

SPECIAL NEEDS

LET'S NETWORK

May 1, 2006

MAY UPDATE

In-House

Together: Less Stress, More Success!

Join us for the last **Dunellen Parent Support Group Social** of the 2005-2006 school year. The social will be held from 7 – 9 pm on Thursday, June 1st in the media center at John P. Faber Elementary School. In addition to open discussion, we have invited Marie Luciano, the upcoming Director of Special Services, to come and meet us, Bill Robins will be speaking on the advantages of changing our group to a 501(c)(3) organization, we will be nominating officers for the upcoming 2006 – 2007 school year and we will have a speaker from The Family Support Organization of Middlesex County, a non-profit, county based organization, which provides direct peer to peer support, education, and advocacy services to family members of children with emotional and behavioral challenges. Everyone is welcome. Our mission is to help the families of all of Dunellen's special needs children.

A Special Thank You

I'd like to thank Dunellen Resident, Diane Lewis, for her thoughtful and generous donations to Dunellen's pre-school programs. Your kindness is truly appreciated.

Disability Awareness Week

May 28th through June 3rd is Disability "Special Needs" Awareness Week. You can get involved by spreading the word and awareness or volunteering your time. If you are interested in volunteering to help with our effort to promote disability awareness, please email mmccabe@sns.com

Three Words from the Office of Special Services

Grant Received. We received a \$1,300 grant from the Dunellen Education Foundation for our application on Multi-sensory Reading Alternatives. We will purchase Wilson reading materials, a research-based decoding and encoding reading and writing program for Faber and Lincoln. These materials will complement and expand our Orten-Gillingham and Sonday programs. Thanks DEF!

Planning for Next Year. We plan to continue all of our current roster of special education classes next year, including the two preschool classes and one multiply disabled class at Faber and BD program at the high school. In addition, we will continue the pull-out resource programs in Faber, the middle school and the high school as well as the in-class support at each school and will assign classroom aides in the grades where they are needed. Most teachers and aides plan to continue with us next year, but there are always a few new hires. We always look for those with the best skills, experience and dedication to provide education for our students with disabilities.

Summer Program. Our summer program at Faber this year runs from June 22nd through August 4th. The programs include the two preschool programs, and two special class programs (grades K-3 and grades 4-5). All programs will run from 8:30 – 12:30, but will not include lunch. Parents may send in mid-morning snacks with their children. Speech and occupational therapy services will be provided in as specified in the IEPs. Only students with an extended school year in their IEPs will be able to attend these programs.

Thanks to the Luminary Organization for their donation of a kitchen set to the Preschool-Elementary class!

– Mari Molenaar, Acting Director of Special Services

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Mental Health Awareness

May is MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS Month.

Show your support for our community's individuals and families facing mental illness by pinning on a silver ribbon.

Helping Kids with Learning Disabilities Understand the Language of Friendship

While children with learning disabilities may know how to initiate friendships, many of their relationships fail because they don't know how to sustain them. Children with learning disabilities often end friendships because they have been unable to work out conflicts. While they may hear their friend's words, they often don't take the communication (e.g., joking and teasing) the way it was intended, often attributing negative intentions when they were not present. Because of their difficulty processing language, many children with learning disabilities are poor listeners. Whether it is because of their problems comprehending verbal and nonverbal communication, or because of their desire to make the information easier to grasp, they often put information into simple, "black and white" categories (e.g., good or bad). Instead of understanding manners, building rapport by checking (asking questions), or understanding that the person may have said something without really thinking of its impact and was unintentionally hurtful, unresolved misunderstandings can escalate into conflicts that can end friendships abruptly.

Listening vs. Comprehending: Do They Understand the Nonverbal Message?

For many kids with learning disabilities, the problem isn't with listening but with understanding how nonverbal and verbal communication fit together. Many children assume that if they understand a friend's words, they don't need to pay attention to his body language. Unfortunately, that isn't true since body language, tone, and other nonverbal expression are often more relevant to understanding what the person intends to say than the actual spoken words.

A child with learning disabilities may work so hard to understand a friend's verbal message that he misses the more subtle messages or the way the nonverbal behavior complements or contradicts the verbal message.

