



PERSPECTIVES

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

More Students with Asperger Syndrome Going to College

Some schools have programs to help autistic students
By Thea Trachtenberg

Like many of his high school classmates, Robby Cvejanovich is trying to decide which college to attend this fall. While Cvejanovich is concerned about picking a school with a good zoology program, his parents are anxious about what will happen outside the classroom as their autistic son transitions into college life.



"I am very nervous because Robby is the most honest and trusting person I have ever known. He doesn't understand that people can lie. He doesn't understand why people lie," said his mother, Beth

Cvejanovich.

The issue is not limited to the Cvejanoviches. As scores of autistic young adults enter universities for the first time, colleges across the country are trying to find ways to deal with the first generation of Asperger's students to hit campuses in large numbers.

A decade ago the idea of Asperger's students — who have a mild and high functioning form of autism that is characterized by social isolation — working their way through a four-year college may have seemed impossible.

But today, with early diagnosis and therapy, an influx of students across the autistic spectrum are heading off to college and the schools are trying quickly to adapt. Marshall University has one of the few programs in the country specifically for those with Asperger's syndrome.

"If you attend two classes for 50 minutes a day, the

rest of your day is spent on campus. So it's that community that is hard to navigate many times — to know where to go to feel safe or where to go to get support — and that's where our program really fits in," said program coordinator Marc Ellison.

The university has graduate students who work daily with the 14 students in its Asperger's program to review assignments and help with classroom etiquette. "They have levels of anxiety or stress that prevent them many times from coming in and seeking help," Ellison said.

Autistic students also have weekly life skills meetings. Though programs like Marshall University's are rare and small, other schools are beginning similar curriculums.

Reprinted from www.abcnews.go.com

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

I was diagnosed with myopia when I was in fifth grade. That means that until I received my prescription glasses, I was able to read my textbook close-up, but not the chalkboard in front of the room. I've worn corrective lenses ever since to help me see things far away.



A funny thing happened last time I went to the eye doctor. Well, I'll admit it doesn't feel very funny. It seems that in the process of aging, I am now on the brink of needing bifocals, since I'm no longer nearsighted nor farsighted! The fact that I

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find it difficult to read books or my computer screen while wearing glasses proves the doctor's point. I'm now shopping for a pair of interim reading glasses.

It has struck me that there's a hidden truth here related to social understanding. Many of us have "social myopia." We can readily see what we do well, but tend to be blinded to the gifts and abilities of others. Or perhaps on the flip side, we think we're the only ones who feel overwhelmed, sad, frustrated, financially pinched, etc., while overlooking the fact that many others feel the same way.

As we examine the process of social understanding, we can sometimes find a need for "social reading glasses." These would help with our tendency to see things "my way--in a somewhat distorted version of reality where neither our own abilities/challenges nor those of others are seen with great clarity or accuracy.

Obtaining "social corrective lenses" may not be as simple as driving to the nearest drugstore, yet it need not be overly difficult. Here are a few steps to head us in the right direction:

1. Recognize the problem. Identify in yourself one or two areas which could use improvement (if we're honest, there are usually at least that many)
2. Distance yourself. When I was 13, my mom's complaint that her "arms were too short" seemed both strange and funny. Sorry, Mom--I'm not laughing anymore! Without reading glasses, I find that I also have to hold small print farther away in order to be able to read it. Sometimes we need to take a real or imaginary step back from a social situation in order to see it, understand it, and respond to it more effectively
3. Keep learning. Ask questions of the people with whom you live and work--without assuming you already know the answers Attempt to get to know them and to see things from their perspective. Utilize resources such as "The Hidden Curriculum" (Brenda Smith Myles--available at www.thegraycenter.org) to better understand the social information that those with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may be missing, and how you can help.

A glance at a dictionary confirms that "myopia" is

"nearsightedness; a condition of the eye when objects are seen distinctly only when near the eye." However, a second definition is this: "lack of foresight or discernment." Now there's a social point to ponder!

Best wishes for improved social foresight and discernment, which will likely benefit both you and those with whom you live and work!

