



NREIC

Collaborations

Update January 2008

Published for the Early Intervention
Community of Bergen, Hudson and
Passaic Counties.

www.nreic.org
(973)-256-8484

Contributors for this issue:
Joy Hammerman
Desireé Bonner

My Play Group
90 Center Ave, Westwood NJ
(201) 781-6129



~a social skills, language-based, play program for children with special needs~

Children learn, practice, apply and generalize skills in a variety of situations that address individual needs and allow each child to learn and grow. Games, art activities, circle time, and sensory activities are used to increase play skills, language skills, fine motor and gross motor skills and social skills. At My Playgroup, they will be focusing on language development, social skills, peer relationships, and play skills. Through experienced professionals and a learning rich environment, children will learn how to interact appropriately with peers of their own age. The program is designed by three Early Intervention Professionals with complementary disciplines who have combined their expertise to create an exceptional and unique learning environment. They offer social skills, play based classes throughout the week with weekend times also available. They also offer behavioral consultations, parent training, one-on-one private social skills training with experienced professionals, as well as home ABA therapy. NEW GROUPS ADDED ON AN ONGOING BASIS. PLEASE CONTACT US AT (201) 781-6129 OR BY EMAIL AT



Advocacy Developmental Milestone: Be a Big Voice for Little Kids in the 2008 Presidential Election

The **Advocacy Developmental Milestones** present you with periodic opportunities to put your advocacy skills into action by speaking out on the infant-toddler policy agenda of *good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences*.

Take Action!

The 2008 presidential election presents a critical opportunity to elect a leader who understands the importance of the earliest years of life. With the primaries starting this month, now is the time to take action to ensure our nation's infants and toddlers have a leader who proactively supports their healthy growth and development.

Follow **three easy steps** to make very young children a campaign priority during this important election season. Be sure to let the presidential candidates know that you vote with babies in mind by sending the ZERO TO THREE "[I'm a Big Voice for Little Kids](#)" e-card to all the presidential campaigns!

<http://zerotothree.720strategies.com/ecards/send/presidents>

ZERO TO THREE · National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families
2000 M Street, NW, Suite 200 · Washington DC 20036 · www.zerotothree.org

Statewide Parent Advocacy
Network, Inc.

20th Anniversary
Conference

"Strengthening Families ⇔ Building
Communities"

Saturday, March 1, 2008

Sheraton Eatontown

Route 35

Eatontown, New Jersey

SAVE THE DATE

**A COMMUNITY PROGRAM ON
AUTISM, ASPERGER SYNDROME**

Presented by Dr. Ami Klin,
Director of Autism Program at
Yale Child Study Center
A Program for Parents and Child
Service Providers

Wednesday, January 23, 2008
7:00 -9:00pm (Registration begins
at 6:30pm)

Adath Israel Congregation
1958 Lawrenceville Road
Lawrenceville

No Fee

RSVP by January 18 to Debra H.
Levenstein at 609-243-0390 or
debral@ifcsonline.org

Dr. Klin will provide a brief
overview of autism, spectrum
disorders and asperger
syndrome. He will concentrate
on what parents should know
about these including updates on
treatment, early identification and
early intervention. There will be
plenty of time for questions and
answers.



**Association for
Special Children
and Families**

A Family Support Organization

P.O. Box 494 Phone: 973-728-8744 Email: ascfamily@hotmail.com
Hewitt, NJ 07421 Fax: 973-728-5019 www.ascfamily.org

The ASCF is providing a Social Skills group facilitated by a social worker that focuses on teaching special needs children how to interact with each other and the environment around them. The group will be held once a week for approximately 9 weeks. If interested, contact Nadia @ 973-728-8744

Special Services Advisory Council of Glen Rock is pleased to welcome John Macri, PhD. School Psychologist: "Parenting Strategies: How to Help Your Child Without Losing Yourself" Thursday, January 24 at Coleman School Learning Center, 100 Pinelynn Ave, Glen Rock. 7:30 PM. This meeting is open to the public. Please email Sara Lowry at lowrys37@hotmail.com or Eileen Besser at e.besser@att.net

***"Family Connections"
Support Group***

*The next meeting will take place at
the JCC on the Palisades in
Tenafly on Thursday, February 7
from 7:30pm to 9:30pm.*

*Families with young children are
invited to attend the group to
discuss various topics related to
raising young children with chal-
lenges. Free of Charge! Please
RSVP to Joy Hammerman (973)256
-8484 or email Joy@NREIC.ORG*

Notice herein of any workshop, seminar, conference, etc., not offered by the NREIC, does not constitute an endorsement of any specific methodology, organization, or opinion



Community of Practice on Early Childhood Family Support

The CoP is an *on-line* gathering place that brings together families, professionals, researchers, and policy leaders to share our insights and experiences for collecting wisdom.

