



# The Journal of ASA Broward

Issue 63

May 2005

## ASA Broward Presents Social Skills Therapies

By Laura House

ASA Broward conducted its fourth general meeting of the year on April 20th by hosting several speakers that addressed various methods of social skills therapies.

Valerie Hershkowitz represented Dimension Therapies- Valerie explained that one of the features of autism is a deficit in pragmatic language and social skills which should be addressed in a comprehensive program. After an initial consultation to determine problem areas and start developing goals, Dimensions offers three levels of treatment: Individual therapy with a clinician for a child who needs to develop skills prior to introduction of peers, Pragmatic Partners where a child is paired with one peer, and Pragmatic Groups which are offered with five levels of interaction depending on a child's age and skills. Opportunities are contrived for initiating requests and cooperation. Activities like music, arts and crafts, and cooking are employed for the above sessions as well as summer camp. For additional information, you can call Dimensions at 954 423 9700

Lisa Whittaker and Margie Padron represented BLAST- BLAST offers an after-school social skills program. Groups meet once per week and are 90 minutes for children over the age of six. The format which includes 45 minutes of direct instruction on a particu-

lar skill (i.e., initiating an interaction) using visual supports. Afterward, time is spent focusing on relaxation and deep breathing exercised. The next 45 minutes is composed of interaction in the form of games: two people or group that is interactive or based upon team style. Video modeling is often used and kids make videos of themselves in social situations and then critique them with support of the staff. Preschool groups run 60 minutes and begin with circle time, then stretching and breathing for relaxation, and finally a structured game. All group placements are preceded by an intake evaluation with both parent(s) and child present. BLAST's sessions usually follow the public school calendar in 10 week blocks. More information is available by calling BLAST at 954 575 5998

Marlene Schulefand spoke on the part of CARD- CARD has previously offered social skills groups running 8 to 10 weeks which focused on instructing parents how to facilitate social interaction sessions. Parents would observe sessions on closed-circuit TV and collect data targeting specific skills (i.e., turn taking, initiating play, commenting during play). Groups use visual supports, video modeling and social stories. Another skills based group, Teen Time, provides teens with AS and HFA the opportunity to get together with each other while

enjoying an activity or an outing. For information about Teen Time or future social skills trainings, contact Brian Roselione at 954 262 7111

Julie Humphries of Broward County Schools facilitated a discussion on social skills groups facilitated by Autism Family Counselors. Counselors from this organization often use games which require students to pay attention to each other, take turns and learn how to handle winning or losing. Clients are thought to use social stories to talk about playing with friends, compromise, sharing, etc. Employee role-playing sessions are performed to practice skills such as reading body language and understanding proximity as it applies to standing to another person. Counselors also keep in contact with general education and cluster teachers to ensure that opportunities for generalization occur. This is a service based on the need of the student and must be included in the student's IEP.

To wrap up the meeting, this reporter was asked to speak about RDI (Relationship Development Intervention). Although I am a parent and not a service provider, I agreed it was appropriate to mention this because RDI also addresses the deficits in the 'social skills' area. RDI is a parent-based treatment usually involving consultation with a certified provider. It is a developmental approach to teaching motivations and skills for social relationship development. It focuses on experience sharing, social referencing and regulation, declarative language and flexible thinking. For more information go to [www.rdiconnect.com](http://www.rdiconnect.com).

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# HOMESCHOOLING

## A Real Option for Families with Children on the Autism Spectrum

By Laura House

In the past several years I've seen an increasing number of magazine and newspaper articles with a positive slant on home education: another homeschooler wins a spelling bee or gets a perfect score on the SAT, families are utilizing amazing resources on the Internet, and more colleges and universities are accepting admissions from homeschooled students. Of course, all of these references involve typical children. So maybe homeschooling a child on the autism spectrum isn't a "feel good" story for the newspapers, but more and more families are quietly reaping the benefits. I hope to help others understand how that is so.

