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News and Views, Fall 2006

West Virginia Autism Training Center

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The West Virginia Autism Training Center

www.marshall.edu/coe/atc

at  **MARSHALL UNIVERSITY**
Huntington, WV

Fall/Winter 2006

NEWS & VIEWS



From the Director

Barbara Becker-Cottrill, Ed.D.

Greetings to all of our WV Autism Training Center families, colleagues and friends. This edition of our newsletter is filled with inspiring first person experiences, as well as solid practical information for families and educators. I thank all of our contributors for their willingness to share insights and information with our readers.

As I look back on the past several months and think about accomplishments, I am struck by the strengths I see in the midst of so many challenges and barriers. Perseverance is probably the most notable strength common among the achievers highlighted in this newsletter. I have never been more convinced that the combination of perseverance and finding and utilizing the right supports is the key to personal success. Our cover story is a remarkable example of the perseverance of two wonderful individuals who in the past several years shared similar goals and dreams and supported each other, with a little help from their friends, through their college programs. Dylan's story is also one of family perseverance and support. You will see that with this combination, new worlds open up.

I am also so inspired by the love and compassion of our siblings of children with ASDs. The greenhouse story is a must read as an example of the creativity of a sister and her pure desire to help her brother and others. And in "My Brother Conner" Cameron sums it all up by writing "He's my brother and I love him." What wonderful support these young siblings already bring to their brothers.

I want to take this opportunity to welcome new staff members to the WV ATC. Gina Broce, Administrative Associate began working with us in August. Rebecca Bond, from the Northern Panhandle and Ivan Swanson, from the Huntington area began their work as Educational Specialists in September. Another new Educational Specialist, Andrew Nelson, will begin working in the Eastern Panhandle (yes the EASTERN PANHANDLE!) in November. Rebecca Hansen assumed the position of Intake Coordinator and College Program Assistant in October. Marc Ellison, our new College Program for Students with Asperger's Syndrome Coordinator came on board in October. Each of these individuals have exceptional backgrounds and bring years of experience to our program. Welcome to an exciting time in our WV ATC history!



Our College Experience

By Mary Reinhardt, Mother & College Student

It is hard to believe that it has been over three years since I made a phone call to Dr. Jennifer McFarland. Once again, I was seeking her advice, this time regarding higher education. That's when I first heard about their college program at Marshall. At that time it was a pilot program just completing its first year with only one student. My son, Andrew, was graduating from high school that spring and I wanted to give him the best opportunity available to ensure a successful outcome. I knew from past experiences that he needed a little extra help.

Andrew has the diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome. Like most Aspies, he is very bright, but has trouble with social situations and sometimes controlling his emotions. I had no doubt that he would excel with the academic end of college, but was uneasy with how he would manage the maze of college life. The loud music in the dorms, the crowded classrooms, that sense of freedom that most teenagers love, were all things that Andrew had trouble handling. In addition, he always seemed to have trouble dealing with transitions. In all other areas he was more than ready for college. He had taken college courses while in high school and graduated with 32 credited hours and had a GPA of 3.67. He had been awarded the Promise Scholarship, the Presidential Scholarship, and a scholarship from the Greater Beckley Area Foundation. The financial end of college was taken care of. It would have been a tragedy if he had not been able to continue his education. Granted, he did this through the help of an IEP which centered around communication and social situations. His IEP cleared the way for him to do the work.

I had done countless internet searches, looking for any type of support for someone like Andrew. I found Continued on Page-1

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Our College Experience

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support for the physically disabled, learning disabled, sight and hearing impaired, but nothing for the socially impaired, certainly nothing for autism. So, out of desperation, I called Dr. McFarland. At her urging I contacted Dr. Kim Ramsey, the director of the MU college program. We started the process with a trip to Huntington where we met with her. I instantly liked her and felt very comfortable talking to her. This was a good thing, since this was the person to whom I would be handing over the reins. I had spent years being the buffer for my son and the social world. I had been his supporter, advocate, translator, counselor, and, yes, even protector. My job of raising him was almost complete, his journey into manhood was just beginning.

Two years prior, I had made the decision to go back to school myself. I had worked full time as special education aide and took as many classes as I could handle. I was working on a degree in nursing. I had always planned to further my education, but as a single parent, I wanted to do it at a time when he didn't need me as much. Unfortunately, that time didn't come until he was in high school. Like many others, junior high was a nightmare for my son. I had spent a lot of my time in meetings for him, just to get him through it. It was during this time that he was given the diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome and life began getting easier. He finally started getting the help that he needed. This freed me to start living my life again. My goal was to finish before he graduated from high school. With taking only six to nine hours a semester, that didn't happen. Although I felt fully confident that the College program would be here for my son, the Program Staff did not live on campus, they spent their evenings and weekends at

home like the rest of the world. I was concerned with this living arrangement. I could not see Andrew living in a dorm, at least not at first. I felt, and still do feel, that he adjusts better with small changes rather than major ones. Leaving high school and starting college was change enough for him. I did not want to add any more stress on him than he could handle. I did not want to set him up to fail. With this thought in mind, I made the decision to move to Huntington with him. It was not my intention to go to school with him, but to provide support during time spent off campus. I would have moved to Huntington regardless of going to college. Nonetheless, that is exactly what happened, I went to college with my son. I transferred the 21 hours it had taken me two years to complete and applied to Marshall's nursing program. I was accepted as a pre-nursing major and would on occasion pass my son on campus. We had a deal, he wouldn't call me Mom in front of my "peers" and I would not "mother" him in front of his.

