

Here's What's Different About Us!

Fostering Play and Friendships for Individuals on the Autism Spectrum

Welcome back to another school year!

We hope you had a chance to relax and enjoy the summer with your family and friends. Our presentation team is in full swing visiting schools around the Lower Mainland. Please forward this newsletter to other friends, family or members of your organization.

To Disclose or Not to Disclose! That is the Question

By Heather McCracken

Again and again parents ask the question that I dread to hear, "When should I tell my child they have autism?" Every time I hear this question my heart sinks – and I have heard this question thousands of times in the past decade. To answer this question takes careful consideration and there is really no right or wrong answer.

Disclosing to your child that they are on the autism spectrum is a private and personal choice that needs to take into consideration the family's dynamics. If you are a parent sitting on the fence with this question, here are some questions that perhaps you need to ask yourself. Some of these questions may be a bit difficult to ask yourself but it is my hope that when you are ready to ask them they will help you climb down from that fence.

- Is your child requesting information? Does your child ask questions or talk about any of the following topics:
 - wanting friends but not having them
 - not understanding why some things are so hard to learn, accomplish, or do
 - being "different"
- At some point in your child's life will he/she need to know that they are on the autism spectrum in order to self-advocate?
- At some point in your child's life might she require information about her unique kind of mind or "disability" for moral or legal reasons, such as to provide legal protection against discrimination?
- Is autism a "secret" in your home/family? Does keeping this "secret" take a lot of energy and add stress to your family environment?
- What does a secret imply? In most cultures a secret implies something bad.
- If you were on the autism spectrum would you want to know? Would you feel you had the right to know?

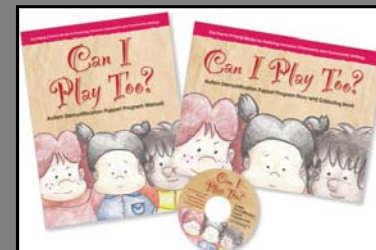
Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society takes a positive, proactive and respectful attitude toward differences, therefore we believe autism is not bad or good, it just is. Using the label of autism or disclosing seems like a natural and respectful thing to do. After all, we are all different in our own way, and being a good friend, parent, sibling etc means **accepting differences!**

Next issue

Learn how to use the *Can I Play Too? Autism Demystification Puppet Presentation Packaged Program* to start the process of disclosure for young children on the autism spectrum.



Coming October 2010!!!



"Can I Play Too?"

Package will include:

- DVD of Puppet Presentation
- Implementation Manual
- Colouring Books
- CD of Printable Materials

Visit our on-line bookstore for more great titles and other materials.

Upcoming Conferences

October 22, 2010.

Can I Play Too? Community Implementation Workshop
Coquitlam, BC

Closed Session

October 30, 2010.

Changing Practices, Changing Systems, Changing Lives: A Framework for the Development of Social Emotional Competence
Burnaby, BC

Hosted by:

BC Centre for Ability and Burnaby Supported Child Development

November 19-20, 2010.

2 Day F2F-IPG Seminar with Heather McCracken & Pamela Wolfberg
Folsom, California

Hosted by:

MAPS—Moondance

Back to the Future

By Michelle Englar, Executive Assistant

I first joined Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society as a program presenter in January of 2008. Until shortly before then, autism was not something I was very familiar with or had even thought deeply about. I was studying at the University of British Columbia to major in philosophy and minor in psychology, none of my close friends or family was on the autism spectrum and, though my minor in psychology focused on development, I had little exposure to autism outside of my textbook knowledge. That is, until I met a unique boy who challenged me to think more deeply about the meaning of friendship - Iain.

Iain, who is on the autism spectrum, has an affinity for movies and I happened to work in the music and movies department at Future Shop at that time. It was there that I became friends with him and his aide, Tanya. Week after week, he would come into the store and after a while, he felt comfortable enough to talk to me. As I got to know him, I became more and more curious about what it might feel like to have autism. One day, when talking to Tanya, she told me that Iain's mother founded and ran a not-for-profit charity called Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society, which had been running since 2002. When I first learned about his mother, Heather McCracken, Friend 2 Friend and its program goals, I was blown away.

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Same friendly people...NEW look!

Friend 2 Friend is very excited to share with you our new logo and colours. Our first logo was all about being a good friend. Over the years, we have grown and expanded our programs and services. We still wanted something that was fun and unique while also reflecting our values of embracing diversity and equality. Please visit our website at www.friend2friendsociety.org for up-to-date news.

Tips from the Sib Training to be an "Autism Ninja"

By Emma Robbins (12 years old)

Having a brother or sister with autism isn't always fun and games. It takes concentration, training and patience...kind of like training to be a ninja.