Words of the Week are emailed to members every Monday to announce a discussion focus for that week. Recent topics have been

When Parents and Schools Disagree – What’s Next?

Celebrations and Success Stories

The Beige and White Diet Intervention or Intrusion?



Enter the CoP at www.beachcenter.org
The Beach Center on Disability at the University of Kansas

Click on Communities of Practice and see what’s going on inside. As a visitor, you can only read the discussions. To participate, click on ***Become a Member***, complete your Member Profile, and ***Submit***.

When you receive your membership confirmation email, sign in to the CoP , start exploring and sharing.

Add your voice to bring about wisdom-based actions that are needed to enhance the lives of children with disabilities and their families.

We look forward to hearing from you in the CoP!

For more information, please contact
Donna Beauchamp 785.864.7601 dbeau@ku.edu



Helping Parents Help Their Children

The Parents' Empowerment Academy: Professional Parent Advocacy Training Empowering the Parent Team

NJPC is offering a FREE five-week Professional Parent Advocacy Training program for parents, grandparents, foster parents, adoptive parents, and other caregivers raising children with emotional and behavioral challenges. Parents and caregivers attending the training are given the opportunity to strengthen their knowledge of the systems that serve their families, their rights and responsibilities within those systems, and the advocacy, professional, and collaborative skills needed to successfully negotiate those systems. Parents will become better able to advocate for themselves and their communities, resulting in increased access to appropriate care and treatment for all children. Professional Parent Advocacy is approved by DYFS for foster parent training. Lunch will be served and transportation stipends are available. Flyer and Registration information is attached. Early registration is recommended. Organizations which have information for our parent information table, should forward 40 copies to NJPC of Passaic County, 117 Keen Street, Paterson, NJ 07524.

Location: Paterson Public School #10, 48 Mercer Street, Paterson, NJ 07524

Time: 9:30am to 3:30pm

Instructors: Kelly Grieco, Director of Special Education Advocacy, NJPC
Kathy Wright, Executive Director, NJPC; Consultant, National Cultural Competency Center, Georgetown University; Consultant, National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health, Georgetown University
Barbara Ransom, Esq., Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia
Regana Bracey, Chapter Director, NJPC of Passaic County

January 19

Professionalism & Communication Skills
Empowering the Parent Voice: Motivation & Assertiveness
Conflict Resolution Skills & The Power of Persuasion
Empowering vs. Enabling

January 26

Cultural Competency & Diversity in the Child-Serving Community
Understanding Childhood Mental Health Challenges

February 2

Collaborating with Agencies Dedicated to Children's Mental Health
Family Involvement in Juvenile Justice & Child Welfare
Building Children's System of Care: An Overview for Families (Sheila Pires Primer)

February 9

Navigating the Special Education System & the IEP Process
Developing a Transitional Plan
IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
NCLB – No Child Left Behind Act

February 13 - 7:00pm to 9:00pm

The Role of Agencies Dedicated to Children's Mental Health: Professional Panel

February 23

Empowering the Parent Trainer-Train the Trainer

TBA

Graduation

Empowering the Statewide Parent Movement

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to use their newly-trained skills to deliver Parent Advocacy Workshops in their local community with the support of NJPC and other certified parents throughout the State.

To register, or for additional information, call Kelly Grieco at 973-989-8866, fax the registration form to 973-989-8867, or email info@njparentcaucus.org.

**5th Annual DINE OUT FOR KIDS
THURSDAY, JANUARY 31ST**

On Thursday, January 31st, eat lunch, dinner or both (as indicated) at these great restaurants. Each restaurant will donate 10% to 20% of their January 31st receipts to the Hudson County Child Abuse Prevention Center.