Of course there were adjustment problems at first. But with the help of those wonderful people at the Autism Training Center, I overcame them. I absolutely hated it and I was so homesick that I wanted to just quit and give up my dream. I spent most of that first semester "volunteering" at the training center. I'm sure they thought it was because I was feeling a little overprotective, but really I just needed the safety of being around people within my age group. Andrew, on the other hand, didn't just survive that first semester, he thrived. For the first time in his life he was in his environment. There were professors on campus who talked and walked just like him. He did so well that he moved into the dorm for his second year at Marshall.

I've heard it said that in order for a boy to become a man, he has to leave his mother. True to the expression, that's what happened. He started behaving like a typical college student. I saw less and less of him, until finally he stopped coming home on the weekends. At one point, he turned off his cell for two weeks and I had no way of getting a hold of him. I found out later that he had spent a weekend on a science field trip in Columbus, Ohio. To fully appreciate that, understand that in high school field trips were carefully planned during an IEP meeting. He had gone on his own with the science club, no preparation involved and very little money. He had a great time, not to mention a great confidence building experience.

Since being at Marshall, I've seen my son grow into a very self assured young man, ready to take on the world. He has made an array of friends outside of the training center. He now has a social life. That's not to say there were no problems. He has a form of autism, it's a given that there will always be obstacles for him. But isn't that true for any of us. With help of the College Program for Students with Asperger's Syndrome, college is one less obstacle to overcome.

As for me, I have one more year to go before I fulfill my goal and become a nurse. I can't say that I would advice anyone to do what I did. It's not easy to change your whole life and start over, especially around a bunch of young college kids. But I'm so glad that I did and I can't say that I regret any of it. I have a feeling that I will appreciate the changes much more when I receive my first pay check as a nurse. However, I would advise parents to do whatever it takes to give their child the best chance at life. After all, isn't that what parenting is all about?



Teaching Social Skills to Students With ASDs-Part I

By Gloria Sage, Program Coordinator Sr.



Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) may have difficulty with a number of social skills including taking turns, playing cooperatively, learning rules of games, reading social cues, like facial expressions and body language, or they may lack the ability or desire to interact with others. These difficulties can cause a lot of anguish and frustration for the students, their parents and teachers, and their peers. Fortunately, social skills can be taught just like any other skill, such as communication skills, self-help skills or academics.

So why should we teach social skills to students with ASDs? First and foremost, to live in the world is to be a member of society, which means interacting with other people. We must interact with people to have a job, go to school and be a part of the community. Relationships can offer us deeply rewarding and pleasurable experiences in life, which directly affects our quality of life. A lack of social relationships can lead to depression. There are benefits to training typical peers, too, since this teaches them to be more compassionate, caring and tolerant of others.

The following ideas are some simple ways parents and teachers can teach social skills to students with ASD at home, school and in the community.

There are also a number of excellent resources available in the ATC library with many more ideas to help you teach your child or student how to interact with others.

Getting Started: for Parents

- Observe same age peers:

Observe games and activities being played.

Observe their dress and mannerisms.

- Parents should practice with their child a game or activity that other children are playing, modeling what is said and done, and how to include the other people.

- Parents should play with the child as if they were a child of the same age themselves - revert to childlike behavior: swing, play chase, make mud pies, etc.

- Teach specific play skills for the activity.

- Next, observe the child when playing with other children and list specific skills that will need to be taught. Some of these may be:

- How to start, maintain and end the play. The child may have to learn to say "Can I play?" "Can I join in?" "What would you like to do now?" or "I want to play by myself now."

- Flexibility, cooperation and sharing: If the child likes to take total control of the activity and will not tolerate any alternative suggestions or want to include other children, explain that the activity is not "wrong" if conducted in a different way. Tell the child that the activity can be completed in less time when working together.

- How to avoid social play: Teach the child socially ac-

ceptable comments and actions to use when he wants to play alone. It is also important to teach other children to comply with his request to be alone.

- Explain what you should have done: When an error in social behavior occurs, always explain what the child should have done and ask them to think how the other person may feel as a consequence of what they say or do.

- Invite a friend to the house: Invite a potential friend to visit and set up the situation to ensure success. Plan activities that you are sure both children like and have an adult play with the children to assist the interaction. Keep the play date short no more than 1-2 hours at first. It is important that the visit end on a positive note to be sure that the friend will want to come back.

- Enroll the child in clubs: Joining clubs such as boy scouts or 4-H will extend the opportunity for social interactions for your child. Parents will need to explain the child's disability to the adults in charge and inform them of strategies that are successful with the child.

What Can the Teacher Do?

The classroom provides many opportunities for learning appropriate social behavior. Some strategies for the classroom include the following:

- Use other children as cues to indicate what to do: The child may not be aware of the code of conduct for the classroom. If a child behaves inappropriately, ask him to look at what the other children are doing. For example, other children may be

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Teaching Social Skills to Students With ASDs-Part I

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sitting still, working quietly, waiting in line, etc. Tell the child he must watch the other children and copy what they are doing. (Be sure that what they are doing is appropriate!)

