

CONNECTIONS



*A Quarterly Newsletter
from the Parent Network of the Capital Region*



The mission of the Parent Network of the Capital Region is to provide parents with the knowledge, skills, and resources to facilitate productive relationships with their school districts ensuring an appropriate education for their child. These services are offered free-of-charge.

FALL 2012

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And They're Off... Tips for Successful Communication with Your Child's Educational Team

By: Julie Keegan, Special Education Resource Specialist

Effective communication with the school team working with your child is a **MUST** if you want to minimize conflict and maximize your child's progress. Consider the following proactive strategies to build successful relationships and communication with your child's teachers and providers.

- **Team Meetings** - a meeting that includes most or all of the personnel working with your child at school is very productive in situations where consistency between home and school is key, your child has unique needs or

behaviors, and/or your child is in a school or educational program. Team meetings can occur once, or periodically throughout the year such as monthly or quarterly. If the school is reluctant to schedule periodic team meetings, you might consider adding team meetings to your child's IEP.

If you are attending your first team meeting of the year, it is very helpful if you and the team discuss your mutual expectations for communication throughout the year as well as any concerns you

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Collaborative Problem Solving: A more accurate, compassionate, productive understanding (and approach to helping) behaviorally challenging kids

By: Ross Greene, Ph.D./ www.livesinthebalance.org

Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) is a model for understanding and helping kids with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. The model was first described in the book, *The Explosive Child* by Dr. Ross Greene, which was originally published in 1998 and is not in its fourth edition (2010).

The CPS approach sets forth two major tenets. First, challenging behavior in kids is best understood as the result of lagging cognitive skills (in general domains of flexibility/ adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem solving) rather than as the result of passive, inconsistent, noncontingent parenting. And second, the best way to reduce challenging episodes is by collaboratively solving the problems setting them in motion in the first place (rather than by imposing adult will and intensive use of reward and punishment procedures). Here are some of the important questions answered by the model:

Question: Why are challenging kids challenging?

Answer: Because they're lacking the skills not to be challenging. If they had the skills, they wouldn't be challenging. That's because-and this perhaps the key them to the model- **kids do well if they can**. And because (here's another key theme) doing well is always preferable to not **doing well (if a kid has the skills to do well in the first place)**. This, of course, is a dramatic departure from the view of challenging kids as attention-seeking, manipulative, coercive, limit-testing, and poorly-motivated. It's a completely different set of lenses, supported by research in the neurosciences over the past 30-40 years, and it has dramatic implications for how caregivers go about helping kids.

Question: When are challenging kids challenging?

Answer: When the demands or expectations being placed upon them exceed the skills a challenging kid is lacking. An even more important goal is to identify the specific conditions or situations in which a challenging behavior is occurring in a particular challenging kid. In the CPS model, these conditions are referred to as **unsolved problems** and they tend to be highly predictable. Identifying lagging skills and unsolved problems is accomplished through use of an instrument called the **Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP)**. You can find the ALSUP in The Paperwork section of the website of **Lives in the Balance**, the non-profit Dr. Greene founded to help disseminate the CPS model (www.livesinthebalance.org).

Question: What behaviors do challenging kids exhibit when they don't have the skills to respond adaptively to certain demands?

Answer: Challenging kids let us know they're struggling to meet demands and expectations in some fairly common ways: whining, pouting, sulking, withdrawing, crying, screaming, swearing, hitting, spitting, kicking, throwing,

breaking, lying, stealing, and so forth. But what a kid **does** when he's having trouble meeting demands and expectations isn't the most important part (though it may feel that way)...**why** and **when** he's doing these things are much more important.

Question: What should we be doing differently to help these kids better than we're helping them now?

Answer: If challenging behavior is set in motion by lagging skills and not lagging motivation, then it's easy to understand why rewarding and punishing a kid may not make things better. Since challenging behavior occurs in response to highly predictable unsolved problems, then challenging kids -and the rest of us- are a whole lot better off when adults help them solve those problems. But if we solve them unilaterally, through imposition of adult will (referred to in the CPS model as "Plan A"), then we'll only increase the likelihood of challenging episodes and we won't solve any problems durably. Better to solve those problems collaboratively ("Plan B") so the kid is a fully invested participant, solutions are more durable, and (over time) the kid - and often the adults as well - learn the skills they were lacking all along.