Proceeds from Dine Out benefit our efforts to keep kids safe: w Parenting Education w Youth Empowerment w Professional Training w Community Awareness w Child Advocacy Center w Family Success Center	IN JERSEY CITY		IN BAYONNE	
	BAR MAJESTIC Dinner 275 Grove St. 201-451-4400	PRESTO'S Lunch & Dinner 199 Warren St. 201-433-6639	DA NOI Lunch & Dinner 1105 Avenue C 201-437-5578	
	THE BLUE RIBBON Dinner 510 Summit Ave. 201-795-9393	PUCCINI'S Lunch & Dinner 1064 West Side Ave. 201-432-4111	IN HOBOKEN	
	HARD GROVE CAFÉ Lunch & Dinner 319 Grove St. 201-451-1853	RITA & JOE'S Lunch & Dinner 142 Broadway 201-451-3606	AMANDA'S* Dinner 908 Washington St. 201-798-0101	
	IT'S GREEK TO ME Lunch & Dinner 194 Newark Ave. 201-222-0844	SKINNER'S LOFT Dinner 146 Newark Ave. 201-915-0600	COURT STREET Dinner 61 Sixth St. 201-795-4515	
	THE MERCHANT* Lunch & Dinner 279 Grove St. 201-200-0202	UNO CHICAGO BAR & GRILL Dinner 286 Washington St. 201-395-9500	ELYSIAN* CAFÉ Lunch & Dinner 1001 Washington St. 201-798-5898	
	THE POINTE'* Lunch & Dinner 2 Chapel Ave. 201-985-9854	YORK STREET TAVERN Lunch & Dinner 247 Washington St. 201-978-5696	*These restaurants participate in Hudson Restaurant Week, with prix-fixe meals at reduced prices	
			Together, We CAN Prevent Child Abuse!!	

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR DINE OUT:

Family Night Out, Romantic Dinner, Working Lunch or Dinner, Youth Group or Sports Team Dinner, Community Service Project, Committee Meeting, Reunion

Hudson County Child Abuse Prevention Center
880 Bergen Avenue Jersey City NJ 07306

T. 201-798-5588 F. 201-798-4242 www.hccapc.org

The Hudson County Child Abuse Prevention Center is a private, non-profit corporation registered with the IRS and the NJ Division of Consumer Affairs/Charities Registration

A few months ago, I took my sons to buy shoes. Nate is 14 and autistic. Joey is 8 and "typical." And I'm the parent — most of the time. Before we got to the store, Joey said to me, "If Nate has a tantrum, I can handle him. You just focus on buying shoes. I'm better at handling tantrums than you. Sometimes you just yell and it makes things worse. No offense."

None taken. He's absolutely right.

The "typically developing" siblings of autistic children are, in fact, the furthest thing from typical. Often, they are wiser and more mature than their age would suggest. And they have to be, given the myriad challenges they face: parental responsibility; a feeling of isolation from the rest of their family; confusion, fear, anger and embarrassment about their autistic sibling. And on top of all of it, guilt for having these feelings.

As their parents, there's a lot we can do to help. For starters, we can educate them early on, by explaining their sibling's disorder — a conversation that should be ongoing. Dr. Raun Melmed, co-founder and medical director of the Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center in Phoenix, suggests including non-autistic children in visits to the doctor or other autism professionals. Early intervention doesn't have to be "thought of as being geared only to the involved child," Melmed says. In his office, Melmed reassures siblings that "other brothers and sisters have negative and confusing thoughts about their [autistic] siblings. That is common." He also instructs parents to reaffirm that message at home. "Parents need only acknowledge to their healthy children that they know what they are going through and that negative feelings are normal," he says.

A great way for kids to feel "normal" is to meet other siblings of autistic children, which they can do at sibling workshops. At the Kennedy Krieger Institute for children with developmental disabilities in Baltimore, social worker Mary Snyder-Vogel runs a program called Sibshops. "The workshops give these kids the opportunity to realize they're not alone," Snyder-Vogel says. "[We play] a lot of games that help them interact and problem-solve with peers. Kids don't even realize they're getting support."

At a recent Sibfun workshop at the Jewish Community Center on Manhattan's Upper West Side, therapists used puppet shows to illustrate issues that are common among siblings of special-needs kids. When asked what they thought the puppets were feeling, the children in the audience needed no prompting, immediately shouting out words like sad, disappointed and jealous.

Siblings will commonly have negative feelings — some might never connect or want to connect with their autistic siblings — but the good news is that typical siblings often turn out to be more compassionate and caring than average. "These siblings have seen what it's like to have a hard time in life," says Sandra Harris, executive director of Rutgers University's Douglass Developmental Disabilities Center, a program for people with autism spectrum disorders and their families, and author of *Siblings of Children with Autism: A Guide for Families* (Woodbine House). There are many other, more specific challenges that affect siblings of special-needs kids — and many of them apply to sibling relationships of every kind. Here are some of the issues that most frequently confront typical siblings — and their families — with advice from professionals.

