

# weap: The People

Volume 5, Issue 1

Wisconsin Early Autism Project, Inc.

2011

## New Baby in the Family

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Congratulations, you just found out you're expecting and can't wait to expand your family. But you are concerned about how your child with autism may take the news and what his reaction might be. Here are some tips and techniques that I have gathered and used which may help ease the transition of your newest addition.

First and possibly most important, talk with your child and try to use language they understand. As soon as you feel comfortable you should tell your child that he/she will have a new baby sister/brother. Using books that introduce the idea can be helpful or incorporating the idea into a play setting like "pretend kitchen" or a dollhouse can feel more natural and less of a serious talk.

Second, carve out special parent and child time before the baby is born and keep up the tradition after baby's arrival. This way the older sibling can still feel important and receive attention specifically meant for them.

Third, the child should understand that you may be busy at times and might not be able to respond to their needs as quickly as before. This can be practiced before the baby comes by using a baby doll, having a pretend bottle, changing diapers, etc. Social stories, role play, and video models are three

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## Restaurant Trip Tips

**Nathan Mathis**

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For most families, a trip to a local restaurant is an enjoyable event. Restaurants, though, can present a number of challenges for children with autism. Transitions in and out of the restaurant, sitting for long periods of time, trying new foods, and noisy environments can all create stress for an autistic child and their family. These challenges can be overcome by employing some simple techniques and building skills in the home before venturing out into the community.

Transitions to new environments are difficult for many autistic children. One way to aide a transition is to foreshadow it. During the days and hours leading up to the restaurant trip, remind the child of the upcoming trip. Writing the date and time on a calendar and reviewing this with the child can help the child get a better visual idea of the date as it is approaching. Looking at pictures of the restaurant with the child (either taking pictures yourself or using Google images) and reading a social story can help the child get an idea of what the restaurant environment looks like. A similar method would be to make a video of the restaurant and watch together (you should get

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permission from the restaurant before making a video).

Being able to sit for long periods of time is a skill that is necessary for a trip to a restaurant. If a child can't sit for a meal at home, he or she may not be ready for a trip to a restaurant. Work at home to build the amount of time that the child can sit during a meal.

Providing the child with activities to occupy him or her is another way to make waiting easier. Bring along puzzles, books, coloring activities, video games or any other activity that the child enjoys. Be sure that the child has the ability to sit and attend to these activities for a long period of time in their home environment before trying them at a restaurant.

Another thing to keep in mind is to start small. Make your first few trips to the restaurant brief. Order ice cream or an appetizer; something that arrives quickly so that little waiting is involved. As the child is successful, work up to ordering meals that involve more waiting.

Another challenge that may be encountered at a restaurant is variations in food. A child doesn't need to be tolerant of many different types of foods, but he or she should be tolerant of different types of the same food. If your child will only eat chicken nuggets, for example, be sure that he or she will eat different types of chicken nuggets, or chicken fingers instead of chicken nuggets. Work to build tolerance to these variations in the home before trying at a restaurant.

If you have already made trips to a restaurant and had success, try building on those successes by branching out slowly to different environments. For example, if a child has done well at McDonalds, try taking a trip to Burger King. Once a child is okay with fast food restaurants, try a buffet-style restaurant. Try not to change too many variables at one time, though, and be sure that the child has had enough success in one environment before branching out.

Going at off times is another way to reduce stress for a child with autism. By going during off times the restaurant will be quieter, the food will likely come to your table faster, and if the child does have a meltdown, there will be fewer people in the restaurant that may be bothered. It may be a good

idea to inform the restaurant staff that you have an autistic child with you so they understand possible behaviors.

Including children with autism into family routines such as restaurant trips is important both for the child and for the family. There are many techniques that can be employed in the home and while at a restaurant to make the experience easier for an autistic child. If your child struggles in a restaurant setting, or if you've been putting off a trip to a restaurant, talk with your therapy team about the possibility of beginning a program to address these issues.♦

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ways to prepare for the big arrival. This way your child will understand that you might be busy right now but will come by them as soon as you can. In addition to demonstrating how mom might be busy, it can be helpful to set up an area where the child knows he/she can play by themselves for a period of time. Bins, ziplocks and baskets are all useful tools for organizing independent play activities such as puzzles, lacing cards, coloring, blocks, or any other toys that your child enjoys and can use independently.

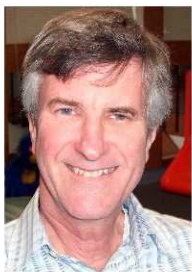
Fourth, prepare for the new sounds your child might hear, such as a newborn crying. This can be overly loud and might make your child uncomfortable. Audio clips are readily available on the internet so you can expose your child to the new and unfamiliar sounds.

