

The ALL ABOARD NEWS



A Quarterly Publication from the Advisory Board on Autism and Related Disorders

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Volume XII— Issue 9

Fall 2008



SAVE THE DATE **ABOARD Conference** **Autism & Communication**



Friday, December 12, 2008
Orchard Hill Church, Wexford, PA

Keynote Speaker:
Patricia Wright, PhD, MPH,
National Director of Autism
Services for Easter Seals

This conference is designed to provide parents and professionals with information on using AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) strategies to increase communication, education and behavioral success for individuals with ASD.

Topics include:

Behavioral, Scheduling and Transitional Supports involving AAC
Classroom Strategies for Segmented and Inclusive Classrooms
How to Pursue Funding for AAC and How to Handle IEP Meetings
Home Success Strategies for AAC

Sponsors:

DynaVox and Mayer-Johnson, the leading providers of advanced AAC solutions and symbol-based support tools, including the Boardmaker Software Family and Picture Communication Symbols.

Community Care Behavioral Health Organization.

Chairman's Message

Fall is here, and we all have been busy with school, IEP's, and everything else in our busy lives. In addition, it is a presidential election year, and autism was at least mentioned, at the campaign conventions. No matter what your political affiliation, listen closely through all the analysis and blogs to find out what your candidate might be communicating to you.

On another note I spoke to a friend of mine across the country who recently attended a marriage strengthening seminar. He talked about what he had learned about communicating with his spouse in very typical male terms of confusion about the process. One of the communication tools he shared with me was to ensure that both of you understand each other. With a lack of understanding on both sides, confusion and misunderstanding could occur. This means that talking alone is not enough. Ensuring that one understands is what is crucial. This particular communication tool is just as beneficial when conversing with others in general and in particular with our children on the spectrum. I was driving home with my son, and we were discussing a school issue. During the conversation, I used the expression "the squeaky wheel gets the grease." It occurred to me that he may not understand what the expression

meant or why I may have said what I said. I then asked him if he understood the expression? It was clear from how he responded that he did not exactly understand the metaphor and more importantly how it applied to this particular situation. I took the time to provide further explanation. By taking this time to make sure that he thoroughly understood, it became apparent to me when he truly got it! Certainly this extra effort on my part made me realize how important communication to the point where we BOTH understood is important

All of this coalesces at a time when ABOARD is announcing its fall conference. ABOARD is excited to be collaborating with DynaVox and Mayer-Johnson to offer a conference on Autism Communication. The conference will be held on Friday, December 12, 2008, at Orchard Hill Church in Wexford, PA. Presentations will be geared for professionals and parents as well.

Hope you can attend our conference. Enjoy the fall!

Sincerely
Elliot Frank, Chairperson



**Please Remember ABOARD
During Your United Way Campaign
#9817**

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***What is the
Professional
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Council (PAC)?***

***ABOARD's
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Council is
comprised of a
group of
professional
individuals
that work in
the autism
community.
This council
helps promote
resources,
information
and latest
technology/
trends to help
those with
autism while
providing
guidance and
support to
ABOARD.***

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC): An Overview

The ability to express oneself affects behavior, learning, and sociability. When disorders, such as autism, prevent individuals from speaking, they often become frustrated and overwhelmed. Fortunately, technology such as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) offers individuals other ways to interact. The Pressley Ridge Autism and Developmental Disabilities Program utilizes this technology in its delivery of services.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication refers to the supplementation or replacement of natural speech and/or writing using aided and/or unaided symbols. The AAC strategies that are particularly used with children with autism are: sign language, pictographic symbol sets/systems or Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), and high technology speech generating devices (SGDs) for synthesized and/or digitized speech output. PECS is a structured behavioral intervention program to teach use of visual-graphic symbols for communication. This strategy teaches the child to make requests by handing/exchanging symbols for desired items. Speech generating devices (SGDs) use graphic symbols to represent messages, activated by finger, switch, headstick, etc. by selecting a symbol from the display. SGDs have been potentially effective and out-

comes suggest that feedback through synthesized speech increases communicative interactions. SGDs are also successful in conjunction with Functional Communication Training to reduce problem behavior(s). Functional Communication Training (FCT) is a set of procedures to replace problem behavior by teaching func-

“The ultimate goal for using any AAC device is to achieve the highest possible functional communication.”

tionally equivalent communication skills as alternatives. A variety of AAC strategies are taught including, e.g., gestures, manual signs, symbols sets, use of electronic devices. This approach provides convincing evidence and overall positive outcomes have been reported to both increase use of language and reduce problematic behaviors.

The ultimate goal for using any AAC device is to achieve the highest possible functional communication.

