



# AUTISM NEWS

of Orange County  
& the Rest of the World

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Cover illustration by Austin Terry

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## COVER FEATURE

We are pleased to feature one of our local artists, **Austin Terry**. Read more about Austin on page 7.

## Mission Statement

*Autism News Orange County & the Rest of the World* is a collaborative publication for parents and professionals dedicated to sharing research-based strategies, innovative educational approaches, best practices and experiences in the area of autism.

## Submission Policy

The Autism News of Orange County *RW* is available free of charge to parents and professionals of children with autism. The opinions expressed in the newsletter do not necessarily represent the official view of the agencies involved.

Contributions from teachers, therapists, researchers and relatives/children of/with autism are welcome. The editors select articles and make necessary changes.

Please submit articles in Microsoft Word using font size 12, double spaced, and no more than four pages in length (2600 words). Photos are encouraged and when submitted with articles the permission to include is assumed.

**Please email all correspondence to:**

**Dr. Vera Bernard-Opitz**  
vbernard@ocde.us

**Please visit our website: [www.autismnewsoc.org](http://www.autismnewsoc.org)**

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## Editorial

By Vera Bernard-Opitz

Welcome to another issue of the Autism News, which focuses on the important topic of **transition** and **integration**. Major life changes and transitions have become part of the challenges we all face in a world that requires flexibility more often than consistency. While previous generations tended to have stability in the family environment, neighborhood, community, school, and work, today even young children have to adapt quickly to multiple social contexts and settings.

One of the characteristics of children, adolescents and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the tendency to prefer sameness rather than new experiences. Even small transitions often seem like an insurmountable challenge, which require specific assistance. As such it is a top priority to focus on interventions to enhance flexibility, life skills and social skills in order to adapt to a constantly changing world.

What more can be done to facilitate transitions and integration? How can bridges be built from one setting to another, be it moving from one activity to another, or going from preschool to kindergarten, or high school to that first job? How can parents be supported in this process? How can we reduce prejudices in society and improve acceptance for people with ASD? We hope that the contributions of this issue will provide some answers to the above questions and give concrete ideas for overcoming the challenges faced by people with ASD, as well as their families, teachers, and other involved professionals.

- Improving peer relations and play are the focus of the joint contribution by **Heather McCracken** and **Pamela Wolfberg**. 'Friend 2 Friend,' an organization based in British Columbia, and 'Integrated Play Groups' initiated at San Francisco State University, have joined forces to help inte-

grate children with autism and foster better understanding of autism in typical children.

- Motivating social behavior and improving social skills are crucial components of the Social Skills Training Project by **Jed Baker**, who recently gave a well-received talk in Los Angeles on his Social Skills program.
- **Kelly McKinnon**, book author and local behavior therapist in San Juan Capistrano, exemplifies concrete suggestions on how students with ASD can play independently, interact appropriately with peers, and successfully 'survive' recess.
- Improving the skills of the individual and making the environment more comprehensible must go hand in hand. **Glenna Osborne**, from Division TEACCH, describes, with case examples of adults with ASD, how to accomplish work satisfaction.
- Making the transition to the work force is also the concern of **Peter Gerhardt**, who recently talked about 'Preparation for Life' at the Regional Center of Orange County. Job matching and job carving are types of services that can help adolescents and adults with ASD be successful in their first employment.
- **Jennifer McIlwee Myers** is a person with ASD whose brother is also autistic. In that capacity, she shares her very personal perspectives of the importance of teaching life skills to people with ASD.
- Through being informed, becoming their child's advocate and being active team-members, **Linda and Peter Vos** describe how their daughter, Chelsea, transitioned successfully from early specialized intervention programs to integrated preschool classes.

We are grateful to all our contributors and welcome manuscripts for our **coming issue**, which **will focus on evidence-based practices** in dealing with the population, we all care about.

**Vera Bernard-Opitz, Ph.D.**

*Clin. Psych., Editor*

<http://verabernard.org> ♥



## Pathways to Friendship and Play for Children on the Autism Spectrum – F2F and IPG Models

By Heather McCracken and Pamela Wolfberg



*Fifth graders ready to learn what it feels like to have autism in the Friend 2 Friend Simulation Game*

The unique and complex problems children on the autism spectrum encounter in peer relations and play pose significant challenges for parents, educators and therapists seeking to help them. Hallmarks of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) include a lack of varied and imaginative or imitative play as well as a failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level. Problems in these areas are intricately tied to characteristic impairments in reciprocal social interaction, communication and imagination (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Despite inherent problems, there is strong evidence to suggest that children with ASD share many of the same desires and capacities for play, companionship and peer group acceptance as typical children (Boucher & Wolfberg, 2003; Jordan, 2003). What differs is that their intentions are expressed in ways that are uniquely their own. As such, the unusual ways in which children with autism relate to people and objects often set them apart from their peer group. Without appropriate support, these children are especially vulnerable to being rejected or neglected by peers. This, in turn, deprives them



*Third graders reviewing the Seven Basic Friendship Tips with Leanna and Mr. Monkeybones*

**“Friendships and social play are where we practice the skills we need to be successful caring adults.”**

– Kenneth Rubin, 2002  
*The Friendship Factor*

of opportunities to learn how to socialize and play in more conventional and socially accepted ways, and ultimately to form meaningful friendships.

The Friend 2 Friend (F2F) and Integrated Play Groups (IPG) models were created out of deep concern for the many children who are missing out on peer play and friendships as a vital part of their childhood experience (Wolfberg, McCracken & Tuchel, in press). These complementary models support children with ASD in play and friendships with typical peers in inclusive settings within the school, home and community.

### **Friend 2 Friend Model**

The *Friend 2 Friend (F2F)* model is designed to foster mutual friendships for children with ASD by building awareness, empathy and understanding in their peers, siblings and classmates (McCracken, in press; 2005ab). F2F offers innovative educational programs that include Puppet Presentations targeting children ages 3-10 and Simulation-Game Presentations targeting children ages 11 and up. Presented in an age-appropriate and sensitive manner, F2F demystifies autism for children by modeling, labeling, explaining and normalizing characteristics of autism and providing the experience of what it feels like to have autism. F2F also teaches children specific friendship skills (7 Basic Friendship Tips) that include pro-social communication strategies to help a peer socialize and play with a child with autism.

### Seven Basic Friendship Tips

- 1. Get Your Friend's Attention –**  
Say your friends name to get their attention before you start to speak to them.
- 2. Use Small Sentences, Gestures, and Wait –**  
Too many words can sound like blah-blah so use small sentences and gestures like pointing to help your friend understand you, then wait to give your friend time to answer you.
- 3. Watch Your Friend –**  
Watch your friend so you can learn the things that they are good at or like to do.
- 4. Give Your Friend Choices –**  
When asking your friend to play, try giving them choices of the things you know they like to do or are good at.
- 5. Ask Your Friend to Talk –**  
Everyone likes to be asked questions about themselves, like: What are you drawing? Will you sit beside me? Do you want to play?
- 6. Use Friendly Words –**  
What is the friendliest word you know, sometimes "hi" is the friendliest thing you can say to someone.
- 7. Accept Differences –**  
We are all different in our own way, being a good friend means accepting differences in ourselves and others.

The F2F model is a compilation of years of study and practical experiences combined with contributions and support of numerous individuals with autism, parents, educators, therapists and students (McCracken, in press). F2F has been adopted by numerous schools/programs at the local, national and international level, and is gaining recognition as among best practices for children with ASD. To date, F2F has visited over 25,000 children including over 700 with autism. Based on preliminary findings of current research in progress, there is strong evidence demonstrating benefits for both the children with autism and typical peers. Positive outcomes noted for the children with autism include: better communication skills, improved social success, increased self-confidence, decreased anxiety and stress, diversity of interests and play, fun and friendships. Positive outcomes noted for typical peers include: sense of pride in helping others, better understanding/acceptance

of differences in others, better communication skills, increased self confidence, fun and friendships. Further, there is strong evidence to suggest that the F2F program has had an influence on schools in a broader sense by helping to create a culture that embraces diversity and inclusion on many levels. The following are basic friendship tips:

### Features of the Friend 2 Friend Model

<b>Mission</b>	To foster understanding, acceptance, empathy and mutual friendships between children on the autism spectrum and their peers, siblings and classmates
<b>F2F Program Design</b>	
<b>Learning Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize and accept differences in oneself and others</li> <li>• Recognize individuals with ASD as valuable friends</li> <li>• Encourage opportunities to ask questions and express feelings</li> <li>• Understand the unique challenges of individuals with ASD</li> <li>• Empathize with what it feels like to have ASD</li> <li>• Promote positive relations with <i>all</i> peers</li> </ul>
<b>Service Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preschool – high school aged students (3 years and up)</li> <li>• Small group presentations</li> <li>• Facilitated by F2F lead presenter and program guides</li> <li>• Visits arranged in schools and community settings</li> </ul>
<b>F2F Programs</b>	
<b>Puppet Presentations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children ages 3-10 years</li> <li>• Small groups (one to two classes/up to 50 – 60 children)</li> <li>• 30-40 minute interactive presentations</li> <li>• Visual, auditory and tactile learning opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>Simulation Game Presentations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children ages 11-18 years</li> <li>• Small groups (one to two classes/up to 60 – 80 children)</li> <li>• 45-60 minute interactive presentations</li> <li>• Visual, auditory and tactile learning opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>F2F Intervention</b>	
<b>Social Facilitation Model</b>	<p>Facilitates social interaction, communication, play and mutual friendships by skillfully introducing and applying the following practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modeling characteristics of autism</li> <li>• Labeling characteristics of autism</li> <li>• Explaining characteristics of autism</li> <li>• Normalizing characteristics of autism</li> </ul>