- Encourage cooperative games: Many classroom activities can be done in small groups of children working as teams. The child with an ASD may need supervision or assistance with turn taking, sharing and allowing others to express their ideas. Children with ASD may have difficulty with always wanting to be first and having to win in competitive games. Cooperative games can help to avoid this problem.
 - Model how to relate to the child: Other children in the class may not know how to react to the child's behavior. It is important for the teacher to demonstrate tolerance, patience and encouragement to the child with an ASD. Other students will then model the teacher's behavior. It is also important for the teacher to recognize and praise students when they are supportive to the child with ASD.
 - Explain alternate means of seeking help: Teach the child to seek help from other children rather than always asking the teacher for assistance. This could be done through speech, gestures, PECS, signs or whatever method of communication the child uses.
 - Encourage prospective friendships: Identify potential classmates who may be recruited as friends for the
- Provide supervision on the playground: The lack of structure and supervision, combined with noise and intense socializing on the playground is often an unpleasant time for the child with an ASD. This is when the child is at his least skilled and most vulnerable. Teachers on playground duty need to know the problems the child may experience and assist them in being included in games and activities, and/or respect their need to be alone. Bullying is a big issue and teachers need to be aware of what is going on and intervene if this occurs.
 - Provide relaxing or solitary activities at the end of the day: The child may try to follow the rules of conduct in the classroom and behave like other children during the day. This causes an enormous pressure which is often released when the child gets home. He or she may react like a "Jekyll and Hyde." To minimize this, it may help for the teacher to have a range of relaxing or solitary activities for the child to engage in before he leaves to go home. When the child gets home, the parents may give the child a period of time to "chill out" and just relax and do what he wants.
 - **In Teaching Social Skills Part II**, we will focus on the importance of friendship skills and provide a number of ways to teach students with ASDs how to identify what a friend is and how to be a good friend.

child. Encourage contact in the classroom, lunchroom and on the playground. These friends may become the child's guardian if he or she is teased or bullied by other children.



References/Resources:

Attwood, T. (1998). Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd.

McAfee, J. (2002). Navigating the Social World: A Curriculum for Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome, High Functioning Autism and Related Disorders. Texas: Future Horizons, Inc.

Moyes, R. (2001). Incorporating Social Goals in the Classroom. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd.



Funding a Wish

By Angela Bryson,
Parent Support Coordinator

One of the resources the WV ATC can provide to our families is to link them to various funding sources. One of the best funding sources that has proven to be "Tried and True" is The Sunshine Foundation. This great organization has provided many wishes for our families from an all expense paid trip to Disneyworld, vacation time at the beach, complete computer systems, augmentative devices, fences and many other requests.

The Sunshine Foundation was founded in 1976 by a former Philadelphia police officer, Bill Sample. While on protective duty at a Philadelphia Children's Hospital, he witnessed firsthand the financial and emotional bur-

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Funding a Wish

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den placed on families of ill children. He saw that so many families could not afford to give their sick child one last wish. Bill, with the help of a handful of other dedicated people, got together to give Sunshine's first wish, a trip for a little boy named Bobby who wanted to see the mountains and play in the snow. Bobby got his wish, but passed away a short while after his trip. Bobby's wish lead the way to helping other children.

The Sunshine Foundation has served over 25 WV ATC families in the past 7 years. The Sunshine Foundation has been a great organization to work with our families. One family stated that they were "treated like royalty" on a trip to Disneyworld. Another family stated that the staff were "friendly, considerate and always helpful." The wait is about two years between a request and when it is fulfilled. To apply, the child must be between the ages of 3-18 years and have severe to profound autism, another chronic illness, or be physically challenged or abused. Specific family income guidelines also apply. Parents can call 1-800-767-1976 or go to www.sunshinefoundation.org for more information.



Summer Mentor Training a Success

For the past 10 years, the WV Autism Training Center (WVATC) typically has conducted Mentor Training for paraprofessionals on topics related to autism and Positive Behavior Support during the summer months. The Mentor Training consists of 4 full days of training. Mentors must pass a written exam to obtain a certificate for the training offered by the WVATC. Unique to WV, paraprofessionals can qualify for a specific school system personnel category after finishing certain requirements. One of the requirements is to participate in 30 hours of inservice level training on topics related to autism. This past summer, the WVATC conducted 7 four day trainings across the state with nearly 200 aides participating. Evaluations by the aides were overwhelmingly positive. For more information about Mentor Training, call the WVATC at 304-696-2332.

The Greenhouse Project

By Nathalie Henchey, Parent



Gardening has been my escape for the past 5 years. After my son was diagnosed with autism, it became very clear that I needed an activity to keep my mental health and have a daily break from my own life. Working full-time and trying to be a "supermom", it was very hard for me to take few minutes for myself, but after multiple recommendations I did it. What helped me not feel guilty to take a few minutes away, was the company of my daughter, Alex. She would just be around me when I played in the garden, sometimes talking, sometimes helping. She was the sunshine in my day.