Selecting the appropriate AAC device is a process. It is important to select a device based on each person's communication needs and desires. Other key factors to consider when assessing a child for a communication device include: the method of access, language system, cognitive levels of functioning, durability and portability, and the flexibility of the device.

There is research that supports the idea that using a communication device does not hinder the development or return of natural speech. In fact, most people using a device find it faster to use natural speech if they can be understood by others. The most important outcome for children should be improved communication. Although communication includes speech, it also includes gestures, facial expressions, sound-making, and aided AAC. We all want children with severe disabilities to be verbal communicators. Verbal communication is the result of developmental, physical, and environmental influences. Some children simply may not be at a developmental level consistent with speech. Others may not have the physical structures necessary to use intelligible speech. Children such as these will benefit from treatments targeting nonverbal and/or augmentative communication.

(AAC): An Overview Continued

With the advancement of technology and with a better understanding of the communication needs of children with disabilities, AAC can provide new opportunities for improved communication. The needs of individuals with disabilities like autism have gained enormous awareness in recent years. An AAC device/strategy that blends a variety of supports, allowing families and professionals to apply multiple techniques for communication, is now seen as a critical element in addressing these challenges.

By: Monica Penezic, MA,
CCC-SLP
Pressley Ridge

“There is research that supports the idea that using a communication device does not hinder the development or return of natural speech. In fact, most people using a device find it faster to use natural speech if they can be understood by others.”

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For their donation to ABOARD inlieu of having wedding favors for their guest at their wedding reception.

P.A.K. (Parents of Autistic Kids)

Beth Rom

Richard and Karen Vandewater

Thank you to all who supported ABOARD with Macy's Shop for Cause and purchased a shopping pass to benefit ABOARD!

Cadence Design Systems

Cadence employees around the world participated in the company's Spirit of Stars & Strikes fundraising effort. The Pittsburgh group of Cadence had selected ABOARD as their beneficiary for their 2008 fundraising effort. Along with the Pittsburgh group fundraising and participating in the 2008 Highmark Walk to benefit our organization, their donations were also gift matched from their company. These generous donations from the employees, the company gift match program, and the Spirit of Stars & Strikes fundraising effort will be earmarked to benefit ABOARD'S family support groups. Thank you, Jayanth Shreedhara, from Cadence for heading up the Pittsburgh group's effort!



Pitt Early Autism Study Objective?

- Our primary goal is to understand the earliest indicators of Autism Spectrum Disorder and uncover diagnostic signs that emerge within the first years of life.

Who we are Including?

- Infants who have an older sibling with ASD.
- Toddlers with ASD who are not yet speaking in complete sentences.
- Families should be local or willing to travel to Pittsburgh for testing.

What is Involved?

- Children will visit the University of Pittsburgh several times and will be recorded as they watch pictures and movies (e.g. Mr. Roger's Neighborhood).
- Assessments for Autism will be given at no cost. Compensation for completed studies.

Contact Information: www.pitt.edu/~infants
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No Child Wakes Up Determined to Have a Bad Day

As a speech-language pathologist, many parents that I work with have heard some or all of these comments about their child:

“Johnny can be so manipulative.”

“Suzie knows what to do; she’s just choosing not to do it.”

“Billy is often non-compliant.”

These comments are typically made based on observable actions that are often labeled as “behaviors.” However, in children with language deficits, such as children with ASD, these “behaviors” are not the actions of an intentionally disruptive child. They result from the child’s language deficits, and are the child’s attempts to use language for reasoning and problem solving.

Asking for Help

A common expectation that adults have of children is that they ask for help when faced with a problem. The ability to ask for help is a very complex cognitive concept that requires a highly developed ability to use language for critical think-

ing. First, one needs to recognize that there is a problem. Then one needs to utilize world knowledge of previous times when there was a problem and how it was resolved. In addition, one needs to be able to compare the current situation with previous situations to problem solve a resolution to the perceived stressor. For children with ASD, this is very difficult and can result in increased anxiety and distress. The request for help may be expressed by the child in a non-verbal manner, e.g., shrugging his/her shoulders, crying or throwing things. Once again, these observable “behaviors” are not the actions of an intentionally disruptive child, but, rather, they result from the child’s language deficits. It may appear as if the child is at a loss for words; quite literally, the words are “lost” in the child’s brain.

“Once again, these observable “behaviors” are not the actions of an intentionally disruptive child, but, rather, they result from the child’s language deficits.”

Answering Questions

The ability to answer open-ended questions such as, “What did you do at school today,” or “What should you do if the school bus forgets to pick you up,” also requires a child to use language for reasoning and problem solving. This is typically learned from one’s own experiences or by watching others perform an activity. Learning from past experiences and applying this to new situations can be extremely challenging and frustrating for children with ASD. A limited or impaired ability to interpret others’ actions can result in a child having difficulty with understanding non-verbal communication, such as: facial expressions and gestures, understanding other’s perspectives and idioms. A child can also have trouble with: organization and expression of thoughts, generating multiple solutions to situations, describing state of minds of others, timing conversational exchanges, remaining on topic or appropriate vs. inappropriate comments or actions.