Laurel Hoekman, Executive Director
The Gray center for Social Learning and Understanding www.thegraycenter.org

If you live near Zeeland, Michigan, we'd love to tell you more about The Gray Center, and get your feedback concerning what we could do to help you. You'll also receive a FREE GIFT just for participating! (Details available at www.thegraycenter.org)

Reprinted from www.thegraycenter.org

New Book about Asperger Syndrome and Alcohol

By Carin Yavorcik

Title offers coping strategies

Asperger Syndrome and Alcohol exposes the unexplored problem of people with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) using alcohol as a coping mechanism to deal with everyday life. Alcohol can relieve the anxiety of social situations and make those with ASDs feel as though they can fit in. Ultimately, however, reliance on alcohol can lead the user down a path of self-destruction and exacerbate existing problems.

PERSPECTIVES

A publication of GISD's Special Education Services Center

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Utilizing their professional and personal experience, the authors Matthew Tinsley and Sarah Hendrickx provide an overview of ASDs and alcohol abuse, and explore current knowledge about where the two overlap. Tinsley explores his own personal history as someone with an ASD who has experienced and beaten alcohol addiction. He discusses how the impact of his diagnosis and his understanding of the condition played a huge part in his recovery, and how by viewing his life through the prism of autism, his confusion has been replaced by greater understanding of himself and the world around him.

Reprinted from www.autism-society.org

MU Researchers Hope to Design Formula for Earlier Autism Detection

By Carin Yavorcik

Study looks at facial structures, brain abnormalities

University of Missouri researchers are studying 3-D imaging to reveal correlations in the facial features and brain structures of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which they hope will enable them to develop a formula for earlier detection of the disorder.

Ye Duan, assistant computer science professor in the MU College of Engineering, is working in collaboration with researchers at the MU Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders to create a facial imaging system that will make identical measurements of the faces of children with ASD. In conjunction with these efforts the researchers are studying 3-D imaging of various segments of the brain in children with ASD, which allows them to compare the brain structures of children with autism to their typically developing peers.

"Once we have created a formula, we can pre-screen children by performing a quick, non-invasive scan of each child's face and brain to check for abnormalities. Early detection is crucial in treating children and preparing families," said Duan in a release.

Reprinted from www.autism-society.org

Developing Academic Accommodations to Promote Successful Inclusion

By Stephen Shore

Introduction

Accommodations. The word can strike fear into the hearts and minds of the most seasoned educator. Both teachers of neurotypical students and those with special needs are often challenged when asked to make changes for the special learners in their charge. Regular education teachers are especially challenged, if on top of educating 25-30 neurotypical children, they are then asked to make modifications for special education students. To make matters worse, often these students suddenly appear in their classrooms without much warning or time for preparation.

There is good news, however, because it is possible to classify academic accommodations into groups, thereby simplifying the task of accommodating the student with special needs. In fact, I have found that most accommodations are actually extensions of good teaching practices. For example, I once provided a student with autism in my computer class with an advance organizer. So, before each class I wrote a list of activities for that day on the board. My sense is that every student would benefit from knowing what the day's lesson will cover!

I have found it useful to classify accommodations under nine different domains (Deschenes, Ebeling, and Sprague, 1994). Categorizing academic accommodations into these domains makes it easier for me (and I suspect others) to choose the accommodations that best match the students' needs and abilities. Below I shall describe and provide examples of accommodations in each of these areas.

Nine Domains of Academic Accommodations

These areas of accommodation have been adapted from the work of Deschenes, Ebeling, and Sprague (1994), and appear in *Understanding Autism for Dummies* (Shore & Rastelli, 2006), as well. The following domains provide a nice framework for

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systematically approaching the task of selecting appropriate accommodations for students with special needs:

1. Size
2. Time
3. Level of Support
4. Input
5. Difficulty
6. Output
7. Participation
8. Alternate Activity
9. Substitute Curriculum

...students on the autism spectrum have challenge with executive function. Often, just assigning intermediate deadlines is enough to help the student manage the assignment.

Size. Adapt the number of items the student is expected to learn or complete. For example, an instructor could reduce the number of spelling words that must be learned in a given period of time. Instead of testing on 20 new spelling words each Friday, consider reducing the requirements to 10 new items. Another possibility might be to split the spelling quiz into two parts with 10 words on Tuesday and the rest on Friday.