Challenge #1: "Why won't he play with me?"

For younger siblings of autistic children, one of their first doses of reality usually comes when their older brother or sister won't play. "The child on the [autism] spectrum may seem indifferent or have a meltdown when the sibling tries to interact," says Rutgers' Harris.

Seven-year-old Adam, whose autistic brother Jacob is 11, says, "I can't really play games with Jacob like I can with my cousin Eric [also 11]. Jacob likes to play games on the computer — but by himself, not with me. He gets too angry if he loses and then doesn't want to play." Adam's father, Paul, says soberly, "I'm sure Eric represents the brother Adam might have had."

Solution: Find common ground

Parents can start by telling the typical sibling that his brother or sister "is doing the best he can, and here are some things you can do with him," says Judy Levy, director of social work at the Kennedy Krieger Institute. "Maybe in the future he'll be able to learn to play with you in other ways, but right now this is what he can do." Harris encourages parents to "find ways in which the siblings can relate [or] share an interest." That can be something very simple, as Elliot learned at an early age. "It turns out my brothers [Benjamin and Aaron] are really ticklish," says Elliot. "Tickling was a good way to bond with them, and for them to show affection back by laughing and wanting it again." (And again and again — and again.)

Challenge #2: "It's not fair!"

Every parent has heard his or her child say, "It's not fair!" But for families with autistic and typical siblings, "not fair" is the reality, when it comes to one child being treated differently from the other. Martin Bounds has one autistic child, Charlie, 13, and one typical child, Alex, 15, about whom Bounds says, "He'd get very upset when he would bump his knee or complain of feeling sick. He thought we weren't sufficiently concerned about him, in the spirit of 'I could be over here dying, and all you care about is Charlie.'"

That may be overstatement, but such sentiments often stem from legitimate gripes. Bounds recalls when he and his wife attended an important fund-raiser for Charlie three years ago, on the same day Alex rode in an annual bike race. "Alex won the race for his age group and was really upset when we were not there to greet him at the finish line," says Bounds. "As much as you try to balance schedules, as parents of an autistic child, you have to basically accept that you are going to have moments when you feel you have cheated your other children, and those moments are awful."

Solution: Create special time

Harris urges parents to set aside alone-time with their typical kids every week. "Private time can even [include] riding in the car to pick up the laundry," she says, "but since [the child is] with Daddy, [he or she is] the focus of his attention." Some kids, like Elliot, develop new hobbies as a way to spend time with a parent. "Gardening was something I could do with just my mom — it was never easy to get my mom to myself," he says. Elliot began gardening five years ago; he's now a junior judge at flower shows and grows about 330 varieties at home, including the 170 seedlings he has hybridized.

For single parents, however, eking out one-on-one time can be a daunting task. As a widowed mom, I know firsthand — we do the best we can with the time we have. Single dad Ron Barth says his autistic 9-year-old, Daniel, "dominates everything, so I have to make special moments with Nicole [age 15], like taking her shopping — without Daniel." But, says Barth, "There aren't enough of those moments."

Challenge #3: "I'm scared!"

Some autistic children are aggressive, which can be scary and dangerous, especially for younger kids. And parents can't possibly keep an eye on their kids every second — which is about the amount of time it took for one child I interviewed to get squirted in the eyes with Windex by her younger autistic brother. (She survived just fine.) Even my son Nate, who isn't aggressive but is twice the size of Joey, often hugs Joey — tight. Very tight. Around the neck. When Joey yells "MOM!" I've learned to tell the difference between *Mom, can you help me find my Gameboy?* and *MOM, he's choking me!*

Solution: Find a safe haven

"I tell parents to have a 'safe place,' usually the child's room, where the typical child can go while an adult handles the behavior problem," says Harris. "Then, as soon as they can, the parents should comfort the typical child and help him or her understand what happened."

Harris also suggests that parents develop an "intervention plan" to teach the child with autism alternate behaviors — such as asking to be left alone, or using words, cards or a special gesture — when he or she feels upset. "Kids with autism can learn to go their room, sit in a beanbag chair, or do something else that helps them calm themselves," says Harris.

Challenge #4: "He's so embarrassing!"