*Kindergarteners learning to play and make friends during the Friend 2 Friend Puppet Presentation.*

**Integrated Play Groups Model**

The *Integrated Play Groups (IPG)* model is designed to support children of diverse ages and abilities on the autism spectrum (novice players) in mutually enjoyed play experiences with typical peers/siblings (expert players) within school, home and community settings (Wolfberg, 1999; 2003). Small groups of children regularly play together under the guidance of an adult facilitator (play guide) within specially designed environments. Through a carefully tailored system of support, emphasis is placed on maximizing children’s developmental potential as well as intrinsic desire to play, socialize and form meaningful relationships with peers. Of equal importance is teaching peers to be empathetic, responsive and accepting of children’s differing social, communication and play styles. A further intent is for children to mediate their own play activities with minimal adult guidance.

The intervention involves methodically supporting novice and expert players to initiate and incorporate desired activity into socially coordinated play while challenging novice players to practice new and increasingly complex forms of play. Key practices include the following:

IPG Intervention	
<b>Guided Participation</b>	System of support to facilitate social interaction, communication, play and imagination by skillfully applying the following practices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring play initiations</li> <li>• Scaffolding play</li> <li>• Social-communication guidance</li> <li>• Play guidance</li> </ul>

Based on award-winning research, the IPG model has been adopted by numerous schools/programs at the local, national and international level, and is recognized as among best practices for children with ASD (Iovannone et al., 2003). Positive outcomes for both novice and expert players have been demonstrated through a series of studies carried out by and replicating the work of Wolfberg and colleagues (for a complete list of research, see publications in [www.autisminstitute.com](http://www.autisminstitute.com)). Advances in social interaction, communication, language, representational play and related symbolic activity (writing/drawing) have been noted for the children with ASD while increases in self-esteem, awareness, empathy and acceptance of individual differences have been noted for peers. Generalization and social validation also have been documented as children carried over skills and formed mutual friendships extending beyond the IPG setting. Please refer to *Features of the Integrated Play Groups Model* below.

language, representational play and related symbolic activity (writing/drawing) have been noted for the children with ASD while increases in self-esteem, awareness, empathy and acceptance of individual differences have been noted for peers. Generalization and social validation also have been documented as children carried over skills and formed mutual friendships extending beyond the IPG setting. Please refer to *Features of the Integrated Play Groups Model* below.

Features of the Integrated Play Groups Model	
<b>Mission</b>	To provide a haven for children with diverse abilities to create genuine play worlds together, where they may reach their social and imaginative potential, as well as have fun and make friends
<b>IPG Program Design</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster spontaneous, mutually enjoyed, reciprocal play with peers</li> <li>• Expand/diversify social and symbolic play repertoire</li> <li>• Enhance peer mediated play activities with minimal adult guidance</li> </ul>
<b>Service Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preschool – elementary aged children (3-11 years)</li> <li>• Customized as part of education / therapy program</li> <li>• Led by trained adult facilitator (play guide)</li> </ul>
<b>Play Group Composition</b>	3 to 5 children per group - higher ratio of expert to novice players <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Novice players – children of all abilities on the autism spectrum and with related special needs</li> <li>• Expert players – typically developing peers / siblings</li> </ul>
<i>Continued on next page</i>	

IPG Environmental Design	
<b>Schedule</b>	Play group sessions meet 2 times per week for 30-60 minutes over 6 to 12 month period
<b>Play Setting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Natural integrated settings – school, home, therapy or community</li> <li>Specially designed play spaces – wide range motivating materials, activities, themes encourage interactive and imaginative play</li> </ul>
<b>Play Session Structure</b>	Consistent routines, rituals, visual supports foster familiarity, predictability and a cohesive group identity

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**Heather McCracken**, Executive Director, parent of three, one with ASD; *Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society*, Vancouver, B.C. [www.friend2friendsociety.org](http://www.friend2friendsociety.org)

**Pamela Wolfberg, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor, Department of Special Education, San Francisco State University & Co-Founder of the Autism Institute on Peer Relations and Play, CA [www.autisminstitute.com](http://www.autisminstitute.com) ♥

## Artist: Austin Terry

By Tina Conner



Austin is an avid fan of animation. His initial interest in drawing involved watching others draw and observing their technique. Austin kept his classroom staff busy drawing "Digi-eggs" and other characters from the Digimon and Pokemon cartoons. Eventually, Austin decided to try sketching on his own. He has developed into a prolific artist and always has a sketch pad in his desk.

By far, Austin's favorite subject matter is *all things Disney*. Early efforts involved drawing Mickey Mouse, but he has since moved on to recreating entire landscapes from Disneyland. Austin particularly enjoys drawing pictures of the special events, such as Disneyland's 50th Anniversary Celebration. He also has a large collection of Disney animation books, providing an endless supply of pictures for him to replicate, seen in his early work.

Austin draws by copying existing pictures, working from memory, or drawing from his imagination. Once he has the concept, however, he can create future pictures on that subject without a model. He is now capable of generating original creations.

Austin brings this same conscientious study and focus to other aspects of his life. He is an excellent and hard-working student who enjoys reading, writing stories, studying maps, and learning about American history. He is also a confident performer who loves to be on stage. In school performances, he excels as a speaker, dancer and singer. His thorough study methods really allow him to "shine" on stage. He studies how others behave on stage and then mimics their behavior; "acting" like an actor, orator, singer, or dancer. His method is so effective that he regularly brings the audience to tears with his self-assured, earnest efforts.

Austin is eleven years old and currently attends Culverdale Elementary in Irvine, California. A rotating gallery of his work is on display throughout the campus and in his home. Austin's creative work and positive attitude never fail to bring joy to all who know him.

**Tina Conner**

Teacher – Special Schools Program

Orange County Department of Education ♥

# Social Skills Training For Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

By Jed Baker

## Motivation to Socialize

The number one question I receive from those working with students on the autism spectrum is how to motivate them to want to socialize.

- *John is 3 years old, with very limited language skills. When his parents try to sit and play with him he focuses on lining up play letters on the floor, virtually ignoring his parents. He has little interest in interacting with them or others.*
- *Karen, a highly verbal autistic 12 year old, refuses to interact with others in school or to compromise with others on projects. Her teachers explain that she needs to compromise if she wants to develop friendships, but she explains that she has no interest in making friends or ever having a job.*

Although different in their levels of functioning, both John and Karen are not motivated to learn social skills. Efforts to teach them how to relate to others will be frustrating unless the issue of motivation is addressed. The table below describes several methods of motivating students to learn social skills and many other skills.

verbal versus verbal reasoner) and the locus of motivation (external versus internal). Preverbal reasoners are students who may have some language but are not yet able to understand “if – then” statements (e.g., “If you play this with me, then you can have a snack.”). Verbal reasoners can understand “if – then” statements and thus one can try to use verbal reasoning with them in order to motivate them (e.g., “If you do your math with me, then we can play afterwards.”)

External motivation refers to providing students with a reward that may be functionally unrelated to the response they are making. For example, if a student is able to greet others when prompted, an external reward might be a special snack. The reward here is not logically related to the response and is not naturally built into the situation (i.e., the instructor must provide the reinforcement). Internal motivation refers to situations in which the student’s behaviors naturally provide them with rewards. For example, if a child enjoys playing follow the leader, then playing the game is itself rewarding and there is no need to provide another reward. Similarly, if a student

learns to request a toy from others and receives the toy, then the request naturally leads to its own reward, receiving the toy, and there is no need for other rewards.

## Motivational Strategies for Non-verbal Reasoners

The methods listed for non-verbal reasoners are those strategies often associated with “early intervention.” The goals are to build crucial skills that are prerequisites for later learning in school and social settings. These skills include: joint attention (attending to

others), the ability to follow simple directions, label and request objects, and answer questions. The

LOCUS OF MOTIVATION		
	Extended	Internal
Preverbal reasoner	Controlled studies demonstrate effectiveness Discrete Trial Intervention – Lovaas (Rewards are not necessarily functionally related to the student response)	Controlled studies demonstrate effectiveness Verbal Behavior Training – Sundberg and Parrington Natural Language Paradigm & Pivotal response Training – Koegel & Koegel (Rewards are functionally related to the students response)  Promising but no controlled outcome studies Floortime- Greenspan RDI - Gutstein
Verbal reasoner	Controlled studies demonstrate effectiveness Token systems and behavior charts	Promising but no controlled outcome studies Link skill goals to student’s personal goals Increase awareness of assets before describing possible challenges that need to be addressed Make socializing fun Have student teach others the social skills

The table categorizes different methods of motivating students in terms of their language ability (pre-



interventions associated with applied behavior analysis (ABA) have been subjected to the most rigorous controlled evaluations of outcome and demonstrate excellent results in about 50 percent of autistic students in terms of intellectual, language, adaptive, and early social skills.

