grey matter is the brain's information processing circuits while white matter is the "computer cables" that connect the different localized brain departments together. The white

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

matter 'cables' may grow in tangles instead of connecting different regions together. Courchesne has seen that the frontal cortex is the most affected area and the back of the brain, where memories are stored, is often normal.



If only a limited number of good "computer cables" are available, this may explain the tendency of the autistic brain to specialize. One area gets the "inter-departmental" connections and others do not. For instance, a local area for visual thinking in math may get extra connections. This lack of inter-connectivity between regions may explain why individuals with autism have problems integrating information. When one reads a word or speaks a word different areas of the brain are used. In normal brains, these different areas have communication lines between them, so the individual is able to 'seamlessly' read-process-speak without impairment.

The great variability of strengths and weaknesses in autism and Asperger's Syndrome may be a factor of which areas of the brain are connected with the few good "computer cables." More severely impaired individuals with autism may have fewer good "cables", while high-functioning individuals may have more typical amounts of white matter, and hence, a better system of connectivity between the different parts of the brain. Further research is warranted, but eventually we may be able to predict the severity of autism by the degree of white matter abnormality.

Reprinted from [www.autismdigest.com](http://www.autismdigest.com) January - February 2006

## Bullying in School

### Details of the study

Research Autism is the only charity in the UK to fund and promote research into interventional

treatments and therapies that enhance the quality of life of those on the autistic spectrum and their families. Identifying risk factors for bullying is considered an important focus of research for Research Autism because bullying is a common experience for many people with autism. Prior to this study, it was estimated that at least 40% of children on the autistic spectrum experience bullying during their school years, results from this study show that bullying could be far more common for people with AS/HFA.

The research project was led by Dr. Paul Naylor and Professor Digby Tantam both of the School of Health & Related Research (SchARR) at the University of Sheffield. Between April 2006 and November 2007, the research team interviewed 57 children in the Sheffield area – 30 of whom have been diagnosed with AS/HFA. The research showed that 90% of the 30 children with



AS/HFA reported being bullied, compared to 56% of other pupils and 87% of children with AS/HFA reported that they were bullied at least once a week, compared to 56% of other pupils. The research also highlighted important behaviour patterns which might be linked to bullying and social isolation, such as the pupils with AS/HFA engaged in fewer social interactions during the school day – inside and outside of lessons – and often spent break and lunch times inside the school in quieter spaces supervised by adults. The pupils with AS/HFA also reported having far fewer friends and were less physically active.

Upon completion of this study, the research team concluded that social isolation and bullying may be higher amongst pupils with AS/HFA for a variety of reasons, including possessing poor communication skills and being less physically active due to poor motor coordination skills. Ultimately, the research team felt that more research is needed to examine the risk factors for bullying by peers that pupils with AS/HFA

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

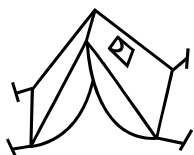
face compared to other pupils and how best to intervene to prevent bullying.

As a result of the first stage of this research into bullying amongst young people with AS/HFA, Research Autism hopes that researchers move closer to understanding the key risk factors for this group of people and that the appropriate steps are taken to prevent bullying being such a common experience for those on the autistic spectrum.

Reprinted from [www.researchautism.net](http://www.researchautism.net)

## Activities for Downtime

Whether its school vacation or you simply have nothing to do, finding activities to occupy your child during downtime can be a challenging task. Try out some of these popular activities used by parents of special needs kids. The activities are fun and will easily occupy and entertain your child.



### Make a tent

Get a bunch of sheets and blankets and throw them over some tables and chairs. You can make the tent dark or light by altering the amount of blankets and sheets you use. Your child will need very little encouragement to make his tent! This activity is an all time favorite with kids. There are lots of things that can go in a tent, blankets on the floor, flash lights, books, a snack, stuffed animals. Your child also might need plastic cups, plates and a pillow to rest on. Perhaps there are wild animals outside the tent such as lions or domestic ones such as dogs. Help your child find them and place them outside his tent. This activity is excellent for expanding a child's imagination and encouraging pretend play.

### Household hunt

This activity takes a little bit of time to prepare but is well worth it. It's fun for kids and teaches

them organization skills they need in the home. All you need is a digital camera, a printer and plastic bin. Get your digital camera and take pictures of lots of items in your house.