Plan B is comprised of three basic ingredients. The first ingredient - called the **Empathy** step - involves gathering information from the child so as to achieve the clearest understanding of his or her concern or perspective on a given unsolved problem. The second ingredient (called the **Define the Problem** step) involves entering into consideration the adult concern or perspective on the same unsolved problem. The third ingredient (called the **Invitation** step) involves having the adult and kid brainstorm solutions so as to arrive at a plan of action that is both realistic and mutually satisfactory...in other words, that addresses the concerns of both parties and that both parties can actually perform.

Question: Where has the CPS model been applied?

Answer: In countless families, schools, inpatient psychiatry units, group homes, residential facilities, and juvenile detention facilities, the CPS model has been shown to be an effective way to reduce conflict and teach kids the skills they need to function adaptively in the real world.

Question: Where can I learn more about Plan B and the CPS model?

Answer: The website of the non-profit **Lives in the Balance** is a very good place to start. It has a ton of resources to help you learn about and apply the CPS model, including streaming video, audio programming, commentary, support and lots more.

Family Gatherings

By: Mary Fornabia, Special Education Resource Specialist

Many of us who have children with special needs are relieved to have school back in session mainly for the routine and structure that it offers us. We now have a set schedule, clear expectations of the day, and believe it or not our children (and sometimes parents too) actually like the routine. However, most of us know what is immediately around the corner that will put a “wrench” in our gratifying routines, the holidays!!! But, it doesn't have to be!

It all begins with autumn, dressing up for Halloween, changing the clocks back for Daylight Savings Time, gathering with extended family and eating turkey on Thanksgiving! These are some “big doings” in the fall. Most parents embrace these fall festivities, but for parents of children with special needs these “Fall Festivities” can create significant disruptions for our children. One mom says, “around here we usually hold our breath in October and don't exhale until January”.

Unfortunately, there is no magic wand to make the “Fall Frenzies” go away but the overall goal is to remember to be flexible, and remember that no tradition is more important than the comfort and happiness of your kids.

Halloween is hands down probably the biggest challenge of the season. Most issues stem from sensory overload. There are the costumes, candy, and decorations. Dozens of children and people out and about in the neighborhood after dark, ringing your doorbell, can send a child with special needs into a state of confusion. One tip to help is to prepare your child early. If you can purchase a costume in September and allow your child to wear the costume every once in a while it will help him/her become more comfortable with it. If your child does not like costumes, don't push it. Most importantly, listen to your child. Many times you can overcome problems with costumes simply by planning ahead.

Another strategy to cope with the stress of the day is to stay close to home. If after 10 minutes your child makes it clear that he or she has had enough, then go with the flow and go home! If you have multiple children and are able to have 2 adults go trick-or-treating, assign one to the child with special needs, and in the event of an early night, the other kids can stay out and get more candy.

If at all possible it is a good idea to practice trick-or-treating. Maybe you have a neighbor whose house you can go to so that your child will be able to become familiar with the act instead of focusing on the fact that the process is something new.

Another big challenge of the season is the end of Daylight Savings Time. At this time of the year it gets darker much earlier in the evening (as early at 4:00pm) and lasts until March. Most children adjust to the change within a few days. For children with special needs, readjusting their body can generally take weeks or months and the transition often has physical as well as mental effects. Some parents combat this by setting their clocks back in 15 minutes increments in the month preceding the end of Daylight Savings Time. Another idea would be to change your child's schedule so he/she is still



engaging in after dark activities (i.e. brushing teeth) once it's dark. Gradual adjustments can help a child with special needs cope with the time change.

Lastly, would be the challenges associated with Thanksgiving and then eventually Christmas and Hanukkah. Much like Halloween the issues are sensory. If a house full of company (some of which you may not even know) isn't enough of a distraction, try to explain decorations such as pumpkins on the porch and pine trees in the living room! Add to this the disruption of time off from school, fewer therapy sessions, and the stretch from Thanksgiving through Hanukkah and Christmas. It can be downright difficult! Having a glass or two of eggnog right now probably sounds pretty good, right? Let me tell you a few minor tweaks to the holiday rituals that can go a really long way.