Time. Adjust the time allotted for learning, task completion, or testing. Consider developing an individualized timeline for the student. Some parts of the task may be learned faster or slower than what is normally expected. Many students on the autism spectrum have challenges with executive function. This means that they have difficulties in scheduling subtasks for the completion of long-term assignments. Often, just assigning intermediate deadlines is enough to help the student manage the assignment.

Level of Support. This type of accommodation involves gauging the amount of additional support a student needs to accomplish a task. My wife, a music teacher, will often request (never demand!) students who are excelling at a concept if they would like to help children needing assistance. Three immediate benefits arise when children engage as peer buddies, teaching assistants, peer tutors, or otherwise help their classmates. First, the students helping others gain a firmer grasp of the subject matter as they think about how to explain it to their classmates. Second, the students being taught may actually learn

faster from peers close to their own age than from their teachers. Finally, students have more of an opportunity to form friendships, as people with and without learning differences, as they discover that they are more alike than different from each other.

Input. Adapt the way in which instruction is delivered to the learner. Although most people on the autism spectrum are visually based, others may be kinesthetically oriented, or may favor other senses for receiving input. Using different visual aides, concrete examples, hands-on activities, and/or group work may help children on the autism spectrum to take in information more successfully. Whatever the learning style of the student with autism happens to be, it will probably be to one extreme or another, making it more difficult for them to use other modes of input that do not relate directly to their preferred modes.

Difficulty. Here the idea is to match the skill level of the child to the challenge of the work. For example, some children with autism may need to use a calculator for arithmetic operations that others have memorized. While it may be ideal for students to be able to perform certain mathematical functions in their heads, being able to accurately use a calculator is better than having no math skills at all. Additionally, these students may learn how to perform these functions in their heads later on, with more time in on the task.

For a long time I had great difficulty learning multiplication and division tables. As a result I “cheated” by using a slide rule type of contraption for multiplication. Soon I learned that I could come up with the answers to division problems by using the device in reverse. After using this device for several months, I eventually learned my multiplication and division tables through the sheer repetition of using it.

Output. There are many ways for students to demonstrate their mastery of the material covered in class. For example, instead of writing, a student might use a computer keyboard. Other alternatives might include giving verbal responses, pointing to correct answers in a multiple choice format, or even

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drawing "mind maps" of the material.

Participation. This area concerns the student's *meaningful* involvement in a task. For example, suppose a student with special needs is included in a chorus class. On its face, because of the challenges the student faces, it may appear that this is not a good inclusion decision, since instead of standing still with the other students and singing, he or she paces about the room. Additionally, instead of singing the student tends to yell in a loud monotone. I once worked with a teacher who faced this very situation. Instead of thinking of all of the reasons *not* to include the student, this very creative teacher gave the student a flag matching the country that the song was about. By so doing the teacher addressed the student's need to pace, her challenges in singing with the group, and the need for meaningful participation. Hopefully, at a future time, the student will be able to join the chorus as a singing member. But for now, this student was *meaningfully* included in the class.

Alternative Activity. It may become necessary to modify the goals or outcome expectations while still using the same materials. For example, a student may learn geography right alongside his or her classmates, but may only be required to locate the states in America, whereas the others may be required to learn the capitals as well. Possibly, this student with special needs can eventually learn the capitals too, but it may take longer, since the information may have to be presented/tested in

Inclusion, just like autism itself, exists on a spectrum, meaning that it is not an all or nothing proposition.	smaller chunks.
	Substitute Curriculum. In this case, students are provided with different instruction and materials to meet their needs. The student's individual goals,

however, remain aligned with the curriculum. For example, if the student has great difficulty with the physical act of writing, he or she may spend some of the time learning keyboarding skills on a computer. It is important not to let this domain turn into "geographical" inclusion. By this I mean inclusion in which a child with special needs is in the same room as the regular education students, but working on an

entirely different topic that has nothing to do with the goals of the class. For example, in a class I observed, a student was working on a project using PECS with an aide. Occasionally, the student would make a noise that distracted the other students from their studies. The regular education teacher would then have to redirect the class. When this type of thing happens the regular education students get a negative impression of the student with autism. This does not serve the student (or inclusion) well.