Examples are your child's bed, the living room sofa, the TV, the dining table, the bread bin, etc. Load the pictures on your computer and print them out. Now walk around your house and collect household items such as teaspoons, toothpaste, socks, small toys, etc. Hide each one of these items in a place you took a picture of, such as your child's bed. Now it's time to explain the rules to your child. Show him the stack of photos and tell him there's something hidden in each of those places. Allow him to take one photo at a time for his household hunt. Each time he finds something, he should return that photo to you and place the item in the plastic bin. When he's found all the items, it's time to use his organization skills. Tell him to take one item at a time and place it where it belongs. Socks go in the sock drawer, toothpaste in the bathroom, spoons in the kitchen drawer, etc. This hunt is lots of fun and a great way to teach children about the space they live in.

### Water play

Children love playing with water and activities involving water is always fun. Set up a washing day! This is loads of fun. Allow children to put on their bathing suits or shorts and go in the yard. Fill three large buckets, one with soapy water and two with clear water. Have lots of sponges and towels available. Now bring out all those things your child can wash. Some ideas are plastic lawn furniture such as chairs and tables, small bicycles and scooters, trucks and any plastic toys they can safely wash. Allow them to sponge it down with soapy water, rinse it in with clear water and lay it out in the grass to dry. You can add to the fun by including containers of different shapes and sizes, water wheels, sieves, funnels and a toy fishing rod with plastic fish to catch.



(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

### **Pizza cheese faces**

This simple activity is lots of fun for kids and it's really simple to prepare.

The ingredients you need are as follows:

- ⌘ Pizza dough or white pita bread
- ⌘ Pizza sauce
- ⌘ Grated mozzarella cheese
- ⌘ Slices of yellow cheese such as cheddar or American cheese
- ⌘ Optional: pineapple, mushrooms, carrots, olives or any type of veggie that your child eats.



Lightly grease a baking sheet and place the pizza dough or pita bread on the sheet. Place all the ingredients on the table and tell your child to take his spoon and dip it in the sauce. Allow him to spread sauce over his pita bread or pizza dough. Now it's time to sprinkle grated mozzarella cheese on his pizza face. Once that is done, it's time to decorate. Use blocks of cheddar or American cheese for eyes, a mouth, eyebrows, a nose and cheeks. Place more pizza sauce on top of the cheese for cheeks. If your child eats vegetables such carrots or fruits such as pineapple, use these on the pizza for decorating. Create a hat by cutting a triangle piece of pita bread or pizza dough and placing it above the round pizza face. Decorate the hat in the same way as the face. Now pop it in the oven at 350 degrees for about 15 minutes. Set the timer and encourage your child to keep checking how much time is left. When the pizza is ready, it's time to eat!

### **Tackle that skill**

We all know we should teach our kids certain things but we just can't face it. Whether it's tying shoes, telling time, doing up a zipper or brushing teeth, the thought of it brings tremendous guilt. You're not alone! We've all tried teaching our children skills with no results. Our enthusiasm waned with each blank stare. Skills can be tough to teach and sometimes kids just aren't ready to learn certain things. We all know you have to learn to walk before you can

run. But you never know when that something might click. Summon up the courage and try again. Pick something you haven't worked on in a while. Your child doesn't have to master the whole goal, just the first steps. If you're trying to teach skills such as tying shoe laces or brushing teeth, take a look at our video modeling series. The songs and video modeling will help greatly. If you're teaching reciprocal conversation, use our conversation starters and follow the easy instructions. Whatever you decide to tackle, remember your child will get it! It just takes patience and persistence.

### **Independent healthy snacks**

Create healthy snack bags. The first step is to create the snack container. Get plastic containers that are a suitable size for snacks. Now it's time to decorate. Use markers, stickers, glitter, paint, photos or anything that appeals to your child. Let them decorate their snack box to their hearts content. Encourage them to write their name on it. When the snack box is complete, it's time to fill it with healthy snacks. Use a shelf in your kitchen cabinet that's within easy reach of your child and fill it with healthy snack choices. Examples include raisins, apple sauce, cereal bags and granola bars. Tell your child to pick two or three things from the snack shelf and put it in his snack container. If your child eats fruit, encourage him to take a fruit from the fruit basket and include it in his container. Make a special place where your child will keep his snack container. When it's time for a snack, your child will independently pick a snack from his container. Each morning help your child choose his snack choices. It won't be long till he does it independently.



### **Video day**

Your kids need some downtime and so do you. Take a trip to your local library or video store and rent lots of DVDs that your kids will enjoy. Pick up some books on tape where your child can follow along with the story.