Here are some tips for becoming an autism ninja:

1. Know what your sibling likes and dislikes and then buy them something cool for their birthday.
2. Have vast amounts of spaghetti and drive down to Washington for raiding the Fred Meyers and Targets for tomato sauce.
3. Protect your Nintendo 64 at all costs (set up sentries to guard it!)
4. It's a good idea to know your sibling's sense of humour, wait...let me reword that: KNOW THEIR SENSE OF HUMOUR OR PERISH!
5. Be able to recite the seven friendship tips, down to the punctuation.
6. Tape an Anti-Stress kit "Bang Head Here" sign to the wall and use it frequently.
7. Train your friends in the art of the autism ninja.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please consult the "Bang Head Here" sign.



Recent Publications



Exceptional Family Magazine

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The Relationship Problem: How to Foster Social Relationships between Individuals on the Autism Spectrum and their Natural Peer Group

By Heather McCracken &
Joanne McCartney-Prest

Welcome Back!!!

Everyone at Friend 2 Friend wants to welcome Michelle Englar back (especially Heather & Diane) with open arms. We've missed your incredible organizational skills, energy but mostly your smiling face!

Congratulations!

F2F's own IPG Master Guide Joanne and her husband Andy welcomed their first child this summer. We wish them all the best and look forward to welcoming Joanne back next year.



Back to the Future (continued from Page 2)

Friendships for me had always been easy. I had always kept a strong group of friends throughout elementary school, high school and beyond. When I heard about the programs, I wondered - *What if I hadn't been able to make friends very easily? What if only a few people knew how to relate to me? What if I had grown up without my friends, whom I love so dearly?* I suddenly realized that I was really lucky to have had such a supportive group of friends and felt ashamed that I hadn't thought more deeply about those who find it challenging to form friendships.

After I finished my undergraduate studies, having once met Heather, I was offered a position with Friend 2 Friend. I was ecstatic. I was so excited to be a part of an organization that not only demystified autism, but whose core values were based on friendship, understanding and acceptance. I joined the team to deliver the Autism Demystification Programs in schools across Vancouver and started to realize I was learning more than I could have ever imagined. The Friend 2 Friend team, the children who I met during school visits and parents of children affected by social-communication disorders collectively showed me that autism awareness really meant something different than I had studied at school. Everyday, I knew more and more that autism awareness and the demystification of autism was necessary and important for everyone, not only those with close friends and family of those on the autism spectrum.

After six months of working for Friend 2 Friend, I was given the opportunity to live and work in Japan as an English teacher. I was confused and torn about whether or not to go. Working for Friend 2 Friend was exciting, challenging and fulfilling, but ultimately I felt I could not pass up the opportunity to live and work abroad. In August of 2008, having never studied Japanese before, I moved to Japan.



The whole time I was there, I could not forget about my experiences working with the Friend 2 Friend team. I even used the seven friendship tips to help make friends with those who had limited English abilities and asked others to use them with me when speaking in Japanese. I found that the core values of Friend 2 Friend were applicable to the growth of my life as a minority in Japan. I realized that it was the simplicity of the Friend 2 Friend message that was so powerful. To me, it was not just a theory about autism, but a theory about life. Once again, I felt blown away by the power of the Friend 2 Friend message of acceptance.

In the spring of this year, as I was beginning my preparation to move back home, I was offered the position of Executive Assistant for Friend 2 Friend. My decision to work for this amazing organization again was not really a decision at all: I had always known that if I

was given the opportunity to work for Friend 2 Friend again, I would do it in a heartbeat.

I came back to Friend 2 Friend in September and everyday I look forward to delivering the Autism Demystification Programs in schools across Vancouver and abroad. A lot has changed in the last two years: there is a new puppet play, new characters and puppets, as well as many new publications. And, as I look into the future of Friend 2 Friend, I'm excited to think about all of the children who will benefit from these programs and all of the things I will learn being a part of these programs. I can't help but feel incredibly lucky to have met Iain and his mother and to be involved with this wonderful organization.

Friend 2 Friend Goes International

Pamela Wolfberg and Heather McCracken were invited by Beijing Qi Rui Kang Fu Training Centre to present in Beijing, China from June 7-10, 2010. While there, they were involved in a cultural exchange with professionals and parents from the Chao Yang Disability Association, Research Centre, University and local schools. It was a learning experience for all involved. Many thanks to Nelson Tao from Vancouver, BC who was instrumental to the success of the trip doing everything from planning and coordinating to translating and liaising with the hosts.