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The Greenhouse Project

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At a very young age, I initiated her to gardening. She was good company and made me laugh even on rough days. Still today we cherish our gardening moment together. We call it: "our quality time together." Being a sibling of a child with autism, sometimes I felt that she needed her one-on-one alone with me. Gardening became our escape. A half hour a few times per week was plenty to rejuvenate both of us. We did not have a great big project, we just did little things and it was great.

The greenhouse project idea came from Alex, now 12, who was looking for a project to do for her community service hours for school. On one Saturday morning this last spring, Alex and I were gardening. My other sunshine, my son, now 7, came by, kneeled down and asked if he could help. He used his words. We were both surprised. My daughter gave him a hand shovel and amazingly, he just started playing in the dirt. My son started giggling and we had a great time. It only lasted a few minutes but it was great because he had showed an interest in something that Alex and I enjoy doing together.

Watching the news that evening, Alex looked at me and stated that she would collect funding for a greenhouse. Her idea was to adapt and create a raised garden that appealed to all the senses through the use of colors, smells, textures and sounds. A raised garden would make it easier for her brother to use and would have well defined areas. My son has a tendency to get lost in space. She wanted some wind chimes because her brother always like to ring them. Alex thought that he would greatly benefit from gardening activities. He would get a hands-

on connection with the natural environment and life cycle. I explained to her that her brother was not quite at that level, but he could maybe start with the basics, like seeding, watering, etc.

Alex asked me if I would assist her in raising the funding. She wanted to do this for her brother and other children with autism from our area. I could see that she wanted to make a difference. I got her organized and off she went. The next day she started collecting donations with a mason jar. A few hundred dollars collected down the road, the neighborhood had been generous. One of the neighbors gave her two trellises. She also went around in my office and my co-workers supported her idea. We went to local businesses to ask for some damaged goods/supplies. A few weeks later we had enough funding to order the greenhouse kit. My wonderful husband and family supported her idea by offering to help assemble the greenhouse. We felt like weekend warriors. I am still surprised today how determination goes a long way.

My son and a few other children with autism from our area will have a new interesting hobby that may take root in their lives. We will organize little gardening group activities to promote social interaction with other children. My son already has new programs that his staff will be using daily. It will allow him to learn the basics of gardening. As a family we will use gardening as a quality time activity.

I am amazed to see that my escape became a great family project. Thanks to my daughter, I have now a quality time activity to share with my son and her. My daughter stated that he has a green thumb like her. She was telling me yesterday that she had not realized that when she started this project, that the whole family would benefit from

it. She smiled and gave me a hug.

She is happy that the whole family is now gardening. She will be helping/participating through all next year with the gardening activities; even though she has already done all her community service hours needed. She would also like to expand the project next year to our backyard vegetable garden. This project is big in our heart. It all started with a little seed, my daughter's idea! It grew to a constructive, quality family activity that other children with autism will be able to enjoy.

**It all started
with a
little seed !**



On-line Autism Certification Coursework Available

Marshall University now offers two on-line courses needed for the autism teaching certificate. Courses available include:

Fall, 2006 CISP 427/527E Introduction to Autism

Spring, 2007 CISP 662E, Instructional Characteristics of Autism

Also, available during the fall and spring semesters, CISP 664, Practicum in Autism.

To learn more:

www.marshall.edu/coelatc

To register: www.marshall.edu/registrar



My Brother Conner

By Cameron Ford, Brother



In 1996, I was four years old and my mom was in the hospital in Morgantown. I was wondering when we could go and see her. When Dad and I got there, my mom was lying in the hospital bed. The doctors were going to do surgery, so we could get the baby out of her stomach. I wasn't allowed in the room until they were done. I couldn't understand why I could not see my mom and was sad. Then they let me in the room, and I saw my mom with these clear tubes up her nose so she could breathe. The tubes were a little bit scary. I saw a doctor with a baby and he gave the baby boy to my mom. She let me hold him, and I was happy when I held him in my arms. He looked kind of cute. Then everybody wanted to hold my baby brother. I got to decide what to name him - either Addison or Conner. We named him Conner. When we got home, it was a very happy time. After his first year, I was surprised that my brother could walk, sometimes. When he would walk fast, he looked like he was trying to jog or run. He was very funny looking when he would try to run. He would sometimes fall down when he walked too fast. He made me laugh.

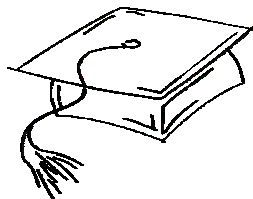
We found out when Conner was three years old that he was autistic. When we found out, we were surprised about this. Children with autism have problems learning to talk, making friends, playing with others and understanding what other people are saying. Some kids don't like loud noises, bright lights, being touched, or too much excitement. They usually don't like big crowds or lots of noise. And they especially dislike changes in routine. Conner has a lot of these problems. It is a hard job to be a big brother to a younger brother, especially when that brother is autistic. My mom has to take him to speech therapy to help him talk better. He also has to see an occupational therapist for his special needs. He has lots of different doctors. Sometimes I have to go with them. It is really boring, but I know that it helps him. When he does something well, we make a big deal of it. When he gets mad, we have to ignore it or I have to go to my room for my own safety and sanity.