Sometimes I think deciding to homeschool is actually more difficult than living it. When initially considering homeschooling, anxiety can center around the legalities but happily Florida law is quite flexible and allows room for choice. Homeschooling is one of five ways to satisfy Florida's compulsory attendance law which begins the school year in which a child is six by February 1st. This is different than the "age six by September 1st" rule so it can be a little confusing. For example, if you plan to homeschool and your child is turning six in or after February, 2006 you don't have to file notice this year. But if your child will be six any time before February 1st, 2006, you would need to file notice this fall for the 2005-2006 school year.

As for what and how to teach at home, the state leaves those decisions to parents. The laws are straightforward and don't make staying in compliance difficult. Parents should be the primary, but not the only teachers. For example, my son has had wonderful tutors through the years. We are not required to keep attendance or document hours spent engaged in "school" but parents do have some basic responsibilities: if your child is of compulsory school age send a

"notice of intent to homeschool" to Broward County School's downtown office, maintain a portfolio of records and don't throw it away for at least two years. Should the superintendent's office request a portfolio review you have 15 days to comply—this is not a routine event, but a possibility. Once a year we send in an evaluation and that is where the real flexibility lies for our kids. Lastly, if you stop homeschooling or move to another county, you must notify the school board in writing.

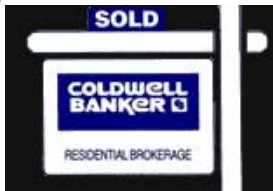
So what is a portfolio? There are two basic parts: a log of educational activities made at the time they are done including the titles of any books, etc; and samples of writing, worksheets, or creative materials used. Our kids are all so different; this could be interpreted many different ways, but for my own son this includes his math and other worksheets, writing samples (this could be a copy of a very short letter to his Paw-Paw), and any other work that's easily captured on paper. Of course, it's more difficult to convey the work we do for his social and relationship skills using RDI (Relationship Development Intervention), but I consider that part of homeschooling because it would be addressed in an IEP under "social/emotional" if he were in school.

An annual evaluation must be sent in every year and can take the form of standardized or psychological testing, but where's the fun in that? For us it would be one of the most challenging aspects of being in public school. The legal option we've found works best for Patrick is an individual evaluation or portfolio review. A certified teacher meets with the family, reviews the child's work, and simply makes sure that the child has made "progress commensurate with her or his ability".

There are several local groups for homeschooling parents and they do tend to focus on typical children, but I have found that homeschoolers tend to be more flexible in accepting differences. There is no segregation by grade level, so you may find a bunch of kids, boys and girls, ages three to thirteen all playing together. It's funny that the first concern that the general public often raises about homeschooling is "socialization". Some homeschoolers with typical kids will tell you jokingly that their only problem with socialization is that their kids get too much of it. Our kids with autism will need special support and teaching from us for socialization, homeschooled or not, so it shouldn't be a major concern. There are classes, park days, field trips and 4-H for socialization beyond family.

Clearly there are pros and cons to homeschooling. For us advantages include: a more relaxed teaching atmosphere and lifestyle; control over what to teach, how and when; and no IEP meetings... ever. Challenges are: well, it's big responsibility. And spending long periods of time together can lead to confronting issues related to behaviors and how to ensure that a child's time is spent productively. Children with autism have needs that go way beyond academics. This can be a primary advantage to homeschooling or a reason to decide against it. And every family is different. Many factors should be taken into consideration including finances, dynamics between family members, and the personalities and needs of the child with autism, siblings, and parents. But when everything does come together homeschooling can be not only a good way to address academics, but a great way to live.

Feel free to contact me at [Laura-Signs@aol.com](mailto:Laura-Signs@aol.com) for information or resources.



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*"As a parent of an Autistic son, I strive to help those whom share the same common bond of our very special children."*

### Advertisements

ADVERTISE WITH US—our newsletter is circulated to over 350 people, families and/or professionals throughout the community. Advertising space is available as follows:

- business card size-----\$25
- ¼ page-----\$50
- ½ page-----\$75
- full page-----\$150

### Membership

Please check your address label for expiration date. If applicable, please send your membership dues to our PO Box address. Don't forget to make any necessary changes.

Thank you for your support!