Fifth, include your child in care, if possible. Giving a special task or responsibility gives kids the opportunity to complete a task and feel accomplished. Something as simple as handing mom a diaper or picking out a bib are two ideas.

I was able to implement all of the above tips on a team of mine and they have greatly eased the transition of his new baby sister into the household. If you're interested in trying these ideas talk with your Senior Therapist.♦

## EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

"Jessica Hollow always comes to work with a positive attitude and a smile on her face." explains Senior Therapist Andrea Haag. "She goes above and beyond what is asked and required of her. She is always thinking of fun and creative ways to engage the children she works with and is always willing to help pick up extra hours."



## Ask Dr. Sallows

You can submit more questions to Dr. Sallows by putting "Ask Dr. Sallows" in the subject line of an email to:

[jsallows@wiautism.com](mailto:jsallows@wiautism.com)

### What does Autism Spectrum Disorder mean?

This term refers to all children with autistic symptoms, while acknowledging that these symptoms can be present in varying degrees. Children who show mild deficits in all three areas characteristic of autism (language, social interaction and unusual or rigid behavior) are diagnosed with PDD-NOS. That is, they have a Pervasive Developmental Disorder but don't meet the criteria for any specific sub-diagnosis such as autism. Children with clear deficits in all three areas are diagnosed with autism. Children with fairly intact language (3-word phrases by age 3), but who still have social interaction deficits and rigidities/preoccupations with a specific area of interest, are diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder.

### What is Aspergers Syndrome? How is it different from Autism?

Aspergers Syndrome is part of the Autism spectrum. Individuals with Aspergers have many more developed skills and abilities than people diagnosed with full Autism. The major symptom of Aspergers Syndrome is difficulty in understanding and participating in social relationships. There are often restricted or repetitive patterns of behavior interest and activities, sometimes featuring areas of very high interest. There is usually no significant delay in speech or language and no significant cognitive disability. In treating Aspergers, it is important to target social deficits and to specifically teach social interaction skills through one to one and group interactions.

### My child has a few symptoms of Autism but the doctors I have gone to tell me that he does not meet the criteria for Autism. He has been diagnosed with a speech and language delay. He has a very hard time communicating his needs and gets frustrated often. Do you have any suggestions?

Unfortunately the diagnosis of Autism is not clear cut. You can go to different professionals and get different opinions about diagnosis. The bottom line is "What will help your child move beyond his apparent limitations?" Regardless of how your child has been diagnosed there is help. Many children can benefit from an Applied Behavior Analysis approach to their learning difficulties. What needs to be done is a careful analysis of the areas where your child is struggling. From that analysis, programs can be developed to teach your child in the areas that he is struggling.

### If I have one child with Autism, what are my chances of having another child with Autism?

Autism is considered to be a genetic disease so there is an increased risk of having a second child with autism in families that already have one child with Autism. Autism occurs more often in boys than girls so the risk of having a second child with Autism is even greater if a family has a male child with Autism.

### Can Autism be treated?

From about the age of 1 ½ to 6-10 years, the brain of a child has roughly 10 times as many nerve connections as that of an adult. During these years, children can learn rapidly if they are presented with repeated opportunities. A child learns that an adult is fun through physical play that the child enjoys, therefore building social relating. Similarly, a child learns to imitate and use speech by trying to copy the word "up" when an adult does something fun like picking him up into the air. Parents can build skills in many areas using these strategies.

### We have concerns about delays in our 18 month-old child. At what age can a child be tested for autism?

Symptoms of autism may not be apparent until 12 (poor eye contact) or 18 months (language delay). Several researchers are developing diagnostic measures for infants. Currently, two are available for use at 18 months. The MCHAT (Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers) is a screening tool with 6 critical items: Looking where the adult points; showing items to share interest (not to fix or open); pointing to share interest (not to request); responding to name by looking; imitating adult actions (e.g., making a face). The CARS (Childhood Autism Rating Scale) involves ratings of symptom severity and requires training to use accurately.♦

## WEAP Research

Weap is collaborating with Dr. Richard Davidson at the UW Madison Waisman Center on an exciting research project. The goal of the study is to learn how treatment outcome is related to differences in brain functioning. We have always assumed that as children learn to communicate and relate to others, that these changes are reflected in differences in brain functioning. However, this has never been proven. Children who have completed treatment have never been imaged. By using an MRI machine to image the child's brain as they look at pictures of faces displaying different emotions, we will be able to examine the functioning of brain areas that process social information. This will provide the first look at the connection between learning new skills and brain functioning.