Conner loves T-Rexes. He likes to draw, play on the computer, swim, horseback ride, and watch movies. Even though he repeats a lot of the sections of the movie, and it is really hard to watch a movie with him, we are together. Sometimes he repeats sentences and words over and over which can be really annoying. He doesn't always understand how to play games or play with my friends the right way. Conner often gets mad at me for stupid things that don't make sense to others. Conner can't help it that he is autistic. It is just the way he was born. Even though, there is a lot Conner doesn't get and can be a total pain, he is still my brother and I love him.

Autism Training Center, MU – College Program, Graduation Ceremony, 2006



By Rebecca Hansen,
Assistant Coordinator



The 169th Commencement exercises were much more than just another graduation ceremony for the College Program for students with Asperger's Syndrome. On May 6, 2006 our first two graduates received their diplomas. Amy Goodman finished her master's degree in Special Education and Andrew Reinhardt received his Bachelors of Science degree in Physics. Amy is already putting her education to work as she has taken a position as an Early Intervention Service Coordinator. Andrew has decided to further his education by beginning graduate work in Geology here at Marshall University. We are extremely proud of our first two graduates and hope that their success will instill hope for our current and future students.

Congratulations !



ADAM SHREVES

Congratulations to Adam Shreves. Adam successfully returned to school this past year after receiving services at home for the past 3 years.

We are proud of you Adam!



BLAINE SEITZ

The Greatest Gift !

Many participants involved in trainings offered by The Autism Training Center in northern West Virginia have had a unique treat during the past few months. They have had the distinct pleasure of learning from a young adult who is "on the spectrum." Mr. Blaine Seitz, age 29, was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome when he was 26. He and his family recently participated in the Family Focus Positive Behavior Support Training. During this process, Blaine and his team determined that one of his many talents would be to share his experiences with others.

Blaine's presentations offer a wonderful mixture of humor, intelligence, insightfulness and compassion. He has offered practical solutions to parents, professionals and paraprofessionals alike.

Blaine's quest to share his knowledge with others is a result of a very special legacy. Blaine's father, Jake Seitz, a prominent and respected teacher in Monongalia County, recently lost his battle with cancer. It is Blaine's wish to carry on the gift of teaching others. For his dad, the forte' was history. For Blaine, it's Asperger's Syn-

drome. Both of these distinguished gentlemen have given the gift of knowledge that will change people's lives.

There is no greater gift!



Dylan's Story

By Darlene, Dylan's Mom



Dylan

Dylan just turned 5 years old this May. He had a big birthday party with the "car's " theme. He opened all of his presents himself. He ate cake and ice cream (mostly ice cream) with the other kids, and overall had a good time. I want to tell you this because this is the first birthday Dylan has actually enjoyed. Dylan's past birthdays were filled with crying and banging his head on the floor. And the more people that were there, the more upset Dylan became. When Dylan was born he was what I would call the "perfect baby." He hardly ever cried unless he was hungry or needed changed or oddly enough when you would try to hold him close. He slept through the night from his first night home. We were thrilled with his passive personality after our experience with his older sister Bryanna who was definitely a high maintenance baby. I noticed Dylan was not meeting his milestones as soon as his sister did, but I realized every child is different, and I can't expect them to walk and talk at the same time. When Dylan went to the pediatrician for his one year well check up we

were really getting concerned by this time. I voiced my concerns to the doctor, and her response was boys are slower at reaching milestones and to wait six more months before we worry. I couldn't help but to worry. At 15 months he still was not even trying to stand up, he wasn't talking, and he was beginning to flip his hands and turn his ankles while at the same time making odd facial movements. At 19 months Dylan took his first steps. But still he didn't talk and the pediatrician again said wait six more months before we look into this further. I was very frustrated with the doctor and did not know where to turn for help. I heard about the Birth to Three program and contacted them. I spent months researching on the internet, and in medical books just trying to pinpoint what could be going on with my child. Birth to Three sent a speech therapist, O.T. and a developmental specialist to our home. I did not know much about autism before, but I remember very clearly a breakthrough moment for myself. I had bought a child health nursing book and looked up developmental delays and it had multiple sub categories. But I turned to the beginning and started reading. I came to a checklist titled diagnostic criteria for autistic disorder and it stated at least 8 of the following 16 items must be present for a diagnosis. I began to read the list, it in-

cluded, stereotyped movements, persistent preoccupation with objects, insistence on routine and so on. That was it, I knew what it was. I had found my answer. Dylan had autism. There were 12 of the 16 items that applied to Dylan, and some of them could not be applied because he was too young. A few months later we went to Klingberg Center in Morgantown where Dylan received a diagnosis of autism. I was relieved to finally have a one word answer to give curious relatives and friends: "Autism." Dylan also received help for his intestinal issues. We then applied for title XIX waiver & enrolled Dylan in preschool two days a week as a 3 year old. Dylan graduated from the 4 year old pre-k this past May and received a trophy which he proudly displays on his fire truck shelf in his room. During this past school year we received services from ATC which included PBS training for the pre-k and kindergarten teachers. Dylan received OT and speech therapy year round. Thanks to lots of prayers, working with Dylan at home, and also some really great pre-k teachers, Dylan has made unbelievable progress the past two years. He is counting, saying the alphabet, and starting to write his name. His social skills are greatly improved. He now sleeps in his

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Dylan at the beach



Dylan and his sister

Dylan's Story

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own bed, is drinking from a regular cup and is doing a fine job going to the potty. All things we have been working hard on the past year. He now loves to go to a birthday party. We see a really bright future for Dylan. He is a great little boy and we wouldn't have him any other way.