When someone's words and body language disagree, kids with learning disabilities may misinterpret the communication if they: miss the difference between good manners and genuine communication.

hear criticism when none was intended.

assume friendly joking is really unfriendly criticism.

put communication into "black and white" categories, either too positive or too negative.

One problem children often have is taking the words a friend or classmate says too literally. While children may have been taught how to read, how to listen, and even how to read body language, they haven't been taught how to interpret the message when someone's body language contradicts his words. The most important concept to keep in mind is that if a person's words and body language disagree, one should pay more attention to the nonverbal message than the actual words.

For many kids with learning disabilities, the problem isn't with listening but with understanding how nonverbal and verbal communication fit together.

Nonverbal messages are conveyed in one's tone of voice, facial expressions, and body posture and are more accurate indicators of how the speaker really feels. People often find it is easier to say what is expected, but if their feelings are not consistent with what they are saying, their body language usually will contradict their words. For example, they may avoid eye contact, use a strained tone of voice, or have an unfriendly facial gesture or posture that contradicts their words. When such a conflict exists, the nonverbal message can negate the verbal message. For instance, if your Uncle Charlie says "I love you" but his tone is harsh and he avoids eye contact or looks away when he says it, you'd probably realize something is amiss. While many people understand that the nonverbal message in some way belies the verbal message, it isn't always apparent to children with learning disabilities how to interpret such a contradiction.

Teaching Children to Understand Nonverbal Communication

Children usually respond well if they are given specific lessons in how to read body language and if

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they practice it with their friends and family. To become better at understanding body language, it's important to look for consistency. Here are some questions a child can learn to ask himself about the person speaking to him:

Does her tone of voice match what her words say?

Does she maintain eye contact, look away, or look nervous?

Does she seem comfortable?

When the words and body language disagree, there are many ways to interpret the "real" message. One possibility is that she is trying to avoid a direct confrontation. Most of us use manners or conventional expressions to avoid feeling uncomfortable or to avoid hurting someone's feelings.

The theory is that it is better to be evasive or indirect rather than to refuse someone outright. Since most of us want to avoid discomfort, we've adopted indirect general phrases such as "that sounds good...let's see...I'll call you later...etc." Such expressions are often confusing for a child who doesn't realize a friend doesn't really mean to call him later. The real message is conveyed in the person's body language that may have lacked sincerity or was demonstrated by an avoidance of eye contact.

However, the subtlety eludes many kids with language processing problems. They would prefer a direct answer such as, "No, I don't want to play" to an indirect "Maybe." While a child's best friend might be willing to be this direct, casual acquaintances are more likely to be indirect when refusing an invitation.

Accepting Joking and Teasing with Humor

Since many children with learning disabilities are hypersensitive to criticism, they often take teasing as an insult rather than in jest.

Understanding joking and teasing also relies on a child's ability to interpret the more subtle messages in another person's nonverbal behavior and to accept hurtful actions as being unintentional. Kids often joke or tease by commenting on an existing characteristic, trait or mannerism — either theirs or yours. Instead of being offended by it, one is usually expected to laugh and understand that it is meant to be funny, not hurtful. Since many children with learning disabilities are hypersensitive to criticism, they often take teasing as an insult rather than in jest. Instead of perceiving the remark as a joke, the child often feels wounded and may retort with a hostile remark. This is especially true of a child with AD/HD who's impulsive and might speak before thinking. Instead of being a

playful interaction, a joke can create hostility which can lead to an argument or an abrupt ending to the friendship.

Learning Conflict Resolution Skills

Conflict resolution often relies on differentiating between a person's actions and his intentions. Kids often say or do things without any conscious intention of being hurtful. Many children with learning disabilities, out of a desire to protect themselves from further pain, project negative intentions on other children; they often react to criticism when none was intended, or take a joke or a friendly tease seriously. This can have negative social consequences. Instead of considering that the person may have said something without really thinking of its impact and was unintentionally hurtful, a child with learning disabilities often over-reacts with anger or withdrawal. Instead of trying to figure out the person's intentions, the child may prematurely end the relationship instead of using better listening or conflict resolution skills.