- Ease your child into the big family gatherings by introducing him/her to one or two relatives at a time (instead of the whole crowd all at once). Some parents send family members a letter beforehand with some suggestions about how to make the child feel more comfortable.
- Rely on the old tradition, the kid's table. Set up a table for the kids, so your child doesn't have to contend with the stress of sitting with the grownups, yet still feels special.
- Have a place set up in the house that your child can go to if he or she wants to be alone. Let your child know where this room is before the company arrives. If you are going to someone else's house, speak with your host beforehand so that arrangements can be made for a room for your child. Having this type of space, alone and away from all the other guests will help to reduce anxiety for your child, and for you as well!
- If your child can't handle burning pumpkins on the porch or “scary music” being played, then forego them. Traditions like lighted Hanukkah candles or burning Yule log may need to be adapted for your child or replaced them with another tradition. If you have a tree during Christmas, decorate it in

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Young Minds Need Books: Top 10 List to Get Children “On the Road to Reading”

10. Vinyl or cardboard books with simple pictures are best for young babies.
9. Books with photo pictures of faces and other babies are especially appealing.
8. Cardboard and “chunky” books are good for learning to turn pages.
7. Choose books with animal pictures for older babies and make animal sounds while you look at the book.
6. Make sharing books with your child a part of your daily routine- especially at naptime and bedtime.
5. Books with rhyming words or repeated phrases are fun (the repetition helps make brain connections for language).
4. As your child grows, take trips to the library and choose books together.
3. Talk about the book with your child. Ask her what part she liked best.
2. Continue reading aloud to your child even though they may be able to read for themselves.

And the number one way to get young children on the road to reading is:

1. Read together EVERY day!

(Taken from: The Literacy Connection
www.projectenlightenment.wcpss.net)

UPCOMING PNCR EVENTS

PNCR Fall Conference Featuring Ross Greene, Ph.D.
Friday, October 5, 2012
Century House
Latham, NY
8:15am-4:00pm

Accessing, Understanding, and Organizing Your Child's Educational Records
Friday, September 21, 2012
Latham, NY
1:00pm-3:00pm

Diploma Options and Transition for Students with Disabilities
Friday, September 28, 2012
Latham, NY
1:00pm-3:00pm

Starting Off on the Right Foot: Working with Your Child's Educational Team
Monday, October 1, 2012
6:00pm-8:00pm
Latham, NY

October Parent Support Group
Wednesday, October, 2012
Latham, NY
6:30pm-8:00pm

Fall 2012 NYSED-Vetted CPSE/ CSE Parent Member Training
Thursday, October 11, 2012
9:30am-2:00pm
Johnstown, NY 12095

Movie Night: "Including Samuel"
Crandall Public Library/ Holden Room
Monday, October 15, 2012
6:30pm-8:00pm
[Click here](#) for program details and registration information.

Bullying & Harassment of Students with Disabilities
Wednesday, October 3, 2012
1:00pm-3:00pm
Latham, NY
Wednesday, October 24, 2012
6:00pm-8:00pm
Latham, NY

Special Education Record-Keeping Workshop
Monday, October 29, 2012
6:30pm-8:30pm
Crandall Public Library
Glens Falls, NY

Behavior Challenges at School: Functional Behavioral Assessments and Positive Behavioral Supports for Students with Disabilities
Thursday, November 15, 2012
9:15am-11:15am
Clifton Park Halfmoon Public Library
Clifton Park, NY

Please visit "Upcoming Events" on our homepage at www.pncrny.org to register for these events.

Helping Your Daughter with Asperger's Develop A Sense of Style

By: Adene Karhan, *Special Education Resource Specialist*

As parents, one of the most daunting tasks we face is the selection of the back-to-school wardrobe with our children. This task requires a fine setting, balance of open-mindedness and boundary and can be exhausting even to the most patient and fashion-conscious parent. Parents of girls with Asperger's Syndrome report some additional challenges in helping their daughters to select new clothing.

For some parents, the first challenge is convincing their child that clothing selection is something that is important. While the goal should not be to force our children to conform to the latest fashion trends against their will, it has been shown that children who dress neatly and presentably receive less teasing from their peers. In addition, learning about fashion and gaining insight into one's own sense of "style" facilitates a type of self-awareness that often leads to an increase in one's level of confidence.