**ABA approaches** include **Discrete Trial Intervention (DTI)** (Lovaas, 2003), **Natural Language Paradigm** (and its more recent cousin **Pivotal Response Training**) (Koegel & Koegel, 2005), and **Verbal Behavior Training** (Sundberg and Parrington, 1998). Although all these approaches share a basic structure of teaching behavior through cueing, prompting, and rewarding students, they differ in their emphasis on teaching in natural environments and utilizing internal versus external motivational systems.

A **discrete trial** has five components: a cue, prompt, the student's response, a reward and data collection. Earlier DTI approaches have been shown effective in improving students' ability to respond to adult cues, identify objects, but not always as successful in increasing students' spontaneous language or generalizing skills to natural settings.

In contrast, **Verbal Behavior Training** and **Pivotal Response Training** occur in more natural settings and capitalize more on the students' own interests. In the first phase of verbal behavior training, the emphasis is on teaching children to spontaneously request activities, food, objects, breaks, or attention while in a more natural play environment. As such, the students are typically highly motivated as their responses lead to naturally rewarding consequences (i.e., getting what they requested). Similarly, Pivotal Response Training begins with assessing what the students is interested in and then beginning a discrete trial centered on that interest.

**Greenspan's "Floortime" DIR** (Developmental Individual-Difference, Relationship-Based) model also capitalizes on the student's own interests, emphasizing following the lead of the youngster as the adult plays with the student in an effort to target various developmental skills (Greenspan & Wieder, 1998). Although there are some semi-structured play

activities in this model, cues, prompts and rewards are not used in the same systematic way as in ABA methods.

Another promising approach is **Relational Development Intervention (RDI)** (Gutstein & Sheely, 2002). RDI outlines a systematic set of activities that pull for students to engage because of the joy in the activity rather than an external reward. Early activities to build joint attention might include imitation games like follow the leader or "follow my eyes to the prize," where students have to look at an adult's eyes to find where the adult hid a prize in the room. Although these activities have not been empirically tested yet, the concept is reasonable; engage students in activities that limit over stimulation and require attending to others.

#### **Motivational Strategies for Verbal Reasoners**

For many highly verbal students, external rewards are not necessary. Internal motivational strategies start with linking social skills training to students' own goals. For example, if a youngster wants to go to a birthday party, one can motivate him to learn how to play the games that they will play at the party and other crucial skills to maintain himself at the party. Similarly, many adolescents who never wanted to learn social skills suddenly develop motivation to learn certain skills in an effort to help them find a date. For students with little internal motivation, external rewards may be necessary. Often tokens or points are earned, recorded on a behavior chart, and exchanged for short- and long-term rewards.

Strategies cannot be so straight forward for the student who seems to have no goals, has become depressed and denies any need for skills training. Those students may need counseling to develop greater self-awareness of their strengths before acknowledging any need for help. **For most students, it is helpful to have someone point out two to three strengths for any difficulty that maybe highlighted.**

Making skills training fun by using entertaining role-plays and social games, linking skill lessons to fun group activities or projects is another way to increase motivation. Lastly, asking a student to help

you teach others can motivate otherwise resistant students. For example, asking students to create picture books (see Baker, 2003), videos or live skits, to “help others” allows them to learn a skill without having to acknowledge that they themselves needed to learn it.

### The Components of Social Skills Training

All too often we strive to “fix” the child with the disability and virtually overlook the “typical” peers who maybe ignoring, teasing or rejecting the student. Including typical peers as a focus for intervention yields better results for both disabled students and their peers. We typically begin to target peers at the age that many students enter school environments, by about 3- to 4-years old.

Consistent with this view, I believe effective social skills training consists of at least the following four components:

#### For students with ASD

1. *Skills training lessons* to teach explicitly the social skills that do not come naturally for ASD students.
2. Activities to promote *generalization* of skills in the situations where they are needed.

#### For typical peers and the student's community

3. *Sensitivity training lessons* for others to be more accepting and engaging of students with ASD.
4. Activities to promote *generalization* of sensitivity to ASD students.

### 1. Skill Lessons for ASD students

For verbal reasoners (i.e., students who can understand verbal explanations), we might break down a skill into its component steps, **explain it, model it, and role-play it** until the youngster can demonstrate the skill and understands why it is important. Using this straight-forward approach, we have broken down into simple steps over 70 such social skills related to play, conversation, emotion

### 1. Decide if you need to interrupt because you need help or want something.



*The boy can't open the jar.  
He will interrupt the teachers for help.*

management and empathy in a manual on social skills training for children with social-communication problems (see Baker, 2003).

For very young students (3 and under) with very little language or ability to attend to others, we might begin with the early intervention strategies described earlier (Discrete Trial Intervention, Verbal Behavior Training, Pivotal Response Training, Floortime – DIR, and RDI). For students who have developed some language but still have difficulty understanding verbal explanations, I have translated a subset of the skills that appear in the manual (Baker, 2003) into picture form (see the *Social Skills Picture Book*, Baker, 2001). Instead of explaining skill steps with words, we show a picture sequence. Of particular benefit is making your own picture books, so that students have pictures of themselves engaged in the right (or wrong) way to demonstrate a skill. After the pictures are shown, students should still role-play the skill so that they can actually go through the motions of the skill steps.

### 2. Generalization of skills

Generalization refers to the ability of an individual to use a new skill in situations beyond the training session, and hopefully to use the new skill spon-

2. Walk up to the person and wait for a pause. A pause is when others stop talking.



*Right Way: The boy walked up to the teachers and is waiting for them to stop talking and look at him.*



*Wrong Way: The boy did not wait for them to stop talking, he grabbed the teacher's arm.*

3. Say "Excuse me..." then ask for what you want or need.



*Right Way: The boy says "excuse me" and asks for help.*



*Wrong Way: The boy did not say "excuse me" or ask for help, he just grabbed the teacher.*

taneously without prompting from others. To achieve this level of fluidity with a new skill, individuals must practice and repeat the skill steps a great deal. As a result, it is unrealistic to think one can generalize many new skills at once. In my experience, true generalization occurs when individuals are reminded about or rehearse no more than one to three new skills every day for several months. Generalization of a skill involves three steps: priming before the situation in which the skill is needed; frequent facilitated opportunities to practice the skill; and review of the skill after it is used.

Priming involves some reminder to the individual of what the skill steps are just prior to needing the skill. For example, just before going on a job interview, an individual might go over how to answer anticipated questions. Cue cards, behavior

4. Wait for them to give it to you.



*The boy waited for the teachers to help him open the jar.*

charts, copies of skill lessons (see Baker, 2003), and social skill picture books can serve as visual aides that depict the skill steps.

In order to practice the new skills, students need real opportunities. Facilitated opportunities involve creating daily situations in which the skills can be practiced and coached. For example, a student who never initiates conversation with anyone may be asked to call someone on the phone once per day or join a lunch group facilitated by an adult to practice conversation skills.

After situations have occurred in which skills were needed, the student's performance can be reviewed to increase awareness of the skill. If a youngster is on a reward chart, the reason why the student received the reward (or not) should be reviewed with him or her to enhance learning.

### 3. Peer Sensitivity

Sometimes youngsters with ASD are ignored, yet often they are actively teased or bullied. Students with ASD may do nothing to deserve such teasing and other times they may provoke such reactions with unintentional "irritating" behaviors. When students are harassed, teased, or rejected, it is crucial to explain to others the unintentional nature of their behaviors and how others can help. We often talk with peers about the strengths and talents of the individuals with ASD and present examples of successful, famous figures who may also have had an ASD.

### 4. Generalization through peer leadership programs

We ask peers to do three things to help their ASD classmates and each other:

- (1) **include others who are left out;**
- (2) **stand up for those who are teased; and**
- (3) **offer help to those who are upset.**

To help these kind behaviors generalize into the daily routines of the students, we might create a peer leadership program, where peers volunteer to engage with the targeted student and/or coach the student. We might also introduce a reward program to recognize and reward "kind" behaviors towards fellow students. Our experience and a growing body of research suggests that including typical peers as targets for training can have profound effects on the development of social skills and overall happiness of ASD students in school environments (Dunn, 2005; Baker 2003; Wagner, 1998).

Excerpted from the article, "Social Skills Slump? Motiving the Desire to Learn" by Jed Baker, Ph.D. that appeared in the September-October 2005 issue of the **Autism Asperger's Digest**, a bimonthly magazine on autism spectrum disorders published by Future Horizons; [www.autismdigest.com](http://www.autismdigest.com).