Conclusion

Inclusion, just like autism itself, exists on a spectrum, meaning that it is not an all or nothing proposition. It can range from 100% placement in a regular classroom, with an aide at key times to provide support, to participating in half a class session once a week, with many other combinations in between. In some cases, it may not be possible to engage a student with autism (or one with other special needs) in a regular education class until proper supports can be worked out. With careful attention paid to the needs of the child, however, and with support for regular education teachers, it should be possible to find a way to include most children with special needs at least some of the time. The accommodations outlined in this article can go a long way toward helping to bring this about. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the goal is that of *meaningful* involvement for the person with special needs. The importance of this goal cannot be overstated, since inclusion is successful when *both* children with special needs and those who are neurotypical benefit from the interactive classroom experience.

BIO

Diagnosed with "Atypical Development with strong autistic tendencies" Stephen Shore was viewed as "too sick" to be treated on an outpatient basis and recommended for institutionalization. Nonverbal until four, and with much help from his parents, teachers, and others, Stephen Shore is now completing his doctoral degree in special education at Boston University with a focus on helping people on the autism spectrum develop their capacities to the fullest

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extent possible.

In addition to working with children and talking about life on the autism spectrum, Stephen presents and consults internationally on adult issues pertinent to education, relationships, employment, advocacy, and disclosure as discussed in his books *Beyond the Wall: Personal Experiences with Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, *Ask and Tell: Self-advocacy and Disclosure for People on the Autism Spectrum*, and the newly released *Understanding Autism for Dummies*.

A board member of the Autism Society of America and president emeritus of the Asperger's Association of New England, Stephen serves for the Board of Directors for Unlocking Autism, the Autism Services Association of Massachusetts, MAAP, and the College Internship Program.

Reprinted from Autism Spectrum Quarterly, Spring 2007

Helping Police Officers Understand the Autistic

By Tina Kelley

BRICK TOWNSHIP, N.J. — An autistic boy is discovered standing in the middle of a busy road, on his way to the beach. A young girl with autism outsmarts a number of locks, leaves the house before her mother wakes up and is found, naked but alive, in a neighbor's pool.

At a recent training for police officers here, both cases illustrated the often delicate task of dealing with people who suffer from autism, a devastating neurological disorder that often strikes in childhood and that impairs one's ability to communicate and to relate to others.

In the training, the officers were taught that turning off flashing lights and sirens on a police car could make the difference between a peaceful or chaotic



encounter, and that if they asked someone with autism if they wanted to waive their rights, they might find that the person waved back at them. People with developmental disabilities, including

autism, have up to seven times more contact with law enforcement officers than others, according to an article in the F.B.I.

Law Enforcement Bulletin in April 2001

A co-author of the article, Dennis Debbaudt, who is also the author of "Autism, Advocates and Law Enforcement Professionals," led the training. He noted that a 2007 study by the federal Centers for Disease control and Prevention showed that 1 in 150 children in New Jersey have received a diagnosis of autism, a rate 15 times higher than previous estimates and among the highest in the country. But when Mr. Debbaudt asked whether any of the police officers, from departments throughout New Jersey, had received training on autism, either at police academies or on the job, only a few raised their hands.

The training, sponsored by Parents of Autistic children, a nonprofit service group based in Hazlet, featured videos, lectures and the personal accounts of parents whose children have a form of autism. Among them were Mr. Debbaudt and Gary Weitzen, director of the parents' group, whose son was the one found in the middle of the road, headed for the beach.

Mr. Debbaudt told the officers that they should understand autism "for the safety of others, and so you can go home safe to your families, so you can make the best use of your time and resources, enhance your communication skills and avoid litigation." He cited the case of Calvin Champion Jr., a 32-year-old man with autism who died in 2000 after Nashville police officers used pepper spray on him and subdued him. His family filed a federal lawsuit against the police and the social service agency caring for him, and was awarded \$4.4 million.

