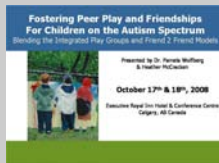


Conferences

Fostering Peer Play & Friendships for Children on the Autism Spectrum



October 17th & 18th, 2008
Executive Inn, Calgary AB,
Canada

To Register Contact:
Autism Calgary Association at
www.autismcalgary.com/2008-autism-conferences.asp

Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society's

Facilitator's Training



November 15, 2008
SFU Vancouver Harbour Centre
Vancouver BC, Canada

To Register Contact:
Friend 2 Friend Society at
www.friend2friendsociety.org

Welcome to the Spring Issue of *Here's What's Different About Us*, the Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society's bi-annual newsletter. This newsletter is dedicated to bringing current information on the social and communication needs of children on the autism spectrum to parents and professionals.

Fundamentals from Folika

Veronica's Visuals

Veronica is a 5-year old girl with autism who struggles with transitions. Like many children with autism, although she has strong verbal skills, she often does not respond to auditory cues. Before starting her Integrated Play Group, staff at her daycare reported that Veronica did not transition well from one activity to another, despite frequent verbal warnings. Using a visual schedule during play group, Veronica transitioned smoothly from one activity to the other, often commenting to her peers about the next activity on the schedule.

Children with autism are often referred to as visual learners in that they tend to understand what they see better than what they hear. In my personal experience, the more I move an activity from auditory to visual the more successful the children are.

Visual supports/schedules are important for children with autism for the following reasons:

- * Many children with autism have strong visual skills and these skills can be capitalized on with visual supports.
- * Many children with autism experience difficulty with expressive and receptive language. Even if the child appears to have good or even excellent expressive language skills, s/he may still have a slower processing time and may miss verbal instructions all together.
- * Visual supports help the child learn more quickly (or "get" the information) when used as a supplement to verbal communication.
- * Providing a schedule encourages the child to learn to transition independently between activities and environments by indicating what is happening next.
- * A schedule provides the needed structure to help the child organize and predict daily events and thus can reduce a child's anxiety level.

A visual schedule can help a child understand that activities happen within a specific time period. (e.g. that "break time" is coming, but after "math time"). It allows a child to see when a preferred activity is coming.

Some parents and educators are fearful that using visuals might hinder verbal language development. Research has indicated that the use of visual supports enhance the development of spoken language.

Continued on Page 2...

Kid Quotes:

*"If we **cannot** accept differences in people and others, We **will not** be able to accept ourselves."*

Thomas Bontinen, Grade 4 Student, January 2008

Fundamentals from Folika continued from Page 1

Most of us rely on visual supports of some kind to help us remember and understand things. I have a day planner. I use a calendar. I write endless *TO DO* lists. If you took away my day planner you can bet I would miss many appointments.

Quick Tips

eat lunch

* Visual schedules can use simple materials such as photographs of activities, Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) or the written word.



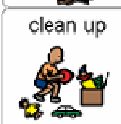
hello

* Ensure that the schedule is always accessible.



camping

* When appropriate, involve the child. Teaching a child how to manage his/her own visual schedule can empower him/her and promote independence.



clean up

* Schedule in choices, breaks and fun activities that the child can look forward to.



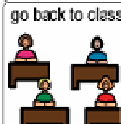
drawing

Monique Hoekstra is a Speech-Language Pathologist who has worked with children on the autism spectrum and related developmental disabilities for the past 12 years. Monique is a Lead Presenter and Master Play Guide in the delivery of the F2F and IPG programs.



good-bye

Joanne McCartney holds a MA in Special Education with a focus on autism and developmental disabilities. She has 8 years of experience in supporting children with autism and related disorders. Joanne is a Lead Presenter and Master Play Guide in the delivery of the F2F and IPG programs.



go back to class

The Picture Communication Symbols,
Mayer-Johnson Inc www.mayer-johnson.com

Congratulations to **Jeri Jakovac** who was ecstatic to win the print "*The Three Friends*" at the first annual F2F-IPG conference in October 2007.



For more information on the Friend 2 Friend Programs and Services contact:



596 Blueridge Avenue
North Vancouver, BC V7R 2J2
Canada

Phone: 604-528-0560
URL: www.friend2friendsociety.org
e-mail: friend2friend@shaw.ca

Parent's Ponder

Coming out Autistic: A Parent's Experience with Friend 2 Friend Programs

My son was eight years-old when he came home one day from school crying, and said, "Why doesn't anyone like me?" Why do other kids have lots of friends and I don't have any friends? What is wrong with me?"

I knew right then it was time to talk to him about autism. I told him there was "nothing wrong with him," I told him he was autistic and saw the world differently. I can still remember the look of relief on his face when he realized that there was a "reason" that other kids easily made friends and he did not.

This year his peers started rejecting my son more than they had in the past. Garrett decided the best way to solve this problem was to explain the reason he sometimes talked to himself or flapped his arms was because he had autism. My son decided he wanted to "*come out autistic.*"

Initially Garrett's school seemed resistant to the idea of a "talk about autism" however the school agreed to look for someone to do a presentation. I waited and waited but as the time grew nearer to Garrett's class three-day camping trip I began to worry. I didn't want him to come away from his 4th grade camping trip with bad memories. I felt it was critical that Garrett's class and teacher have a better understanding of autism before leaving for this trip.

So I emailed Heather McCracken and asked her to come talk to Garrett's class. Heather is the creator of the Friend 2 Friend (F2F) social facilitation model/programs and a parent of three children, one on the autism spectrum. She provided the F2F Simulation Game to Garrett's class early one Monday morning. During the presentation Garrett "*self-identified*" (as Heather calls it) telling his class that he "has autism".

A few days later Garrett and his class left for his camping trip. When he arrived home he said he had a really good time. But it was what he did *not* say that was truly wonderful. He did not say that other children were picking on him, he did not say the kids gave him dirty looks when the teacher turned her back, he did not say kids asked him why he was talking to himself. The Friend 2 Friend (F2F) presentation helped Garrett and his class move forward toward accepting difference. While Garrett and his peers were effected by the F2F Presentation I've seen the biggest change in Garrett's teacher, she now sees Garrett as a special kid who has a lot of potential.

Heather took time out from her busy schedule to present to my son's class in Palo Alto, California. As a family, my husband, Garrett and I want to thank Friend 2 Friend and wish them well in the years to come...

Pamela LePage, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor – Special Education
San Francisco State University