*Pictures taken from Social Skills Picture Book published by Future Horizons ([www.fhautism.com](http://www.fhautism.com)).*

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### Jed Baker, Ph.D.

*Director of the Social Skills Training Project in Maplewood, N.J.*

*For more information please visit*

*[www.socialskillstrainingproject.com](http://www.socialskillstrainingproject.com) ♥*

# Teaching Social Skills in School

By Kelly McKinnon

For children with autism, social skills do not come inherently easy. They are a crucial part of the diagnosis of autism and determine to a large extent the final success of affected children with integration, friendship and long-term outcome.



*Student's areas of interests are assessed and utilized*

It is vital that social skills be an integral part of a student's daily activities. This may include setting up cooperative 'play-stations' as a center or lesson activity or utilizing recess play as an opportunity. For some students, this may include a daily bell period designed to teach specific skills. To teach and generalize social skills classmates should be included in lesson plans for children with ASD.

We know from research that children with autism have a unique learning style. For fast progress social and play tasks should be broken into small steps, providing visuals in the form of schedules and social stories. Initial support via models or prompts is usually required. Individualized reinforcers ensure that skills will be performed again. Using these ABA methods is a very effective way to teach new social skills in school.

### **Recess play:**

Recess can be a very overwhelming time for many students, particularly the child with autism. There is always a crowd; it often includes games ("oh no - gross motor tasks!") and lots of chatter ("oh no - language and conversation skills!"), all challenging demands for

**While cognitive and academic deficits are often the focus of training programs, they actually are not part of the diagnostic criteria for Autism-social, play and language deficits are!**

the student with ASD. Using established teaching principles we can support students to navigate and to successfully use these valuable learning opportunities.

### **Consider your students' areas of need:**

- Can s/he navigate the equipment
- Does s/he need to learn the basics of interactive games, such as tag, chase?
- Are there adequate choices of activities or should others be provided (e.g. jump ropes, chalk, card & board games, large building toys?)
- Would s/he benefit from a recess schedule to know what to do when?
- Can s/he work cooperatively with the materials, such as sharing and taking turns?

The following 'mini-schedules' can help to structure recess and make it less overwhelming for students with ASD:

MINI-SCHEDULES		(3 x 5 cards)	
 Swings	<b>I CAN:</b> 1) Get on swing 2) Push a friend 3) Ask a friend to push me 4) Take turns 5) Be careful walking near the swings	 SLIDE	<b>I CAN:</b> 1) Climb up ladder 2) Be careful climbing the ladder 3) Slide down the slide 4) Move away from the bottom of the slide 5) Take turns
 CATCH	<b>I CAN:</b> 1) Ask a friend to play catch with me 2) Take turns 3) Throw the ball to my friend 4) Catch the ball	 JUNGLE GYM	<b>I CAN:</b> 1) Climb up ladders 2) Swing on rings 3) Swing on bars 4) Climb on monkey bars 5) Be careful when I walk under jungle gym

The use of a 'play facilitator' and a 'recess buddy' can be another efficient and cost-effective way to support many struggling students. Once out at recess, typical children as well as students with ASD naturally

want to gravitate to the fun, exciting activities, and often need the help of a supervising adult to structure their activities. Pair 'recess buddies' can assist the student with ASD join into play or other recess activities.

**'Play-stations':**

'Play-stations' or 'centers' are topic-focused play areas, which invite children into specific play- and language activities. Support staff or parent helpers can facilitate appropriate toy play, language and interaction. The following should be discussed, when setting up 'play-stations':

The following sequence of intervention has been effective to teach play and social skills in preschool settings:

Station #1	Station #2	Station #3	Station #4	Station #5
Play 1:1 Teaching	Independent play	Play with peer	Play with trained peer Adult close-by	Play with more than one peer Adult at distance
<p><b>Station 1:</b> 1:1 teaching opportunity of teaching new play skills  <b>Station 2:</b> An independent play station with mastered play activities  <b>Station 3:</b> A peer station, with one adult, and a peer (can be another student with autism) that knows how to play the same skills/game with a focus of teaching to play together  <b>Station 4:</b> A peer station, with an adult close by to monitor  <b>Station 5:</b> Multiple peers playing, with an adult at a distance</p>				

**Consider your students' areas of need:**

- Can your student play with the materials his peers enjoy?
- Can she share materials or wait her/his turn?
- Can she work on an activity cooperatively?
- Can she comment to others about their play?

Using picture **play-books** on how to play with toys, as well as peer models can help a student with deficient skills.



*Students learning basic play skills through the use of picture play books*

Providing visuals of things to say and setting up **reward or point systems for commenting** during play may help increase your student's commenting rates.



**Classroom reward systems** can encourage active participation in joint play and pro-social behavior including helping friends and good sportsmanship. This is often helpful for the class-climate as well as the acceptance and integration of children with ASD. Social skills do not come inherently easy for children with ASD, but with adequate training and support can make a big difference for their immediate and long-term future.

**Kelly McKinnon, MA, BCBA**  
[www.kellymckinnon.com](http://www.kellymckinnon.com) ♥

# Transition to Employment

By Peter Gerhardt

In the United States, an individual's employment status is generally regarded as a central feature of adulthood. It is, for better or worse, one way in which we define ourselves and attempt to define others. For example, within minutes of meeting someone new, most of us will ask "What is it you do for a living?" The importance we place on whether or not one is employed and, if so, at what, cannot be underestimated.

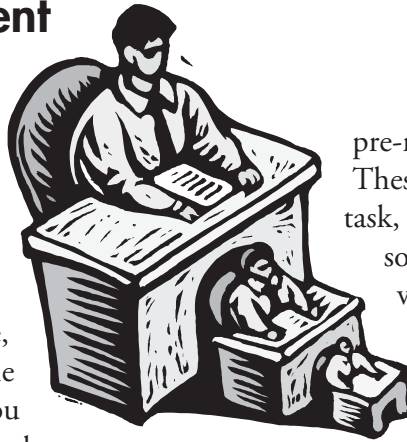
Unfortunately, for most adults with disabilities employment remains elusive. According to a poll conducted by Lewis Harris and Associates (2002):

- Up to 75 percent of **all people with disabilities** are unemployed,
- 79 percent of **all people with disabilities** who are unemployed wish to be employed,
- Approximately 50 percent of **working age people with disabilities** who are unemployed believe employers are not sensitive to the need of workers with disabilities.

These results reflect a diverse mix of people with varying disabilities and may, unfortunately, be somewhat optimistic with regards to the level of employment for persons with autism. The significant social, communicative, behavioral and learning challenges associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) present the individual, the family, the employer and support personnel with a number of complex challenges. But this does not mean that persons with ASD cannot and should not have greater access, support, and success in the employment arena. What follows are a few (very) brief recommendations to improve the transition process.

## Redefine Work Readiness

First, the concept of "work readiness" needs to be redefined. Historically, work readiness has been used to describe a cohort of skills that were considered



pre-requisites for employment success. These might include extended time on task, the absence of challenging behavior, some degree of social competence, conversational skills, etc. Unfortunately, this arbitrary standard of competence has inadvertently excluded far more people with ASD from the workforce than it has helped

gain access. Given that many of the skills one needs to have a job are only learned while on the job (hence the phrase "on the job training") the operative definition places many individuals with ASD in a 'Catch 22' type situation. It seems you can't get a job because you don't have the skills, and you can't learn the skills because you can't get a job; but you can't get a job because you don't... and so on.



*Drawing by Andra Bernard*

Therefore, redefining the concept of work readiness to acknowledge all persons with ASD as being potentially viable candidates for employment is in order. (My personal definition requires an assessment of whether or not the person is breathing.) Once that is acknowledged, more appropriate and functional transition programming (i.e., community experience, job sampling, social coaching, trans-

portation training, functional communication, self management, etc.) can be implemented for all learners, not just for some whose learning curve may be shorter or behavioral challenges may be fewer.

**Actively Promote Functional Transition Planning**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990) requires a transition plan be developed and implemented for individuals with disabilities beginning at 14 years of age. The critical question to be answered in any transition plan is simple, “transition to what?” Without a clear sense of what the end product of the transition plan is to be (e.g., a minimum of 20 hours of employment in a desired [and hiring] industry) the likelihood of a desirable outcome being obtained is greatly diminished.

**Transition planning meetings should involve the person with ASD, their parents, and relevant educational and related support staff (i.e., speech and language pathologists).** One outcome of this meeting is developing a transition goal that takes into account likes, dislikes, preferences, strengths, and challenges of the individual with ASD. Further, intermediate objectives are identified and responsibilities assigned.

For example: **Student:** Mark Doe **Age:** 14 years

**Transition to Employment Goal:** To obtain employment in a field where 1) there are clear completion criteria, 2) he will be able to listen to his music on a walkman, 3) he will be able to access transportation to, and 4) he will work directly with one primary supervisor.