*Due to budget constraints, we will not be able to send you a newsletter if your dues are not current.*

### Thank You!

Special "thank you" to GRACA for meeting each month to assemble and label newsletters for distribution.

WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK THE ADULTS FROM THE ARC ADULT TRAINING PROGRAM for volunteering their time and effort as well. Your tireless contribution is greatly appreciated!

ASA Broward especially thanks chapter member Denise Karp for maintaining a free informational list serve for all persons interested in Autism. IT'S YOUR #1 SOURCE FOR AUTISM RELATED INFO IN SOUTH FLORIDA E-mail Denise at deniseslist@yahoo.com to subscribe.

### Recreational Activities

The Broward Autism Foundation is pleased to be able to offer for chapter members partial scholarships for selectively sponsored recreational programs. Please contact the following for additional information:

**Tag Gymnastics** Alicia Murphy (954) 943-8659

**Incredible Ice (ice skating)** Carol DiMauro (954) 962-0901

**Project Stable Horseback Riding** Eileen Roth (954) 474-5333

### Volunteers

Volunteers are needed for assisting in set up and clean up duties for our monthly meetings. Please contact our Hospitality Chairperson, Judi Steinberg at (954) 577-4141 if interested.

### Support Groups

#### SPEC (Support for Parents of Exceptional Children)

Meetings are held the first Wednesday of every month (7:00) at the Dan Marino Center in Weston, Florida. For more details please contact Laura House at (954) 893-5553.

#### GRACA (Grandparents and relatives of Autistic Children and Adults)

Please contact Roz Bellman for meeting dates and times at (954) 720-5683.

#### CARD (Center for Autism and Related Disabilities)

Please contact the CARD center directly at (800) 9-AUTISM and register to be on their mailing list. CARD hosts many informative workshops and conferences, addressing a variety of issues and needs.

#### ACE (Autism Committee for ESE)

This school advisory meeting is held the third Wednesday of every month (9:00a.m.) at the Baudhuin School in Davie. Call Stacey Hoaglund for more details at (954) 252-8764.

#### South Florida Fragile X Resource Group

Please contact Randy Green for meeting dates and times at (954) 433-5413.

#### Adult Transition Group

Please contact Eileen Roth for meeting dates and times at (954) 474-5333.

### Fundraising

The Broward Chapter of the Autism Society has a variety of NEW gift items available to help in our fundraising efforts:

- Autism Car Magnets -----\$5 each
- NEW logo EMBROIDERED T-shirts-----\$12 each
- NEW Autism Remembrance "Brie" Bears-----\$10 each
- Puzzle pins-----\$10 each
- Angel cards (Qty 10)-----\$16 pack

Also, don't forget that donation cards are available for "In Memory Of" and "In Honor Of". All gift items can be purchased at the monthly chapter meetings or by calling the ASA office @ (954)577-4141.



**Membership—ASA Broward Chapter (Please Print) This amount includes local, state and national dues**

Individual  \$50.00 Family  \$60.00 Full-time Student  \$35.00 (copy of current registration as evidence of full-time status)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Parent  Professional  Occupation \_\_\_\_\_ F/T Student  Location \_\_\_\_\_

Relative  or Friend  of: Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Residence: Home  Group Home \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

School, Job or Workshop Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Are you willing to be part of our referral and Information Network? (yes/no) \_\_\_\_\_ On a committee (yes/no) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you give ASA Broward Chapter permission to put your name on the U of M CARD Center mailing list (yes/no) \_\_\_\_\_

Other comments or suggestions? \_\_\_\_\_

Please send your check made payable to Broward Chapter / Autism Society. PO Box 450476, Sunrise, Florida 33345

**Public Notice: The Broward Autism Foundation and the Autism Society are publicly supported organizations under the IRS Section 501(c)(3). A copy of the exemption, determination letter and tax returns are available for public inspection at our home office with advance notice.**

**BROWARD AUTISM FOUNDATION AND PURSUANT TO CHAPTER 496, FL STATUTES "A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES, BY CALLING TOLL-FREE WITHIN THE STATE 1-800-HELP FLA. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE."**

**REGISTRATION # sc-07923. 100% OF YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE RECEIVED BY THE BROWARD AUTISM FOUNDATION.**