(Continued on page 7)

## Conferences

Date	Title & Location	Speakers	Fee	Contact Info
OUCARES Fall Program Basketball, Cartooning, Drawing, Martial Arts, Adult Social, Parent Discussion Group, Soccer, Baseball, Music, Social Skills				www.oakland.edu/oucares 248-370-2424
Oct. 1, 2008	START—Para Educator Training GISD	Laura Gualdoni, Caroline Truss, Becky Finkle	\$20	www.geneseeisd.org 810-591-4877
Oct. 7, 2008	START—Educational Strategies for Students with ASD GISD	Colleen Brown & Michelle Grifka	\$30	www.geneseeisd.org 810-591-4877
Oct. 10, 2008	Autism Spectrum Disorders Gratiot/Isabella RESD	Kathy Johnson Lori Swann	Varies	www.autism-mi.org 800-223-6722
Oct. 16, 2008	Autism Spectrum Disorders Calhoun ISD	Kathy Johnson Lori Swann	Varies	www.autism-mi.org 800-223-6722
Oct. 17, 2008	Revised Guidelines & Criteria for Social Stories The Gray Center	Carol Gray	\$45	www.thegraycenter.org
Oct. 20, 2008	Behavior, Curriculum, Person Centered Planning, Accommodations & Modifications Marquette-Alger ISD	Multiple	Varies	www.autism-mi.org 800-223-6722
Oct. 24, 2008	Visual Supports/Peer Awareness Muskegon Area ISD	Kathy Johnson Lori Swann	Varies	www.autism-mi.org 800-223-6722
Oct. 29, 2008	Gluten Free & Milk Free Cooking Lake Fenton High School \$15 for supplies	Marjie Andrejciw, MT	\$40	Southern Lakes Parks & Recreation 810-591-0080
Nov. 3, 2008	Parapro Training Macomb ISD	Anne Carpenter Kathy Johnson	Varies	www.autism-mi.org 800-223-6722
Nov. 12, 2008	Gluten Free & Milk Free Cooking Lake Fenton High School \$15 for supplies	Marjie Andrejciw, MT	\$40	Southern Lakes Parks & Recreation 810-591-0080
Nov. 12, 2008	Social Skills & Differentiating Instruction Detroit	Jed Baker Paula Kluth	Varies	920-749-0332 www.spectrumtrainingsystemsinc.com
Nov. 14, 2008	Parapro Training Livingston ESA	Anne Carpenter Kathy Johnson	Varies	www.autism-mi.org 800-223-6722
Mar. 30-31, 2009	Sensory Processing Disorder Clinton County RESA	Dr. Lucy Jane Miller	\$295	www.ccesa.org 989-224-6831

(Continued from page 6)

Even better, allow your child to watch our video modeling series and turn this into a productive, learning experience. Don't forget the popcorn! Then pop the movies into the DVD player and take this time for you. Whether you do household chores or simply kick your feet up and relax, you deserve



some time for yourself too!

Reprinted from [www.nlconcepts.com](http://www.nlconcepts.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



---

## Support Groups

- × Autism Support Group of Genesee County:  
[www.geneseeautism.org](http://www.geneseeautism.org)
- × Advocates for Autism (formerly Flushing Support Group) meet the 2nd Tuesday of each month at North Baptist Church, 4004 Lennon Rd. Contact Cris at 810-732-1776 or Valerie at 810-659-7004
- × ASA/Oakland County Chapter Events:  
[www.asaoakland.org](http://www.asaoakland.org)
- × Jack's Place for Autism: [www.oakland.edu](http://www.oakland.edu)  
(click site map, then centers)
- × Mott Children's Health Center Parent Empowerment Program for parents and caregivers of newly diagnosed or suspected ASD. Karen Shoemaker 767-5750, ext. 5292

## Websites

- 🔗 Autism Society of America: [www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)
  - 🔗 Autism Society of Michigan: [www.autism-mi.org](http://www.autism-mi.org)
  - 🔗 ASA Oakland County Chapter:  
[www.asaoakland.org](http://www.asaoakland.org)
  - 🔗 Dr. Tony Attwood: [www.tonyattwood.com](http://www.tonyattwood.com)
  - 🔗 On-line Asperger's Information and Support-OASIS: [www.aspergersyndrome.org](http://www.aspergersyndrome.org)
  - 🔗 The Gray Center: [www.TheGrayCenter.org](http://www.TheGrayCenter.org)
  - 🔗 Liane Holliday-Willey: [www.ASPIE.com](http://www.ASPIE.com)
  - 🔗 Free pictures of visual schedules, etc.:  
[www.usevisualstrategies.com](http://www.usevisualstrategies.com)
  - 🔗 Picture Exchange Communication System:  
[www.pecs.com](http://www.pecs.com)
  - 🔗 TEACCH: [www.teacch.com](http://www.teacch.com)
-