What's the Big Deal about Schedules?

By Gloria Sage, Program Coordinator Sr.

A variety of visual supports are routinely used to assist individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) because they have been shown to be an effective means of helping students understand their environment, increase communication, increase predictability and levels of independence, and prepare for transitions. A schedule is one type of visual support that is extremely helpful for students with ASD, and schedules can be used in a variety of ways. The question shouldn't be "Should we use schedules?", but "When, where and what type should we use?"

Designing Schedules

The first step in designing a schedule is to decide how activities will be represented. Should we use objects, photos, picture symbols and/or words? This will depend on the individual's needs and preferences. Very young children may need object representation, such as a miniature toilet to show time to potty, a toy bus to show time to go home, etc. These objects can be at-

tached to the schedule with Velcro and removed for the child to carry with him to the activity.

Other children may prefer actual photographs of the activities or icons from picture symbol systems, such as the Boardmaker program. It is recommended that the written words be paired with the picture symbol to help the student develop a sight word vocabulary and improve literacy skills.

Once the type of representation has been decided, the next question is "Should I use a vertical or horizontal arrangement for the schedule?" There are two schools of thought on this: one view is that children will learn to read from left to right so a horizontal schedule should be used. Another view is that schedules should be presented vertically, based upon the fact that young children usually scan vertically and as adults, most of our visual supports are presented vertically (e.g., shopping lists, daily planners and To-Do lists) Either type of arrangement can be successful. Choose a format based upon what you have observed about your student or child and then try it. If he is having difficulty with it, you can change the format and see if that works better.

When to Use Schedules:

Schedules should be used throughout the individual's day. We might start with partial day schedules, one showing activities for the morning and another showing activities for the afternoon. This would show when each activity starts and ends and when activities the individual likes will be available, thus reducing anxiety. We might also use a mini-schedule to direct the choice or sequence of activities during a shorter time segment.

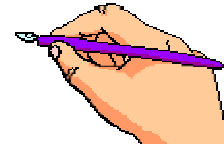
For example: "Math":

1. Count 25 pennies
2. Practice 10 addition fact cards

3. Write answers to 5 problems on worksheet
4. Start the computer

In addition, a schedule could be used within an individual lesson or activity to balance enjoyable with challenging or less desirable tasks. This might be a card that shows.

"First This"



"Then"



Later we might add a full day schedule so the student can see what is going to occur throughout the day. Some students will be able to start out with a full day schedule, others will not.

Weekly and monthly schedules can also be helpful, especially at home. A monthly calendar may show holidays or days off from school, therapy appointments or overnight trips for parents who have to travel on business.

Teaching the Schedule

Sometimes teachers or parents may say "I spent a lot of time making a schedule but he won't use it." Usually this is because they forgot the crucial component of *teaching* the individual to use the schedule. Teaching the use of the schedule must be done like teaching any other lesson or subject, in a step-by-step fashion.

A good way to start is by priming the individual to use the schedule by just showing it to

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him and demonstrating how it will be used. A social story could also be written to explain how to use a schedule and then read to the individual each morning or throughout the day (based upon the individual's needs). Remember that the schedule must be displayed in an area where it can be easily seen and accessed throughout the day. Next we might teach the schedule using the hierarchy of prompts (physical, modeling, gesture, and verbal.) Your student might not have to start with the highest level of prompting (physical). You will need to evaluate where the individual needs to start. As the individual begins to use the schedule, fade the level of prompting to work toward student independence.

One strategy from Pyramid Educational Consultants (the developer of the PECS System) is to teach each picture or schedule component individually rather than trying to teach the entire schedule at once. Teach the components in a non-specific manner, such as "Go here" or "Let's do this" rather than saying "Go to lunch".

Teaching Tips for Using Schedules

- Try to alternate challenging tasks or less desirable activities with easier or more desired activities within the daily schedule. The individual knows that "When this hard task is over, I will get to do something I like."
- Follow a favorite activity with a moderately liked activity or one that is generally tolerated instead of one that is very difficult.
- Once the activity is over, put the picture card into a

"finished" envelope or box on the schedule or turn the card over. Another idea is to cross or mark off completed activities.

- Place a clock face next to each picture or schedule item to remind the student of an upcoming activity, to help them prepare for a transition, or just to match the clock picture to real time. This may assist in learning to tell time.
- Teach about change by using a picture card to indicate change such as :

Surprise



Change



What's This



Start by placing this card within the schedule several times a week and make the change something that is very reinforcing and enjoyable for the individual. The idea is to teach that change can be pleasant before exposing the individual to changes that are more difficult. When you begin to teach about difficult changes, immediately follow it with a pleasurable activity that is shown on the picture schedule.

- At the end of the day before dismissal time, sit down with the individual in a 1:1 session

and place the pictures for the next day's routine on each individual's schedule. This will help prepare the individual for the next day, reduce anxiety about what comes next and provide opportunities for communication and a relaxing way to end the day.