The following activities are suggestions for helping girls to become more aware of current fashion trends:

- Purchase magazines for girls and look at what the girls are wearing.
- Look at the catalogs that are received in the mail and talk about the age appropriate clothing that is being sold.
- Watch some teen television shows and movies and discuss what the characters are wearing. Is there a certain character who has a defined style that your daughter feels most drawn to?
- Sit on a bench at the mall and look at what other girls are wearing.
- Find pictures on Google images of girls who look sloppy or unkempt in their dress or who are wearing strange clothing. Compare these to girls who are dressed neatly and discuss the different first impressions that each of these pictures give to others. What assumptions might one make about each of these girls based on first impressions of dress?



The next step is to take an assessment of the types of clothes that your daughter likes to wear. What are her favorite clothes and what is it about them that she likes? Is it the feel of the fabric? Is it the colors? In the book *Girls Growing Up on the Autism Spectrum* by Nichols, Moravcik, and Tetenbaum, one adult woman with Asperger's states, "Old clothes are trusty, familiar, and soft; new ones look and feel strange and uncomfortable. Why would one, then, want to have the new ones?"

It is also important to take sensory issues into consideration as you prepare for back-to-school shopping. Some children find shopping on-line to be much more enjoyable so that they do not have to be subjected to large crowds and harsh lighting that is typical of malls and clothing stores. Some parents purchase clothing that they think that their daughter will like and then bring them home where their daughter can try them on in the comfort of her own room.

As parents, our goal is to help our children develop an individual sense of style that is comfortable for them. Keep in mind that this style will often change over time. Ultimately, our goal as parents is to help our children learn to perform the following tasks as they grow:

- Manage daily and weekly hygiene routines.
- Go to a store (or an on-line site) and select clothing that is appropriate and that she likes (including bras, underwear, and outerwear).
- Decide on a daily basis what she is going to wear based on where she is going and what the weather is going to be that day.

For more information on this topic, check out the book *Girls Growing Up on the Autism Spectrum: What Parents and Professionals Should Know About the Pre-Teen and Teenage Years* by Shana Nichols, Gina Marie Moravcik, and Samara Pulver Tetenbaum (2009).

Early Literacy: Parents as Teachers

By: Ellen Burns, Director, Capitol Region/ North Country Early Childhood Direction Center



Children begin developing literacy skills from a very early age some even believe that an impact can be made before a child is born. Regardless of the exact timing, it is never too late to begin providing a literacy rich environment for your infant, toddler or young child. The early relationships that are formed with infants can set the stage for literacy development through parents talking, reading, singing, and playing. These are all skills that build the foundation needed for children to develop language and reading skills.

Early literacy skills are not learned in isolation. It is a complex process that includes listening, learning to speak, reading, understanding, drawing and writing. It doesn't take a great deal of time to provide a literacy rich environment for your child. It mostly takes desire, along with a little planning and creativity.

How can parents encourage young readers?

1. Talk with your child. Very young children begin to learn language and understanding by listening to language, mostly from parents or caregivers. Use short sentences, without "baby-talk" to describe what you are doing or label things in the child's environment.
2. Read to your child every day. Create a routine that includes reading so that it becomes a very natural event, like bathing or brushing teeth.
3. Recite nursery rhymes and sing to your child. Repetition and rhyming are stepping stones to literacy development.
4. Be a good role model for your child. Allow your child to "catch" you reading. Let them observe you reading the paper, making a grocery list, writing a thank you note, reading a recipe or writing on your calendar.