It's common for siblings to feel embarrassed by their autistic brother or sister's behavior in public, or to be reluctant to bring their friends home. Kelly Reynolds, 21, says it can be difficult introducing her autistic brother, Will, to her friends: "It's hard to have a young child in an older kid's body. [Will] may go up to one of my girlfriends and sit on her on the couch — which probably would have been cute when he was five years old but he's 17 now," Reynolds says. "That can be hard because you can tell when someone feels awkward or scared or thrown off."

Solution: Encourage honesty — and laugh

"Interestingly, a lot of these [typical sibs] are more outspoken," says Levy of the Kennedy Krieger Institute. "They'll go up to people and say, 'Yes, that's my brother. He has special needs. Do you have any questions?'" My son Joey is one of those kids. When he was 6, we were at a bus stop when Nate started jumping up and down and making weird noises — just being Nate. When Joey's friend started making fun of Nate, Joey got right in her face and said, "Do NOT make fun of my brother again! Everybody learns differently." They were my words coming from Joey's mouth. Several parents I interviewed said a sense of humor is key. "Your typical child can see the humor in the actions of his autistic siblings," says Bounds, father to Charlie and Alex. "It's okay to talk about his or her 'weird brother' in a way that signals that you both know this isn't normal." When Nate does something bizarre in public, which is just about whenever he's in public, Joey and I often give each other an *Oh, my God!* look and roll our eyes, which sort of says, "We're in this together."

Challenge #5: "I feel like the parent."

Angela Bryan-Brown, 15, says she often feels like a parent to her 14-year-old brother Alasdair. "You don't have a choice," says Angie. "You've got to help out, and your parents can only do so much. They're so stressed out." Angie's mom Florie Seery refers to Angie as "the third parent in the house" and "an old soul," a phrase I've heard often from other parents.

Elliot says of his siblings' disorder: "Even though I'm four years younger, it places me in the position of being the older brother. "

Solution: Let sibs be children too

"It's a challenge for children to feel that sense of responsibility for their sibling," says Harris. "A wise parent works hard to temper that and to make the responsibilities fitting to the age of the siblings. An older sister can keep her brother entertained for half an hour because an older sister would typically do that to help out — but she's not a parent."

For young siblings, Harris suggests counseling them: "'It's wonderful to care about your brother, but you're my little boy too. Because your brother has trouble learning sometimes, he might need help from you, but you're not his mommy or daddy. We will take care of him when he needs help.' That kind of message reaffirms one's love and lifts that burden."

Challenge #6: The holidays

"Attending loud, busy social gatherings with new sights, sounds, smells, intrusive relatives and strange places overwhelms the best of us, let alone those with sensitive sensory systems," says Dr. Raun Melmed of the Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center. "Of course, when the child gets overwhelmed and melts down, so do the siblings and parents." "In short, holidays suck, especially the ones you spend outside your own home," says dad, Bounds. "They're full of the most dreaded thing in an autistic life — unstructured time. People get together with relatives and friends and talk — which is sort of hard to do when your child has your sister-in-law's cat by the throat and is about to put him in the food processor."

Solution: Ask family members to help

Harris suggests that parents "create a rotating team of adults. Each person spends a half-hour with the child, so that parents and siblings aren't trapped, and the child doesn't have to be exposed to the chaos of the party. Cousins and aunts can take a turn."

Siblings, however, should be spared. "The typically developing kid wants the holiday to come. She's off from school, she's getting her present and she can't really enjoy that" if she's expected to take care of her autistic brother or sister, says social worker Snyder-Vogel.

Challenge #7: In adulthood, the sibs will become "parents"

Someday, inevitably, the sibling of an autistic child will most likely take on the role of guardian and advocate. "You're basically at some point going to be their parent," says Kelly Reynolds, 21. "Anyone I want to marry has to take that into account. In some ways you kind of feel like you already have a kid. ... For me, it's kind of a deal-breaker when someone can't really get along with my brother. He's such a big part of my life."

Solution: Discuss future plans with adult children

Parents should talk about financial plans and any care arrangements that have been made, once typical siblings are old enough, says Harris in a recent article for the Autism Society of America. But this isn't a discussion to initiate with younger children — unless they bring the topic up on their own.

Many of the children I interviewed showed deep concern for their autistic brothers and sisters. And nearly all of the professionals and doctors I talked with said that a disproportionate number of their students and residents were siblings of people with autism. "I'm very interested in trying to help find a cure," says 15-year-old Elliot, who closely follows news about the disorder. "I'd just like to get a neat little pill someday for my siblings that they can pop in with their apple juice and hopefully be normal."

Find this article at: <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1698128,00.html>