**Short Term Objectives:  
(3 Months)**

- Investigate employment opportunities meeting these criteria
- Assess appropriate opportunities in terms of production, social, and safety demands
- Obtain bus pass for ride to work
- Obtain state issued non-driver’s driver’s license for purposes of identification and so on...

In this way a goal is set, discrete objectives are developed, progress is assessed, and based upon that assessment, modifications can be made as necessary (as they almost always are) at regularly scheduled follow up meetings. Without such a plan, future employment, while possible, becomes an increasingly distant goal. As the saying goes, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.” All the more reason to plan, implement the plan, and then revisit and modify as necessary.

**View First Jobs as Learning Experiences**

Seldom does our first job turn out to be our dream job. Most of us go through a series of jobs--some bad, some good--on the way to finding something that meets our definition of a good job. The same should be recognized as true for learners with ASD in the transition process. **First jobs are simply first jobs.** They are important because they are the place where the person with ASD can begin to 1) develop the skills necessary to keep and hold a job, and 2) develop a sense of which type of jobs and job conditions are best suited for him or her.

In that way, even a first job that fails to last longer than a day can be a valuable experience. This is particularly true if we are able to determine what it was about the job that did not meet the learner’s needs, abilities, interests, and idiosyncrasies. Was the job too noisy? Were the production demands too high? Was there too much general activity and confusion? Was there not enough for him or her to do? This meeting of individual preferences and job characteristics is often referred to as the “job match.”

For many learners with ASD for whom the salary may not be a primary motivating factor, the degree of job match can be *the* critical variable between employee and employer satisfaction and a return to unemployment.

A high degree of job match means that the production, social, and environmental components of a job are viewed as favorable by the employee. A low degree indicates an unfavorable view of these conditions.



### Consider Job Carving

Today's job market is both highly technical and generally complex with most employees required to handle multiple components of a given job. This can play to the advantage of persons with ASD through "job carving," an innovative approach that takes advantage of this complexity by working to create a real and useful job where none previously existed. This is a technique that requires interest, observation, and negotiating skills. Any parent, sibling, or friend who knows the ASD person's personality, strengths and weaknesses, as well as his or her work interests, might find a job-carving opportunity in their own workplace or in a job setting targeted in the transition plan. If so, the objective is to present it to the employer for its economic benefit to the company as well as a strong job match for the person with ASD.

For example, imagine a small but growing local business that consists of the owner, office manager, bookkeeper, and a number of direct-service professionals. As the business grows, the owner realizes it is increasingly difficult for the office manager to coordinate the monthly billing with the bookkeeper while continuing to do everything else that is required of her. In this situation, a reasonable "job carve" may be to work with the employer to develop a "billing only" position that may be filled by a learner with ASD, thereby allowing the office manager and bookkeeper to focus on other, equally important parts of their jobs. The employer benefits (his or her bills are going out on time every month), the office manager and bookkeeper benefit as they are able to better attend to other, more complex job requirements and the learner with ASD benefits by accessing paid employment. Job carving entails the creation of an economically viable, real **job in a workplace where one previously was not even known to exist.**

### Consider Co-Worker Training

To most of the country (if not the world), autism is best understood as Raymond Babbit from the

movie "Rainman." While a fine portrayal of one person with autism, the diversity of people with an ASD label goes well beyond the single individual portrayed by Dustin Hoffman. For the most part, we can safely assume that, unless potential employers and co-workers have direct experience in supporting a person with ASD, they will have limited understanding of ASD. In this case parents and other support persons may have to provide or help to create

a respectful co-worker orientation program about ASD and what it means in the life of their new co-worker. For example, providing employers and specific co-workers with insight into how best to offer directions or feedback to their new colleague; letting them know that if they ask a question they may need to wait a few seconds for the reply while the question is being processed; or assuring them that

despite a lack of eye contact, he or she is still paying attention can be invaluable in preventing misunderstanding, miscommunication, and ultimately, the return to unemployment.

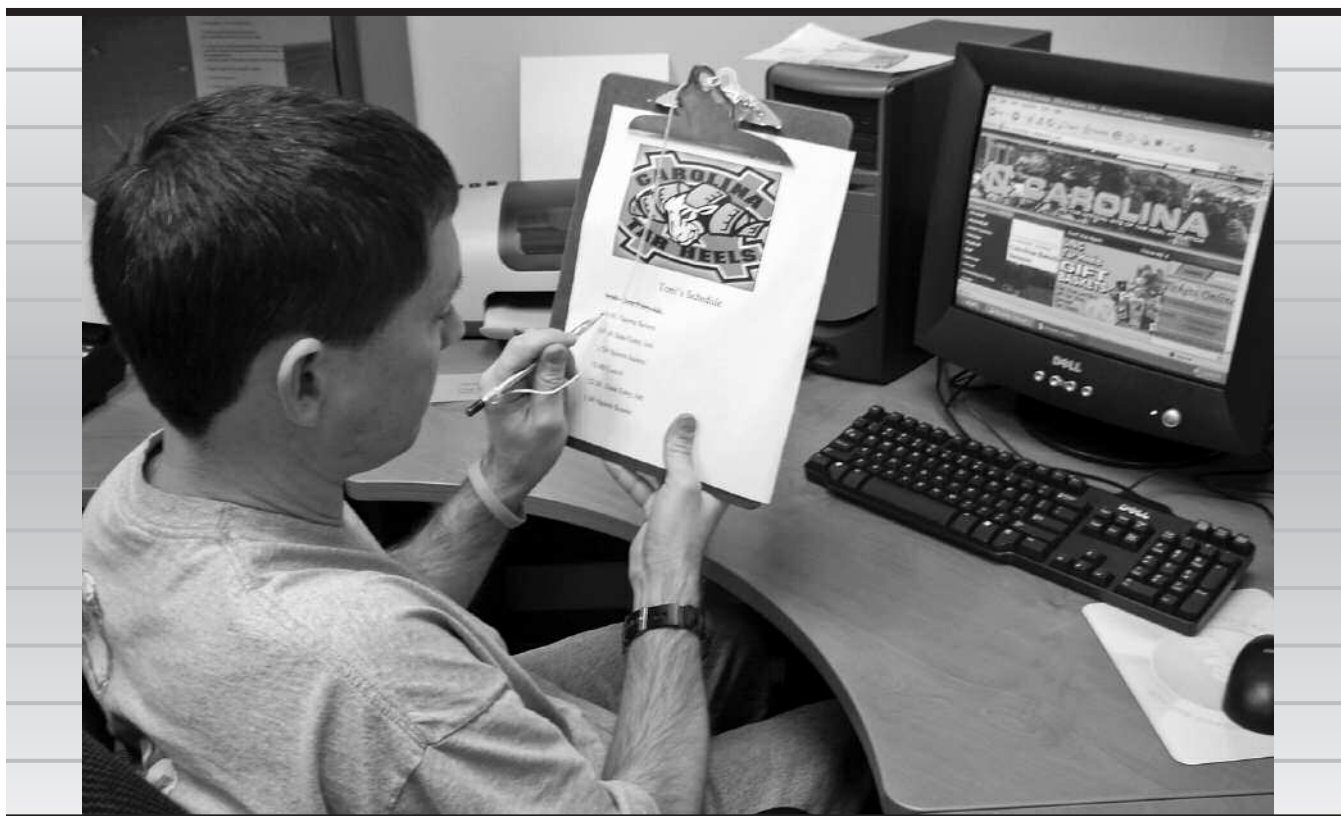
### Summary

Despite the currently unfavorable employment statistics, many individuals with ASD are employable and very capable of being competent, dedicated employees with the right planning, training, and support. What is needed now is greater attention to more clearly identifying those educational, behavioral, social, and systemic interventions and supports that will best allow individuals with ASD to achieve this highly valued goal.

**Peter F. Gerhardt, Ed.D.**

*Organization for Autism Research  
Arlington, VA ♥*





## 'Structured Teaching' Techniques for Adolescents and Adults in the Workplace

By Glenna Osborne



Following high school, Andrew, an 18-year-old with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and moderate to severe mental retardation, and his parents found an opportunity for Andrew to work a few hours each day in a simple clerical job. This job included shredding papers and filling simple store-room orders in a small office setting. This seemed perfect for Andrew. It was close to his home and the office staff appeared to be 'supportive folks.' One major obstacle seemed to stand in the way: Andrew had never learned how to count past 2.

Tom, a 21-year old young man with average intelligence and ASD, had always enjoyed the computer and demonstrated many good computer skills. Tom's parents and his teachers felt that he could be very successful with a data-entry position. However, Tom had an obsession with sports scores on the Internet so that any work on the computer always turned into a sports' score expedition.

While at his dishwashing job, Bob, a 35-year-old with ASD and borderline intelligence, continuously

looked over his shoulder while working. This behavior was so frequent it negatively impacted his productivity. When asked, Bob related he "wants to be independent" and he did not "want too many pots." Although he did an excellent job, while he was actually washing the pots, his decrease in productivity and increased anxiety caused the manager to consider if Bob could continue this job.