Children with learning differences can become better listeners if they:

learn the subtle rules of manners.

pay attention to nonverbal messages.

take joking and teasing with humor.

practice conflict resolutions skills.

One of the most important skills in listening and resolving conflicts is to attribute a good intention to one's "friend." Many children with learning disabilities benefit from social skills classes that include conflict resolution, or by therapy that helps them work through the trauma that comes from being teased and being different. Whatever method you choose, building a network of support that values your child for his unique contributions can go a long way toward sustaining him through the difficult developmental years.

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Quote of the Month

“Those who educate children well are more to be honored than parents, for these only gave life, those the art of living well.” - *Aristotle*

Workshops & Events (June)

Dunellen Parent Support Group (DPSG) Faber School, Media Center, 7:00 - 9:00 pm. **June 1** (Speaker: The Family Support Organization of Middlesex County).

The ARC of NJ sponsors “17th Annual Conference of Health Care for People with Developmental Disabilities”, Friday, **June 2**, at the The Westin, Princeton, NJ. For more information call 732-246-2525.

NJ State Library for the blind and handicapped presents "Braille Literacy Through The Arts", Saturday, **June 3** from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Grounds for Sculpture, 18 Fairgrounds Road, Hamilton, NJ 08619 Braille Literacy Through The Arts is an exciting new event sponsored in partnership by the NJ Library for the Blind and Handicapped (NJLBH), the Grounds For Sculpture and the Department of Human Services Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This event is free and registration is open to all who are blind, visually impaired, or a NJ Library for the Blind and Handicapped customer. PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED. For more information visit www.njlbh.org/upcoming/sculpture/index.htm

NJ State Library for the blind and handicapped presents “American Sign Language Children's Story Hour”. Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs, followed by a presentation about weather forecasting. **June 6** at 10 a.m., at NJLBH in Trenton. For more information visit www.njlbh.org

Eden Institute presents “12th Annual Princeton Lecture Series on Autism”, Friday, **June 9** from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Princeton University. The Lecture Series features nationally and internationally renowned scientists, researchers, educators and administrators who present current, in-depth information on a variety of topics related to autism research and service delivery that are of interest to families and professionals alike. Speakers include Dr.

Eric Hollander of Mt. Sinai School of Medicine's NY Autism Center; Dr. Brenda Smith Myles, University of Kansas' Dept. of Special Education associate professor and co-director of a graduate program in Asperger's Syndrome and Autism; and Dr. Diane L. Williams of Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic Department of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Fee: \$130 and includes handouts, morning refreshments and lunch. For more information, contact Joni Truch at (609) 987-0099 or joni.truch@edenservices.org.

Applied Behavior Consultants, LLC. present “FREE information session for parents of newly diagnosed children with autism”, on **June 9** from 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. at Montclair State University, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair, NJ 07043. For more information email adages@abcautism.com.

6th Annual Ride for Autism Charity Bicycle Tour, Brookdale Community College, Lincroft, NJ. This is a leisure bike riding event, Saturday, **June 10** to raise money for Autism Awareness. For more information visit www.ride4autism.org

The ARC of NJ sponsors “22nd Annual Self Advocacy Conference”, Saturday, **June 17**, at the The Doubletree Hotel, Somerset, NJ. For more information call 732-926-8010.

The Davis Center presents “What is Sound Therapy?”, a free informational seminar on ADD, AD/HD, Autism & Dyslexia, **June 27** from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. at Davis Center, One Mannino Drive, Rockaway, NJ. For more information visit: www.thedaviscenter.com or call 973-400-0010.

VSA/NJ presents "PARENT/CHILD WORKSHOPS IN MUSIC/MOVEMENT AND ART FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM". **Weekly** sessions are offered for children with autism and their families. Classes provide experiences in music, dance and art for young people, fostering the development and retention of an array of cognitive, communication, and social skills. For more information visit: www.vsanj.org

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Book of the Month



The Out-of-Sync Child has Fun

Activities for Kids with Sensory Integration Dysfunction

By: Carol Stock Kranowitz & T.J. Wylie

Carol Stock Kranowitz has done it again! Her first book, *The Out-of-Sync Child* was terrific for parents of children who have difficulties with sensory disorders. Now, she goes a step further with her newest book *The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun*, a treasure-chest of activities that can help a child to progress. This really neat book starts out with an introduction to sensory integration and explains the sensory difficulties that children with Sensory Integration Dysfunction experience.