If your child has completed 3 yrs of treatment, he or she is eligible to participate. Call Frances Haeberli at the Waisman Center to learn more (608 262-8772). If Frances is away from her desk, you can leave your name, phone number and mention the Weap study on her answering machine and she will get back to you. Your child will be paid for participating, and all of your travel expenses will be reimbursed. Most importantly, you will be contributing to a truly significant study. Thanks so much for helping out.♦

## Upcoming Events

### School & Social Strategies for the Child with Autism

AEP Connections is hosting an evening event March 10 2011 from 5:30-9:30 at Appleton West HS auditorium that will feature Brenda Smith Myles! Topics will include; The Hidden Curriculum & how to handle difficult moments for students & children with autism. The community foundation has donated a limited number of parent scholarships.

**Mar 10**

**Appleton**

5:30-9:30

\$25

Appleton West High School

Lisabeth Watson 920-224-4794

<http://aepconnections.com/> [info@aepconnections.com](mailto:info@aepconnections.com)

### PECS Basic Training

The Picture Exchange Communication System is used to teach communication skills rapidly to those with limited functional speech. PECS promotes communication within a social context, without lengthy prerequisite training. Participants will learn how to implement the six phases of PECS, & will leave the workshop ready to implement PECS with individuals with autism, & other related disabilities.

**Feb 24-25 2011**

**Milwaukee**

8a-4p

\$395 pro/\$295 parent

Amanda Hunter 888-732-7462

[www.pecs.com](http://www.pecs.com) [ahunter@pecs.com](mailto:ahunter@pecs.com)

## Groups and Classes

Location	Group	Age/Level	Facilitator	Fee	Days	Time	Start Date
Madison	Teen Group	Ages 13-16	Matt S	\$30/class (register by Jan. 5th)	Wednesdays	4:00-5:30PM	Jan. 12th- May 25th
Madison	Social Skills: Lion Pride	ages 6-8	Marissa & Katie	\$30/class (register by Jan. 5th)	Tuesdays	4:00-5:30PM	Jan. 11th- May 24th
Madison	Social Skills: Elephant Parade	Ages 9-12	Stephanie	\$30/class (register by Jan. 5th)	Wednesdays	3:30-5:30PM	Jan. 12th- May 25th
Milwaukee	Friendship Club	Ages 11-14	Stephanie	\$30/class Cost includes outings	Thursdays (no group 2/17)	4:30-6:00PM	Jan. 13th- March 24th
Milwaukee	Conversations for Kids	Ages 5-7	Stephanie	\$30/class	Tuesdays	4:30-6:00PM	Jan. 11th- Feb. 8th
Milwaukee	Monday Fun Day	Ages 5-9	Robin	\$30/class <a href="#">register</a>	Mondays	4:30-6:00PM	Jan. 10th - March 14th
Milwaukee	The 5 Point Scale	Ages 8-10	Stephanie	\$30/class	Tuesdays	4:30-6:00PM	Feb. 15 th- March 15th
Green Bay	Social skills	Ages 3-5	TBA	\$10.00 / class Choose # of classes (Register by March 11th)	Mondays	9:30-11:00Am	March 21- May 16
Green Bay	Social skills	Ages 6-9	TBA	\$10.00 / class Choose # of classes (Register by March 11th)	Tuesdays	4:30-6:00Pm	March 22 - May 17
Green Bay	Teen Group	Ages 10-13	TBA	\$10.00 / class Choose # of classes (Register by March 11th)	Wednesdays	4:30-6:00Pm	March 23 - May 18
Green Bay	Teen Group	14 & Up	TBA	\$10.00 / class Choose # of classes (Register by March 11th)	Thursdays	4:30-6:00Pm	March 24 - May 19

## Current Openings

MADISON	MILWAUKEE			GREEN BAY	EAU CLAIRE
<b>608-288-9040</b>	<b>262-432-5660</b>	Hales Corners	Racine	<b>920-338-1610</b>	<b>715-832-2233</b>
Beloit	Brookfield	Hartford	Saukville	Bay area	Barron
Madison	Brown Deer	Kenosha	S. Milwaukee	Chilton	Camp Douglas
Portage	Cedarburg	Menomonee Falls	Walworth	Fond Du Lac	Catawba
Rio	Dousman	Mequon	Waukesha	Fox Cities	Colfax
Mt. Horeb	Germantown	Milwaukee	Wauwatosa	Greater Green	Hixton
New Glarus	Greenfield	Mukwonago	West Allis	Manitowoc	Merrill
Watertown		Oak Creek	West Bend	Valders	Phillips
		Oconomowoc			StevensPoint
					Wausau