The support staff for Tamika, a 19-year-old young woman with ASD and severe mental retardation, was able to find a job for her involving polishing and rolling silverware, and folding take-out boxes. Tamika started by completing only one container of silverware, and folding just a few boxes. As she became more proficient, she didn't seem to mind this repetitive type of work for longer and longer periods of time. Her supervisors increasingly gave her more work to complete. After a few weeks of working, yet quite unexpectedly, Tamika paused after more silverware was added to the bins around her and began to

throw the silverware. On subsequent workdays, Tamika's productivity, as well as its quality, significantly decreased.

TEACCH's *Structured Teaching* strategies can be used to assist all of the described individuals to reach their goal of successful ongoing employment. *Structured Teaching* methods, more widely known for classroom application, can be used to teach and support individuals, while providing a method of problem solving for challenging issues in a variety of job settings.

As documented in the newly released, "*The TEACCH Approach to Autism Spectrum Disorders*", Structured Teaching has two main components: 1) Increasing the individual's skills, and 2) Making the environment more comprehensible and more suited to the individual's needs." For more detailed information about this strategy, including the theoretical context of Structured Teaching, visit [www.TEACCH.com](http://www.TEACCH.com).

**Assessment** is a crucial first step in the process of determining the unique needs of each "employee." In a job setting changes often need to take place quickly so that individuals have an opportunity to keep their job. For Andrew, Tom, Bob and Tamika, and others in work settings, an initial assessment followed by long term ongoing assessment will be needed to ensure continued independence, achievement and success. 'On the job assessment' guides the support staff in developing; restructuring, fine-tuning or creating changes in the work environment that will more closely suit the employee and employer's needs.

Specifically, Structured Teaching involves four basic elements, including:

## ONE

**Physical Structure** – The arrangement of space/furniture/materials in such a way that meaning and clarity are added.

## TWO

**Daily Schedules** – A visual schedule helps the person with ASD in understanding and appropriately completing the sequence of upcoming events.

## THREE

**Individual Work/Activity Systems** – This aspect of Structured Teaching helps the person with ASD understand how to approach an activity in a systematic way. These systems provide visual explanation to four questions:

- 1) *What is the task or activity?*
- 2) *How many tasks or activities will make up the specific event/job? (or how long will the event last/how much?)*
- 3) *When is the event/job finished? (or how is progress is defined?)*
- 4) *What will happen after the completion of the event? (or what happens next?)*

## FOUR

**Visual Structure** – This level of structure provides visual strategies to assist the person with ASD in understanding and appropriately completing a particular task. Visual structure incorporates *Visual Instructions* – involving the sequence of steps in a particular task; *Visual Organization* – involving the use of space, containers and stabilization to help with organization; and *Visual Clarity* – to assist with increased attention to relevant task information.

For **Andrew**, the Structured Teaching techniques involving Visual Structure were used to create "jigs" (a puzzle of sorts, with slots for one-to-one correspondence of items – along the same idea as the separate hulls in an egg carton) to help him "count" more than 2 items to fill the storeroom orders. With this additional clarity and support, Andrew continues to be an invaluable member of the office staff, appreciated for his hard work.

**Tom** needed a visual schedule to help him better organize his time. His schedule included times for exploration of Internet sports scores, and also clearly indicated times when use of the Internet was not appropriate. Tom could see, from referring to his schedule, when he would get a break to view the sports scores on the Internet. At first, Tom needed more frequent breaks, during data entry work sessions, to view

Internet scores, but as he understood more about his schedule, he became comfortable with increased times between his breaks for Internet viewing. He was more able to remain focused and complete his assigned work. Tom was well on his way to having the needed work skills to secure a data-entry job.

In order to deal with the environmental distractions, **Bob** needed changes and modifications in the physical structure of his work setting. His supervisor arranged to have a larger shelving unit placed behind him, where co-workers could place pots that needed to be cleaned. This shelving unit created a natural boundary between Bob and others and made it easier to predict and process new work at his own timing. He more easily accepted the new pots to be cleaned and stopped constantly turning to look over his shoulders. His agitation over cleaning more pots greatly decreased, while his productivity increased. Bob is now happy, his coworkers better understand his unique needs, and the restaurant manager is happy and satisfied with Bob's work.

For **Tamika**, a simple left to right work/activity system was needed to help her comfortably understand work expectations. All of the work, she was expected to do during one seating, was placed in bins to the left of her workspace. Tamika learned to get each bin, place it at the workspace in front of her, and to then place com-

pleted items on a table to her right. Clear guidelines were developed to ensure that no "new" work or work materials would be added to already existing materials during one work session. The new materials would become part of another work session, following a short break for Tamika. She immediately seemed more comfortable, less stressed and her work showed great improvement. As a side note, this system seemed to help Tamika's coworkers better organize this area of the restaurant, resulting in increased productivity for all.

The use of TEACCH's Structured Teaching techniques can create opportunities for growth for individuals who have ASD and for the 'neurotypical' individuals sharing their environments – not only in classroom settings, but also in work places around our communities. For Andrew, Tom, Bob and Tamika, Structured Teaching techniques have helped them learn, grow, progress, and overcome yet another hurdle toward becoming more productive, independent and successful individuals and members of their communities.

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**Glenna Osborne, M. Ed.**

*Program Consultant, Division TEACCH ♥*

H I G H L I G H T

**About... SPIRIT LEAGUE**

By Marianne McAuley

As they said in the movie "Field of Dreams"..... build it, and they will come. Well, life imitates art in the **Spirit League**. Mike Echolds had a challenge. "Where?" and "can?" my son fit in to organized sports? He's a great kid... high functioning, growing bigger and bigger every day, but his learning difficulties keep him from fully participating in the typical organized sports leagues that are available to his peers. What to do?? Well, his answer was... to start a **NEW** league! One where children who struggle to "fit in" and compete could actually blossom under a new set of rules.

Be competitive? **YES!** Drill the fundamentals? **YES!** Challenge the kids? **YES!** Teach and enforce

the rules of the game? **YES!** Have fun? **YES!!**

Freak out whether you win or lose? Have parents live out their own unfulfilled dreams through their children? **NO!!!**

We give these kids a place to be active and hopefully learn these sports well enough to play with their peers on the playground and in the neighborhood.

And as the story goes... **Spirit League** was born. We're growing and learning along the way...just like our kids. Enrollment has increased each season and we're well on our way to achieve our dream. We're building a new "home" for our special kids to grow. Please join us for baseball, basketball and soccer!

Visit [www.spiritleague.org](http://www.spiritleague.org) for more details. ♥

## Notes on Life Skills: To What End?

By Jennifer McIlwee Myers

**There are many difficult decisions in choosing educational goals for children with autism. We all know that academics alone do not promote greater independence and self-determination. Instead an early and intensive focus on self-help and life skills is crucial to reach these goals. This is independent of whether the child has a genius IQ or a serious developmental delay.**

I have seen the results of having too strong an academic focus, and it isn't always pretty. One example is a dear friend of mine, a very brilliant adult woman with Asperger's Syndrome who reads advanced technical textbooks *for fun*. Yet she has never been able to live independently; her family knew she was a genius, and different, so they protected her from daily hassles. Consequently, her life skills are poor, and she works at a menial job that does not support her; her family will have to take care of her for the rest of her life.

Searching for other 'aspies' (as we people with Asperger's Syndrome often call ourselves) online, I have found the same situation over and over: the brilliant 'aspie' who cannot live independently or hold a job, because s/he has not been taught simple life skills. Overprotective parenting and a focus on academics over all else can destroy the chance for even a brilliant child to gain independence, never mind a child with an average or low intelligence level.

On the other hand, Jimmy, my sixteen-year old brother, has autism, yet has just started his first job. He is still obsessed with Thomas the Tank Engine and Blue's Clues, he still cannot form complex sentences, and he is unable to guess when people might be lying to him. While he is in many ways still like a child a third of his age he passed the eligibility tests for his first job with ease.

Why has he succeeded? Jimmy has one major

advantage: parents who know the importance of life skills and are determined to teach them. The first dozen times my dad made Jimmy place his own order at McDonald's, it was really rough. It took tons of coaching: endlessly going over the rules for how to order, how to pay, and how to react if the order was not precisely as expected. Of course, my dad gave him the appropriate amount of money to pay and counted the change for quite a long time before Jimmy could handle the exchange himself.



**Overprotective parenting and a focus on academics over all else can destroy the chance for even a brilliant child to gain independence.**

**My autistic brother has one major advantage: parents who know the importance of life skills.**

**I was not allowed to get away with being rude to the 'normies' just because they were, well, normal.**

Additionally, my parents insist that Jimmy help with ordinary household tasks. This has been hard for my dad sometimes; he says that at first it was agony for him to make Jimmy take the trash out on cold mornings when it would have been quite easy to just do it himself and let Jimmy sleep in a bit.