Typical children learn each of the above mentioned skills by watching and practicing the skills during daily routines. For children with ASD, each of these skills must be explicitly taught via direct instruction. Direct instruction must include the sequencing of each

No Child Wakes Up Determined to Have a Bad Day Continued

cognitive activity—seemingly simple tasks can appear overwhelming. For example, the classroom rule of raising one's hand to ask or respond to a question involves multiple steps:

1. Raise your hand
2. Make eye contact with the teacher
3. Teacher looks at you
4. Teacher calls your name
5. Put your arm down and respond

For a child with ASD, not knowing the rules or steps involved in answering a question or solving a problem can result in "behaviors" that are deemed

"When a child is taught how to use language for reasoning and problem solving, "behaviors" magically diminish."

inappropriate, e.g., "blurting" or speaking at the same time as a conversation partner.

When a child is taught how to use language for reasoning and problem solving, "behaviors" magically diminish. No child wakes up determined to have a bad day. Once a child is able to express himself via language, he then begins to view himself as a successful communicator and learner.

By: Janice Nathan, M.S.,
CCC-SLP
Licensed Speech-
Language Pathologist
Nathan Speech Services

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Partnership with ABOARD is mutually beneficial. It supports our work in meeting the needs of Pennsylvanian families challenged with autism spectrum disorders. It also keeps your organization "front and center" in the minds of those very families. We will do this by acknowledging your membership in our quarterly newsletter as well as on our website, which is being re-designed. Also your organization will receive a discounted rate to exhibit at our conferences along with a 20% discounted registration fee when sending 5 or more of your employees to attend our conferences and workshops.

Thank you for your support:

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**Theiss Early Autism Preschool Program
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For more information about our other services at the Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders, please call Ryan Cramer at 412-235-5407.

Autism Family Field Day 2008 Success

This past September the Autism Help Network, Inc. and ABOARD hosted the first annual Autism Family Field Day held at the Woodlands Foundation in Wexford, PA. This event was a huge success with approximately 200 in attendance. Lunch was provided for all with special accommodations for those on GFCF diets.

The Field Day consisted of seven events that the entire family participated in to com-

pete for the “overall event champion” trophy. There were 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place trophies awarded for these champions who scored the highest. There was also “best performance” trophies awarded for the highest score in any one event. Also there was a “Comic Turkey” trophy awarded to the family who did the best in the scavenger hunt event which included dressing up in comic costumes and then parade in front of the judges. Each child participating in the field day

events received a gold medal for their efforts and hard work so everyone was a winner!

At mid-day musical entertainment was provided by Katie Harrill from Wesley Spectrum’s Music Therapy Program and the band, The Flying Sock Monkeys. The band members are children on the spectrum who are in Katie’s music therapy program. Along with the musical entertainment, we also had the pleasure of being entertained by the Eat’nPark “Cookie” and the



**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS OF
THE AUTISM FAMILY FIELD DAY 2008**

Autism Family Field Day 2008 A Success: Continued



Steelers' "Steely McBean".

Closing the events of the day were the awards ceremony and the sack races. A representative from each sponsor took part in the sack race. A close call between Todd Dryer from CCBHO and Stephanie Young from Southwestern Human Services resulted with Southwestern Human Services walking away with the trophy.

**"FROM ABOARD
AND AHN THANK
YOU TO ALL THAT
HELPED MAKE THIS
DAY SO SPECIAL"**

This event was offered to families at no charge and would not have happened without the generosity of our sponsors:

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A special thanks to the Woodlands Foundation for their superb support and for providing their tremendous staff for this event. Also, thanks to McDonald's of Wexford for donating beverages, Best Feeds of Allison Park for their donation of sacks for the sack races and corn used for one of the games, to North Allegheny High School Athletic Department for their donation of balls used for games as well and to Laurie Brown for her donation of time and equipment as our event photographer!



Advisory Board on
Autism and Related
Disorders

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We're on the web!
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Our Core Principles

ABOARD believes that because there is considerable debate throughout the autism community regarding therapies, inclusion, autism cause, vaccine impact, and the potential effects of proposed legislation, our policy is to inform. We trust individuals to assimilate the information and make the best decision for their children, clients and students!

We believe that families are entitled to accurate and timely information, require emotional and practical support from other families grappling with comparable challenges, and often need advocacy assistance and training to maximize availability and utilization of treatment educational and vocational possibilities required by law.

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