- Do not take visual schedules away! (Are you willing to give up your daily planner, PDA, calendar, shopping list, etc.?) If we are concerned with how much the schedules stand out, we might consider gradually fading the size of the schedule until it is small and more easily portable. A small picture schedule could be made to fit into a regular folding binder. You might also consider fading to a more traditional schedule (e.g., checklist, calendar, agenda or planner).
- Remember that visual supports are an everyday part of life (we use traffic signs, directions, packaging, advertising signs and labels, to name just a few). They can provide a wonderfully effective *proactive* means of supporting individuals with ASD, thereby increasing their independence and quality of life.

References/Resources:

McClannahan, L. E. (1999). Activity Schedules for Children With Autism: Teaching Independent Behavior (Topics in Autism).

Maryland: Woodbine House.

Savner, J.L.& Smith Myles, B. (2000). Making Visual Supports Work in the Home and Community: Strategies for Individuals with Autism and Asperger Syndrome. Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing.

Hodgdon, L.A. (1999). Solving Behavior Problems in Autism: Improving Communication with Visual Strategies. California: Quirk Roberts Publishing.

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Pictures:

Attainment Company
www.attainmentcompany.com

Boardmaker Program 1-800-588-4548
 or www.mayer-johnson.com (A home version is now available for parents for \$149.95)

Early Learning Images
www.elliecards.com

Early Learning Site
aba.insightcommerce.net

Pyramid Education Consultants
www.pecs.com

Picture This and Visual Essentials software at www.silverliningmm.com

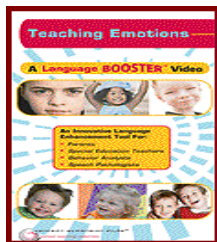


Circle of Friends (COF) Celebrate Graduation

By Karen Randolph, Coordinator, Hancock County and Cindy LeGrand, Coordinator, WVATC

The Circle of Friends Preschool in Hancock County has started its third year this fall. We currently have six children with Autism and ten typical peers. We started this year, as always, with an Open House on August 31, 2006. Fifty people celebrated this event, which gave the families and children time to visit their classroom for the second time as well as seeing their new friends again. Many fun and educational activities are planned for this upcoming year.

We also had a total of eleven children, three were children with Autism, graduate from the pre-school in the Spring 2006 with a graduation ceremony. Songs were sung by the children, a Power



A Review of Teaching Emotions: A New DVD Available Through the Autism Training Center Library

By Dianna Grueser, Education Specialist

Teaching Emotions is a DVD developed by Language Booster. The program is designed to assist children with ASD to recognize a variety of emotions and facial expressions. This DVD is unique because it uses actual scenarios as opposed to pictures, and it utilizes an errorless learning process that is explained clearly at the beginning of the DVD. The instructions are clear enough that parents and professionals can utilize this program to help their child learn to recognize and label emotions. Another benefit to this particular program is that there are several examples of the same emotion using both boys and girls that are a variety of ages and in a variety of situations where the same emotion might be displayed. For example, one clip demonstrates the emotion "mad" after an argument and after an item is taken. Other examples of the emotion "mad" are portrayed under circumstances where the emotion is not so obvious, like when a drink is spilled. Because some of the emotions portrayed are not obvious, it is important for the teacher to know ahead of time what emotion they are teaching. I know there were a few times I had to check myself when I was reviewing the DVD. At that point I knew this DVD was really going to be a helpful tool, because there are so many ways to express the same emotion. This DVD would be appropriate for someone with ASD that has enough verbal or functional communication skills to respond to questions.



Hancock County COF Preschool

Point presentation was shown, which covered the events of the year, and a covered dish dinner was part of the festivities after the class received their diplomas. The three children with Autism are currently in regular kindergarten with minimal supports, e.g. speech and/or occupational therapy.

ton, WV. A crowd of 60 proud family members and friends donning camcorders and tissues gathered to honor the young graduates. The ceremony included staff reading special poems about each of the graduates, a reading of a Dr. Seuss-like tale that the students created together during a circle time activity and the presentation of Friendship awards and Diplomas. After the ceremony the graduates and guests returned to the classroom for a wonderful luncheon buffet and fun.

Congratulations to all of our graduates!

Circle of Friends Preschool in Cabell County celebrated their 5th year of service, sending graduates off to Kindergarten on Thursday, July 27, 2006. This year 8 students graduated from the inclusive pre-school program located in Hunting-



Cabell County COF Preschool

Should I Tell My Child They Have Asperger's Syndrome?

By Peggy Hovatter, Education Specialist Sr.

This is a tough question. Some people with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) see it as a relief...they know they're different and having an explanation of that difference can be reassuring. AS can be a wonderful name to know, especially for someone who's having trouble coping with his or her differences. It may be important to parents to plan the timing of the discussion. For some people with AS, an understanding of the diagnosis may prove helpful as early as late elementary or middle school. For others, it may be in their late teens or young adulthood when they can understand the difference between a 'syndrome' and their personality. Parents can gauge this decision based upon the types of questions that your child may be asking, e.g. "Why don't I have any friends?", "Why does it seem that no one wants to talk about the things that I like?" or "I don't like it in the cafeteria because no one wants to sit beside me."