Now I have a brother, who happens to have autism, who can load a dishwasher, do laundry, and help with the grocery shopping. More importantly, he (usually) does not yell at other people when they make minor mistakes, and he is able to (usually) correct his own mistakes calmly. He has become aware enough of what is socially age-appropriate so that he now stores his toys on shelves as a "toy collector's museum." My brother is an awesome teen!

As a person with AS, I also reaped the benefit of pushy parents who wanted me to be independent and master the diffi-

cult transition into adulthood and increasing self-determination. I was explicitly and deliberately taught everything from how to properly write a check and balance a budget to how to write a *polite* letter of complaint. I was constantly reminded that just because other people can't read 800 words per minute and don't understand symbolic logic does not mean that they aren't worthwhile. I was not allowed to get away with being rude to the "normies" just because they were, well, normal.

**My autistic brother now is awesome!**

**To discount the need for people with autism to learn what everyone else needs to know sets us up to be wards of the state.**

There is an online world of 'aspies' and 'auties' (another slang term used by people with autism for themselves) who are smart enough to build web sites and post endlessly to bulletin boards while still being entirely dependent on family and/or welfare. Despite the ongoing need for people with good computer skills they cannot hold a job, and often cannot handle frustrations such as being told they might be wrong about something.

**Life skills contribute to higher acceptance by others.**

Sadly, this group includes a significant contingent that believes that autism is purely a separate culture and not a disability. In between complaints about not being able to find a girl/boyfriend or make any friends, they put forth the idea that no one with autism should ever be treated, and that autism should be respected to the extent that people with autism should be accepted as they are with no attempt to make any changes. What these folks (and quite a few others) miss is that all children are born 'disabled.' Every child has to be taught to communicate, to act appropriately, and to perform basic life skills. To discount the need for people with autism to learn what everyone else needs to know sets us up to be wards of the state, set apart without a chance of belonging.

**Through life skills people with autism get more influence on their own live.**

And that is what learning life skills is about: the ability to belong, to be respected and to be integrated. When a person with autism goes into a fast-food restaurant *A* and is able to order for her/himself (whether verbally or with visual aids), that tiny action

of independence lets others know that we all share something very basic even if it is as plain as the necessity to eat when we are hungry. When a child with AS learns to treat others with a politeness and respect, s/he is recognized as a person instead of a problem.

Unfortunately, much of the academic and pseudo-academic work that children (and adults) with autism are given tends to be isolating and boring and often does not entail the described goal of independence. Putting the blue triangles in order for the twentieth time or endless stitching of sewing cards risks the child's retreat into their own little mental world.

A person who knows how to groom and dress him/herself, and wash his/her own clothes is much more pleasant to be around than someone who doesn't. Any person who can't do the above and is not working towards those skills is in a state of permanent infancy. No amount of social skill practice can make up for the difference seen and felt by peers of someone who is totally dependent.

As a married adult with AS, I am often asked by parents whether I think their autistic child has a chance of getting married and/or having children. In some cases, there may be little chance; in many cases, there is no way to tell. But I am certain: if that child never has some level of independence and self-determination, the answer will certainly be "no."

Life-skills training is the one missing link that all children (and teens, and adults) need. Right now children with autism usually get much less such training than typical children; what all children on the autism spectrum need and deserve is much more.

And maybe both children and adults with autism might be more inclined to come out of their shells if they learn that they have more influence on their own lives than just pointing to a card to say whether or not they want a cookie.

**Jennifer McIlwee Myers ♥**

## Transitions: From a Parent's Perspective

By Linda and Peter Vos

Before having a child with autism, we did not realize that transitions are such a challenge for the child as well as the parents. While the child has to adjust to a new learning situation, parents struggle with decisions on what is best for their child. Without careful consideration, our family dynamic could have gone from peaceful to chaos in a nanosecond. Many of you reading this article must recognize this experience. I liken it to that life-determining moment of having your child diagnosed with autism.

Our story started when we noticed that one of daughter's (Chelsea) was developing at a slower pace than her twin sister (Cambria). Chelsea had sudden melt downs for no apparent reason, would cry inconsolably and fling her body backwards hard enough to injure herself or me. Her speech was minimal, and her reaction in social settings was sometimes explosive. At other times she would retreat completely into her internal comfort zone where we couldn't reach her. By the time she was two years old we sought services from the Regional Center of Orange County (RCOC) and were on the way to getting a diagnosis of high-functioning autism. Although we were struck with grief, it was a relief to finally understand her difficulties, and more importantly, what to do to intervene.

We enrolled the girls in the Moringa Tree Play Group, designed for children diagnosed with autism and/or at risk for developing autism. The program provided occupational therapy, physical therapy, and integrated speech and language services four mornings a week; parental participation was encouraged. We requested that the program also accept our unaffected daughter into the group to act as a "typical peer" role model. I gained considerable knowledge through my daily involvement in this intense program especially in the area of transitions.

Transitions are challenging for any child but particularly so for children with autism. How transi-

*Chelsea (left) and her twin sister in her old school*



tions are structured strongly affects the way a child accepts change. Transitioning between activities in the playgroup was difficult for all the children. To help make the transition easier, concrete visual schedules were used, since most of the children were visual learners. Other supportive cues were given like the "one-minute-to-go card" and a picture of the next activity. A song was sung that indicated the time for transition to the new activity. The child would then take the card and move on to the new activity.

After seeing this process in action, we implemented a similar structure at home. We realized that Chelsea benefited from knowing the schedule of the day and that picture cards could help with her daily life transitions. Once we understood how important it was for us to manage Chelsea transitions, we were ready to make the next big transition from early start services with RCOC to the Saddleback Valley Unified School District (SVUSD).

To prepare for the transition we decided to learn as much as possible about SVUSD. We attended back-to-school night for the special needs preschool program. I remember crying that night (just like the night when I recognized that Chelsea really had autism) because the district program seemed too extensive and overwhelming for such a little one. I was also upset because Chelsea and Cambria would be separated, and I would no longer be in the classroom full time to supervise her progress.

To help myself to better deal with the upcoming transition, I enrolled myself in classes offered by the Family Resource Center and RCOC on transitions into school. I strongly recommend that all parents avail themselves of the valuable learning opportunity. I invited the individual education

program (IEP) team to observe the Moringa Tree Play Group to better appreciate Chelsea's needs.

My plan was to request at the IEP that Cambria be allowed to attend school with Chelsea to help manage her potential separation anxiety. We also felt that Cambria could continue her role as typically developing peer. The IEP went well; SVUSD allowed both Cambria and me to be in the classroom with Chelsea until she felt secure in her new environment. We continued the use of visual supports by visiting the classroom ahead of time to take pictures of the new environment, teachers, and therapists. From these pictures and others from the playgroup, I developed a social story about the "old school" and the "new school" that I read to the girls every day so they could internalize the upcoming change.

The transition to the new school worked out beautifully. Within a month of starting the new program, Cambria and I were able to transition out of the classroom because Chelsea was okay on her own. My lesson in all of this is that it is okay to think out of the box. Listen to the recommendation of the professionals, but become an active member of the IEP team by advocating for your child. Educate yourself as much as possible and early enough so that you can make changes that will make a difference in your child's transition into school. Lastly, have a positive attitude and a willingness to see options that are presented, no matter how you initially feel.

**Linda and Peter Vos ♥**

HIGHLIGHT

**Task of the Month**



Task Galore produces a series of "How to" books with creative material for teachers based on the TEACCH tradition. Monthly tasks such as the above are shared under: [http://www.taskgalore.com/Task\\_of\\_the\\_Month\\_Jan06.htm](http://www.taskgalore.com/Task_of_the_Month_Jan06.htm).

The above picture depicts a self-contained task in which the student puts together two halves to make a whole and then matches the product using the visual information for completion of the task.

HIGHLIGHT

**REACT Foundation  
Launches  
Mini Grant Program!**

REACT Foundation has launched a streamlined way for public and private educators of children with autism throughout Orange County to get much needed funds to support early intervention therapies. Funds have already been approved for 20 teachers and more continue as applications are reviewed and processed. Funds are to be used for learning materials for speech, language and social therapy, as well as training or special projects.

Grants average about \$100 per teacher and at least 30 more grants will be approved in this current round of grants. Please visit [www.reactfoundation.org](http://www.reactfoundation.org) and click on REACT Programs to view and print the Mini Grant Application.



## Integration into the Community

By Kyle D. Pontius

Community integration is the long range goal for children with autism. A survey was developed by the Community Integration Subcommittee of the Interagency Autism Group and distributed to families who receive the Regional Center of Orange County *Dialogue Newsletter*. The survey required the respondents to identify social/recreational activities currently being used and activities of interest for the future.

New identified resources have been added to the **Recreation Resource Guide**. This guide is free and available on CD by calling the Regional Center's Comfort Connection/Family Resource Center (CC/FRC) at 714-558-5400.

We are continuing to gather information on social/recreation resources. If you have resources that can be shared, please contact the CC/FRC (714-558-5400) or e-mail [ccfrc@rcocdd.com](mailto:ccfrc@rcocdd.com).