**Autism Society of America  
Broward Chapter**

**PO Box 450476  
Sunrise, FL 33345  
Phone: 954-577-4141  
E-Mail: info@asabroward.org**

**Our Next Meeting: May 18, 2005  
Guardianships and Financial Planning**

**7:30pm at ARC Broward, 10250 NW 53rd Street, Building #2, Sunrise  
(One block south of Commercial between Nob Hill and Hiatus Road)**

**Our meetings are open to all that are interested in autism.  
Refreshments will be served. Child care is available by reservation only.  
Please call 954-577-4141.**



# The Rougher Side Of Inclusion

By Dennis D. Bailey

A neighbor calls the police after seeing some shadow looking in a bedroom window next door in the pre-dawn darkness. The police arrive and see a tall, thin young man peering in a bedroom window of a single family home. They shout a command for him to FREEZE! He sprints toward the rear of the home and the police give chase. As the young man enters the back porch area, they take him to the concrete slab, hard. His face hits, along with his shoulder, and he is injured. The police are demanding information from him but he only offers them silence and an odd grin. Taking his insolence as an insult, the police treat him very roughly and arrest him for residential burglary, calling for backup officers to arrive. By the time the other police units arrive, the house lights are up and the residents emerge. The confused couple recognizes the police have arrested their minor child, a sweet teen with autism. He had been looking in his own bedroom window, curious to see what it looked like from the outside, and had run from the police because of the sensory overload created by their flashlights, uniforms, strange faces and hostile voices giving strange, illogical commands.

Another young man sits in a courtroom, on trial for drug trafficking. On the night of his arrest, he had gone to a party against his parents' wishes and, falling for the duped "friendship" of a couple of local delinquents, had agreed to deliver a package in exchange for getting kissed by a


girl he thought was really beautiful. He took his new bike. Police spotted him hurriedly riding late at night and noted that he tried to flee from them as soon as they activated their blues. They pursued, suspecting he might have stolen the bike. By the time they caught up with him and sorted out the bike was his and that he was autistic, they had discovered the package of cocaine. During his trial, the jury notes he seems entirely disinterested in the proceedings, never bothering to look at his accusers or them, idly drawing patterns of circles in a notebook, and benignly smiling. The jury is displeased at his apathy under the serious circumstances. The defense attorney wants to put on an autism expert to explain his client's courtroom behavior to the jury but the court denies request, finding that since the defendant is not claiming he is legally insane the rules dictate his diminished mental capacity is irrelevant and inadmissible.

As we embrace the concept of inclusion for our children with autism, we need to recognize that both the authorities and the families need to work on improving how we cope with the rough interactions which will certainly occur. The police need formal training on how to discern the difference between a guilty or belligerent suspect and when the observed behavior is actually the innocent manifestations of a disability. Just as importantly, families need to alert the neighbors and authorities in advance of their child in the home with disabilities, especially if that child tends to wander. The first scenario,

based on a true story, could have been avoided if only the 911 operator had that information in her computer and passed it along to the responding officers. Up to one fourth of all police calls now involve a person with some mental or emotional disability, and the vast majority of the calls are noncriminal in origin. The second scenario might be avoidable by parents keeping open and active lines of communication with their special teen about the heightened risks involving sex, drugs, and manipulation. And, finally, the courts need to shift some of their procedures to enable those with disabilities to receive a fair trial, not unlike the special procedural rules created for child abuse and elderly abuse trials. These are just some of the issues rising to the forefront of the interaction between people with special needs and the criminal justice system, all the natural consequences of inclusion. As your grandmother said, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Get involved early and often. The stakes are high.

*Dennis D. Bailey, the father of an autistic child, has been both a prosecutor and a criminal defense attorney, as well as a civil rights attorney, in south Florida for twenty years. In addition to his Special Kids Law Center practice, he also teaches at the police academy.*

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*ENDS MAY 15 - Call for Information*

Camp Shadows will be provided free-of-charge for those children that qualify courtesy of the National Autism Registry (NARY)

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Dimensions Therapy Center  
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