There appears to be a reluctance among parents to 'label' their children, mostly out of fear that their child may develop a self-image around the label instead of themselves. And there's always the risk of your child misunderstanding and believing that they might never be able to have a real friendship with others. In reality, people with AS can have valuable and fulfilling relationships with others. These relationships are often of the purest nature, as they are without all the emotional baggage

that typical friendships can succumb to, such as deceit and dishonesty. They offer a whole new (and refreshing) meaning to the term 'friendship'.

Tips if You Make the Decision to Discuss AS with Your Child

1. Do not tell your child they are 'abnormal'. It is not necessary to make a big deal out of the label. You might want to mention that some famous people have or may have had AS. For example, some think that Thomas Jefferson had AS.
2. If you explain that they see the world differently than others around them, they may be more likely to take it as an aspect of their identity rather than something they're doing wrong.
3. Have a good understanding of AS prior to discussion with your child.
4. Explain. Don't judge.
5. If you decide to tell your child about Asperger's, remember that you're not delivering a dire diagnosis. If you feel that you may become emotional, wait. You're telling them that they're different, but STILL OKAY, and helping them to be amazed at their own uniqueness!

Websites:

www.asperger.org

<http://oddsandfriends.typepad.com/askanaspie/>

Books and Videos:

Ives, M. (2001). *What is Asperger's Syndrome and How Will it Affect Me?* London: National Autistic Society.

Schnurr, R.G. (1999). *Asperger's Huh? A Child's Perspective*. TX: Future Horizons.

Developing Friendships: Wonderful People to Get to Know (Video can be checked out from WV ATC library)

WVATC FAST FACTS

***WV ATC serves the entire state of WV**

***WV ATC provides training in autism for approximately 1000 people annually**

***WV ATC services are at no cost to registered families**

***WV ATC, through Marshall University, provides the only approved autism teacher certification program in WV**



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Please join us in our research efforts to find the gene(s) that contribute to autism spectrum disorders. In order to detect these genes, many families are needed to participate in this study.

For more information in the WV, OH and KY area:

Scott Short at: 1-866-308-3032 or scott.short@duke.edu

Duke CHG at:



Duke Center for Human Genetics
DUKE UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

What Our Families Have to Say . . .

Each year the WV Autism Training Center provides Family Focus Positive Behavior Support (FFPBS) services to 40-60 families and their teams throughout the state. This past year we served 52 families and teams residing in 23 of 55 West Virginia counties. Here is some of the feedback from participating families.



"Thank you for picking our son to be a candidate for your Family Focus project.

The Family Focus project was a huge success for us as a family and for our son during the school year. It helped us to work through particular problem areas and turn them into a huge success.

Our son started the school year out not wanting to go and shortly we were dropping him off at the door.

Our ATC coordinator during this process was very helpful to us and the staff at his school. The monthly path meetings were a big help to everyone. These allowed us to problem solve and move onto getting different strategies. She was so helpful in every way possible.

We feel so fortunate to have had the ATC on board with us during the last school year. We feel without this extra help/support that our son's year would not have been so successful. We look forward to keeping in touch. This is a great organization for the families and individuals. Thank you and God bless!!"

"Our ATC staff person gave us strength and understanding. She is a voice of love, reason, and caring. We felt like she was a member of our family. She broadened our knowledge and strengthened our family!

I wish that there was more funding so that more families could enjoy the support that we received. God Bless all of You!!

Our daughter's quality of life has improved dramatically since FFPBS. Thanks to all of the help we received from our ATC staff person and the help and cooperation from our daughter's teachers at school. I think the Autism/Asperger's seminars that were provided had a major impact for team members as well as the community. She did an excellent job presenting information and answering questions. She did an outstanding job throughout the program, showing real concern and putting great effort in making sure that she did everything possible to help and improve our daughter's quality of life. FFPBS offered support and help when I could not find it anywhere else. I am forever thankful for the opportunity to participate in the program. Thank you."

"I just want you all to know that this program is excellent! I really believe that it may have saved my son from a life of being dumbed down by our social system and from being socially shunned.

Our ATC staff was a fantastic person who managed to get our school system to listen to her about my son, and his abilities. He has Asperger's Syndrome and the school did not know how to handle this. With ATC's help, programs have been altered and changes have been made that will help change my son's negative views on school and help make the rest of his school years productive.

Our ATC staff person also has helped us to deal with my son's depression in a better way. All in all, I'd say this is the best thing that ever happened to my son and I wanted you to know this. Thank you so much for everything."

GIVE NOW !

Donations to support the Autism Training Center can be made on-line at:

www.marshall.edu/coe/atc

Don't Miss These Upcoming Conferences

The Expanding World of PBS: Science, Vision and Values

Association for Positive Behavior Support

March 8-10, 2007

Boston, MA

www.apbs.org

Together a Brighter Tomorrow

Autism Society of America

July 11-14, 2007

Phoenix, AZ

www.autism-society.org

First Annual NATAAP Conference

(NATAAP) Network of Autism Training and
Technical Assistance Programs

Conference Sponsored by
the Ohio Center for
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September 26-28, 2007

Columbus, OH

www.ocali.org

**Please Save
These Dates !**



Please remember to Join Us!



for the Autism Walk, to be held on April 28, 2007, at Ritter Park, Huntington, WV



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