- Play "I Spy" with your children, use colors as a basis for choosing the items. This not only helps children to learn their colors but also builds vocabulary.
- During any activity, like mealtime, bath time, etc, talk through what you are doing or what you are about to do. Use descriptive words like "delicious" or "gigantic".
- Sing to your child. Choose simple songs, like nursery rhymes that have repetition, rhyming and rhythm. Children love to sing and this is a simple activity that can happen at home, in the car, just about anywhere.
- Add hand motions, sign language or movement to songs
- Talk about objects in the child's environment, both in the home and outside. Be sure to allow the child an opportunity to express themselves and the label items in the environment too.
- Tell your child stories, both real and made-up. Children love to hear stories about when their parents were younger.
- Children love predictable books with patterns that they eventually learn and recite. Point out pictures, label them and ask questions.
- Children may ask to have the same book read over and over again. Though this may be tedious for parents, take advantage of the children's familiarity with the book and stop reading midsentence and see if they can complete the sentence or ask them what will happen next.
- Teach your child the sounds of the letters in their name. For example, if their name is Jeff help them to hear that their name has 3 sounds.
- Identify connections between the book and real life. If the story is about children visiting a museum, talk about a museum near you and visit with your child.
- Supply your children with any type of writing or drawing tool including paper, pencils, markers, crayons, paper, chalk, paint, just to name a few.
- Encourage them to write their name often, especially on any notes they write or any artwork they create.
- Use other tools to write, like playdoh, shaving cream, pudding, paint with sponges, cotton or other materials.
- Play games that encourage literacy skills like writing the names of common items in your home on index cards and having the children find the item and tape the card to the object.
- Take photographs of familiar people or objects, label them and create your child's own book.
- Point out signs in the environment such as billboards, menus, signs, and names of restaurants.

Providing a literacy rich environment takes a little effort, desire and creativity but the benefit to young children is endless. When children are encouraged and provided with early literacy skills and have parents that value the importance of early exposure to literacy, the children have an advantage in later years.

And They're Off - continued

or the school team members may have based on their initial involvement with your child or with the IEP. Be sure to express yourself clearly, but also be a good listener.

This is essential to building mutual respect and also enhancing the team's commitment to your child and your concerns. Ask the team about their observations of your child in class or therapy and what interventions they have found useful. Ask if they believe your child's IEP goals are appropriate and if they believe they can meet or exceed those goals in the coming year. Ask if they feel other goals should be added or changed. Ask if there is anything you can do at home to ensure consistency between home and school. It is important to really listen to what the teachers are saying. It is also equally important that the school team knows your expectations, your goals, and your preferred methods for how the team communicates with you about their concerns and your child's progress towards his or her IEP goals. Note, too, that the focus of your goals and concerns does not always have to be limited to academic achievement. For example, you may want your child to develop some friendships or become involved in an after school activity.

- **Individual Meetings** – meeting one on one with a teacher or related service provider is an excellent way to establish a relationship and gain insight regarding your child's struggles and successes at school. Individual meetings are particularly effective when your child is struggling in a particular class or setting, is making little progress, or where there seems to be a communication or IEP implementation issue.
- **Phone/E-mail** – Phone or email communication is useful when you have a quick question, you want to verify something your child has said about school, you want to acknowledge a teacher or provider's efforts, or when face-to-face meetings are not possible. These strategies also are good options if you are afraid you may get too emotional if you have to meet face-to-face. The tone of your message is also important. Many, many parents have regretted a hastily sent email written in the heat of the moment or before all the facts were known. If you tend to be on the emotional side (and it is very natural for parents to feel frustrated or protective), a good rule is to draft the email or think about your voice message but wait several hours or overnight before sending or leaving the message, and only after you have reread it first. Likewise, avoid overwhelming your child's teachers or providers with overly-frequent and/or rambling messages. Instead, state your concern or question succinctly using a professional and respectful tone. After all, that is exactly the type of communication you would also expect from them.

Keeping communication open using these strategies will go a long way in ensuring a productive year for your child.

Family Gatherings - continued

- such a way that satisfies your kid's curiosity. Let them decorate it in such a way that has meaning to them. It may mean nothing but plain white lights and strand of cranberries and or popcorn. What is most important is that your child is comfortable and happy.
- If your child is one that becomes very excited with a house full of people and the opening of presents, than give your child a job. Have them pass out presents, or organize them according to a person. He/she can put the wrapping paper in the trash.
- Most importantly holidays are to be special times about the whole family. Many of us grow up expecting to follow the same traditions that we grew up with and we want our children to have these same experiences. This is all perfectly natural. We do need to learn to modify and sometimes "let go" so that our children with special needs can experience these special times with family in a way that is meaningful to them.

Remember, it is a successful holiday if the kids are happy.

(Resources used for this article: Abilitypath.org and oneplaceforspecialneeds.com)



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web at
[www.pncrny.org!](http://www.pncrny.org)