Mr. Debbaudt said he had heard of 6 to 12 cases each year in which people with autism are harmed, hit with a stun gun or killed by law enforcement officials. The officers were told to take plenty of time and be calm when interviewing autistic people. Some are crime victims, some are suspects, but the majority who come to the attention of the police have wandered away from their caregivers, often

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Conferences

Date	Title & Location	Speakers	Fee	Contact Info
Dec. 5, 2008	Visual Strategies: The Key for Improving Speech, Language, Communication, Behavior, & Social Oakland Schools		\$50	www.asaoakland.org 313-745-2816 susan.swartz@farmington.k12.mi.us
Jan. 8, 2009	Discipline of Students with Special Needs	George P. Butler, III, Esq.	\$309	866-352-9539 www.lorman.com
Jan. 15, 2009	Potty Training Your Special Needs Child Abilities Center		\$25	www.asaoakland.org 248-926-0909 therapy@abilitiescenter.com
Jan. 29, 2009	Red Flags & Green Lights-Knowing When to be Concerned about Autism		\$25	www.asaoakland.org 248-926-0909 therapy@abilitiescenter.com
Mar. 30-31, 2009	Sensory Processing Disorder Clinton County RESA	Dr. Lucy Jane Miller	\$295	www.ccrea.org 989-224-6831
Apr. 9, 2009	Red Flags & Green Lights-Knowing When to be Concerned about Autism		\$25	www.asaoakland.org 248-926-0909 therapy@abilitiescenter.com
May 14, 2009	Strategies that Work for Picky Eaters & Problem Feeders		\$25	www.asaoakland.org 248-926-0909 therapy@abilitiescenter.com

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without an understanding of the dangers of traffic or open water, which often attracts them. In fact, drowning is a leading cause of death for people with autism, Mr. Debbaudt said. People with autism may be very afraid of or very drawn to police dogs, Mr. Debbaudt said. They may be attracted to an officer's badge and try to grab it, and they may panic if their routines are broken, if their favorite objects are taken from them or if surrounding sights, sounds and smells overwhelm them.

Similar training sessions have been offered around the country. Autism Speaks, a nonprofit advocacy and fund-raising group, worked with the Chicago Police Department last spring, and it is working on a safety tool kit for all first responders, said Lisa Goring, director of family services for the group. "We've heard from families as well as from professionals that they just need more instruction, certainly in terms of first responders understanding that a person with autism may not respond appropriately or may not respond at all when given a command," she said.



A bill cosponsored by State Senator, Loretta Weinberg, would require autism awareness programs statewide for emergency medical technicians, police officers and firefighters. The bill was passed by the Assembly in March, and awaits action in the State Senate.

Book Addresses Teen Issues

By Carin Yavorcik

Mother and son take on "life's challenges"

Sex, dating, alcohol—there are some topics difficult for parents and teenagers to talk about. Jose and Damian Santomauro, a mother and her 18-year-old son with Asperger's Syndrome, have teamed up to help address those topics in *Asperger Download: A Guide to Help Teenage Males with Asperger Syndrome Tackle Life's Challenges*. Damian, who was diagnosed at age 5 and is now a college student, defines a term like acne, kissing or gossip. Then Jose describes the same issue from a parent's point of view.

Reprinted from www.autism-society.org

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Support Groups

- × Autism Support Group of Genesee County:
www.geneseeaautism.org
- × Advocates for Autism (formerly Flushing Support Group) meet the 2nd Tuesday of each month at North Baptist Church, 4004 Lennon Rd.
- × ASA/Oakland County Chapter Events:
www.asaoakland.org
- × www.oucares.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
- × Kathleen's House: www.kathleenshouse.org, 810-720-0667.

Websites

- 🔗 Autism Society of America: www.autism-society.org
 - 🔗 Autism Society of Michigan: www.autism-mi.org
 - 🔗 ASA Oakland County Chapter:
www.asaoakland.org
 - 🔗 Dr. Tony Attwood: www.tonyattwood.com
 - 🔗 On-line Asperger's Information and Support-OASIS: www.aspergersyndrome.org
 - 🔗 The Gray Center: www.TheGrayCenter.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
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