### **AREAS TO CONSIDER DURING A TRANSITION REVIEW MEETING**

The Transition Review should draw up a plan of how the person with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) will be prepared for adult life. The following list contains just some of the typical areas that may require planning for.

Please note not all will be relevant for all people, though each may need to be considered:

<b>Social Relatedness – The need to:</b>	<b>Life Skills – The need to:</b>
1. reduce his social isolation, help him leave the house/bedroom	1. travel independently and use public transport safely
2. improve his ability to relate to others (may include social skills)	2. live independently of his parent/caregivers (housing options and planning)
3. have someone to talk to outside the family (i.e. befriender, clubs)	3. learn how to look after himself, personal care and grooming; meet employers expectations
4. seek counseling – recognizing emotional difficulties	4. develop practical life skills – cooking, laundry, cleaning
5. recognize dangerous social situations	5. understand personal care, getting enough sleep, how to relax
6. develop appropriate relationships/sexual behavior	6. develop financial independence/ ability to manage own money; situations
7. discuss Asperger syndrome and how it affects him or her	7. manage any additional physical difficulties (for example, epilepsy, ADHD)
8. be able to explain Asperger syndrome to others (acquaintances, college students)	8. be encouraged to use prescribed medication
9. control his anger towards others	
10. understand personal safety outside the home, how to recognize and avoid 'risk'	
11. control his anger towards himself and others	
12. acquire assistance with mental health and associated difficulties (for example, depression)	

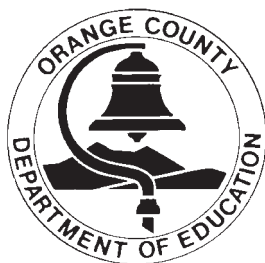
**Kyle D. Pontius, Ph.D.**

*Regional Center of Orange County* ♥

We are grateful for the ongoing sponsorship of this newsletter by the following agencies:



**Council for Exceptional Children** (Chapter 188) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities, and/or the gifted. CEC advocates for appropriate governmental policies, sets of professional standards, provides continual professional development, advocates for newly and historically underserved individuals with exceptionalities, and helps professionals obtain conditions and resources necessary for professional practice.



WILLIAM M. HABERMEHL  
County Superintendent of Schools

**Orange County Department of Education** provides 'world-class' educational programs for over 163,000 students. These include General Education, Alternate and Correctional Education, Outdoor Science, Regional Occupational Program (ROP), and Special Education and Student Programs. OCDE partners with local school districts and community college districts, as well as local, state and federal governmental agencies. Staff Development, administrative, business, educational and support services are available.



**For OC Kids** is a UCI-CHOC collaborative program dedicated to the earliest diagnosis and treatment of autism and related disorders. It is committed to the support, education and empowerment of families and professionals. It is supported by the Children and Families Commission of Orange County.



**The Regional Center of Orange County** is a nonprofit organization that coordinates services to more than 14,000 Orange County residents who have developmental disabilities. These disabilities include mental retardation, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy and related conditions. The Regional Center is operated by a volunteer board of directors under contract with the State of California's Department of Developmental Services. The mission of the Regional Center is to advocate, support and provide services to people with developmental disabilities from birth through adulthood. The Regional Center receives state and federal funding to provide services to eligible individuals and families.

## Upcoming Staff Development, Conferences and Parent Trainings

(Partial Listing — January to April 2006)

There are several opportunities for continuing education and support that will be offered by various organizations. For OC Kids, the Regional Center of Orange County (RCOC), and the S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project of Orange County strive to provide affordable fees to both families and staff. Each session has a specific focus, some pertaining to early interventions, some with more of an emphasis on the older aged student. Registrations may be very limited, therefore call early!

Date/Time/Place	Topic/Speaker	Dev. level	Approximate Fee	Contact
Jan. 21 & Feb. 4 2 full day sessions 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM O.C.D.E.	SEE-PAC - Parent Education Series	Early	\$35 for the 2 sessions per person and \$10 materials fee. Includes continental breakfast and lunch	For OC Kids (714) 939-6118
January 26 4:00 – 8:00 PM R.C.O.C	“How to Manage Your Child’s Difficult Behavior” <i>Paul Does, PhD, BCBA</i>	All ages	\$20	Regional Center of OC Karen Schaeffer (714) 796-5330
February 1 4:00 – 8:00 PM O.C.D.E.	<b>Overview:</b> SCERTS Model <i>Emily Rubin, CCC, SLP</i>	Early to middle age developmental levels	\$30 Includes a boxed meal	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
February 2 & 3 8:30 AM – 3:30 PM O.C.D.E.	SCERTS Model – 2 full-day sessions <i>Emily Rubin, CCC, SLP</i>	Early to middle age developmental levels	\$135	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
February 17 8:30 AM – 3:30 PM O.C.D.E.	<b>Advanced Day:</b> “Icon to to I Can” (for those who have attended first level) <i>Barbara Bloomfield</i>	All ages	\$60	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
February 18 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM O.C.D.E.	Using Visual Supports within Structured Teaching – Make and Take Day <i>Barbara Bloomfield</i>	All ages	\$30 Materials fee	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
March 21 4:00 – 8:00 PM R.C.O.C	“Evidence Based Treatment Approaches” <i>Dennis Russo, PhD, BCBA</i>	All ages	\$25	Regional Center of OC Karen Schaeffer (714) 796-5330
March 5 – May 16 Tuesday night series 6:30 – 8:30 PM O.C.D.E.	SEE-PAC - Parent Education Series	Early	\$20 Materials fee	For OC Kids (714) 939-6118
March 15 4:00 – 8:00 PM O.C.D.E.	<b>Overview:</b> “Social Thinking – I LAUGH Model” <i>Michelle Garcia Winner</i>	Developmental ages 8+	\$30 Includes a boxed meal	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
March 16 8:30 AM – 3:30 PM O.C.D.E.	<b>Day One:</b> “Social Thinking – I LAUGH Model” <i>Michelle Garcia Winner</i>	Developmental ages 8+	\$60 <b>SESSION FULL</b>	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
March 17 8:30 AM – 3:30 PM O.C.D.E.	<b>Day Two:</b> “Social Thinking – I LAUGH Model” <i>Michelle Garcia Winner</i>	Developmental ages 8+	\$60 <b>SESSION FULL</b>	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137
April 3 8:30 AM – 3:30 PM O.C.D.E.	<b>Refresher #2:</b> “Links to Language” (for those who have been trained in Links) <i>Lauren Franke, PhD</i>	All ages	\$45	S.U.C.S.E.S.S. Project (714) 966-4137

**Locations:** O.C.D.E. = Orange County Department of Education – 200 Kalmus Drive, Costa Mesa, CA 92628

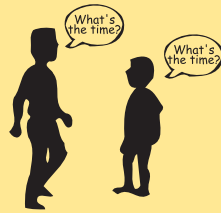
R.C.O.C. = Regional Center of Orange County – 801 Civic Center Drive, Santa Ana, CA 92702

# SOME EXAMPLES OF AUTISTIC BEHAVIOR

## ALGUNOS EJEMPLOS DEL COMPORTAMIENTO DE PERSONAS CON AUTISMO



Avoids eye contact  
Evita el contacto visual



Copies words like a parrot ("echolalic")  
Repite las palabras como un loro  
("en forma de echo")



Shows preoccupation with only one topic  
Demuestra preocupación/interés en solo un tema/asunto



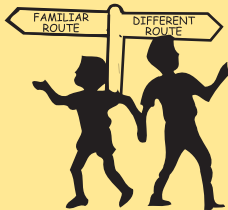
Lacks creative "pretend" play  
Carece el juego creativo



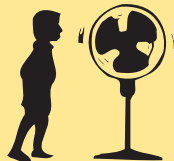
Shows indifference  
Demuestra indiferencia



Displays special abilities in music, art, memory, or manual dexterity  
Demuestra capacidades especiales en musica, arte, memoria or destreza manual



Does not like variety: it's not the spice of life  
No demuestra interés en variedad



Shows fascination with spinning objects  
Demuestra fascinación con objetos que giran



Shows fear of, or fascination with certain sounds  
Demuestra miedo de/ó fascinación con ciertos sonidos



Laughs or giggles inappropriately  
Risa/reír inadecuadamente



Shows one-sided interaction  
Demuestra interacción que es unilateral



Does not play with other children  
No juega con otros niños

### Some Examples of Autistic Behavior

#### Algunos ejemplos del comportamiento de personas con autismo

- Difficulty with social interactions.  
Tienen dificultad para socializar con otras personas.
- Problems with speech.  
Tienen problemas con su lenguaje.
- Disturbed perception.  
Tienen una percepción anormal de los sucesos que acontecen a su alrededor.
- Abnormal play.  
Su forma de jugar es anormal.
- Resistance to change in routine or environment.  
Se resisten a cambios en sus actividad rutinarias ó a su medio ambiente.