Each activity lists the appropriate age range, the materials needed, what the child can do, and the sensory benefits that the activity offers, this allows you to select the activities that best fits your child. This companion volume to *The Out-of-Sync Child* presents activities that parents of kids with Sensory Integration Dysfunction can do at home with their child to strengthen their child's abilities-and have some fun together along the way.

Resource of the Month

Tumble Jam provides programs that are designed to teach children how music and their bodies work together; music, movement and fun. Classes for special needs children run from ages 6 months to 5 years old and a new class has been started for children ages 9 to 15 years old. Tumble Jam is located at 405 Park Avenue in Scotch Plains. Music is a very physical thing. The actual playing of music requires a lot of fine and gross motor activity. In a Tumble Jam class children don't just learn about music by singing notes, they also learn about music by moving their bodies. They will learn about pitch movement through body movement. They will learn

about dynamics (loud and soft) through body awareness and interactive games with a live piano. Tumble Bees classes are more laid back and relaxed. They work closer with the Bees on building their confidence and fine and gross motor skills. As the children progress and get older, they are asked to sit longer and participate more. When ready, children will be asked to come up and "lead" the class. The children enjoy watching their parents come up to "conduct" or help sing. At Tumble Jam, parents are as much a part of the classes as their children.

Classes are taught by professionals who have early childhood teaching and development experience. The special needs program was featured in the *Star Ledger*, is endorsed by NJCOSAC, and recently won an award from Morristown Memorial Hospital's occupational therapy department.

Tumble Jam likes to say that when your child is old enough to move on from Tumble Jam, they will be able to take what they have learned and move seamlessly into a dance class, gymnastics class, or into music lessons.

For more information or to register call (908) 322-8526.

Save the Date

Mark you calendar with upcoming events. . .

- **COSAC Support Group Middlesex County**
Raritan Valley Academy, Piscataway, 7:00 - 9:00 pm. **May 7**, Speaker: Jed Baker, **June** date not yet scheduled. Facilitator: Melissa DeWees, Psy.D. Parent Contact: Steve Sobel (732) 390-1796
- **COSAC Support Group Union County**
Children's Specialized Hospital, Mountainside, 7:30 - 9:30pm. **May 23**, **June** date not yet scheduled. Facilitator: Nancy Arvizzigno, MA, LPC. Parent Contact: Deb Ritter (908) 233-8510 (1-5pm only)
- **Epilepsy Support Group Middlesex County**
Robert Wood Johnson Hospital, **June 27**. For more information contact Jane at (732) 216-5092
- **The Davis Center** presents "What is Sound

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Therapy?" a free informational seminar on ADD, AD/HD, Autism & Dyslexia, **July 25 & August 22** from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. at Davis Center, One Mannino Drive, Rockaway, NJ.

For more information visit:

www.thedaviscenter.com or call 973-400-0010.

- **RDI Connect** sponsors "RDI: Going to the Heart of Autism" 2 Day Workshop, **July 7 & 8** from 9 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Dr. Steve Gutstein dramatically illustrates the Relationship Development Intervention Program (RDI) via audience participation and hours of video taken from actual intervention sessions. \$275 Fee. For more information contact Kristen Adiska at 866-378-6405 X119; email adiska@rdiconnect.com; web site www.rdiconnect.com

Next Issue

Take Action! I'd love to hear from you with suggestions and ideas for June's issue. Let me know what topics you would like to read about. Advise of any events you have on your calendar. Share resources, stories, book reviews and research updates. If you would like to write your own articles, I'd be happy to include them in upcoming issues. Please note, all articles are subject to approval. Feedback on this month's issue is also appreciated. All submissions should be emailed to mmccabe@sns.com