

THE Jenison Public Schools

MORNING

NEWS *Fall '93*

Welcome!

We've a whole new look and format, as well as many new subscribers. (In fact, we're particularly curious about the state of Maryland - have you been advertising our newsletter on the radio or on blimps over football games or something?) THE MORNING NEWS has over 1,000 subscribers in 9 countries - which explains our new look. We had to go to bulk mail to survive. And survive we will, especially with your help and support.

To those of you new to our newsletter, our focus is to share practical information among parents and professionals working on behalf of individuals with

disorders on the autistic spectrum of all ages. We encourage articles and ideas from subscribers, as well as work by individuals with autism or related disorders. This issue is devoted to articles and letters concerning children with autism. Our next issue will focus on secondary students and adults. Your ideas are always welcomed!

This is our final year as a free, donation supported newsletter. This school year we will have two issues, this one and spring of '94. Beginning in fall of '94, we will return to quarterly issues, and begin support via subscriptions (subscription information on last page of this issue). We hope to continue to expand as a network of concerned parents and professionals.

Named after that part of the day which presents the greatest opportunity,
THE MORNING NEWS is a publication of Jenison Public Schools.

An issue devoted to young children with autism:

The Role of Diagnosis in the Educational Process

That Jungle We Call Recess

Featuring poems in this issue by Alyson Olson, a student at Spring Lake Jr. High, Spring Lake, MI

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Carol Gray, Editor. Logo design by Janet Williams. ©Jenison Public Schools, 1993. All rights reserved.

Editor's Note: In our effort to present a wide variety of viewpoints, THE MORNING NEWS welcomes articles from subscribers. This issue features an article by Dr. Mark Hinshaw, a psychiatrist at Psychiatric Consultation Services, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Mr. Brian Gray, a school psychologist, Jenison Public Schools, Jenison, Michigan.

The Role of Diagnosis in the Educational Process

Dr. Mark Hinshaw
Mr. Brian Gray

It's summer, a family heads for the lake, and the boat won't start. Dad's mechanical skills are limited, but he quickly assumes that the trouble must lie with a bad battery. Dad sets out to remove the battery, but at the last minute consults with someone with better mechanical skills. The battery is fine, and simply taping a wire saves a trip to the boat store with a very heavy battery. The point of this analogy is that treatment is much more effective and efficient if the diagnosis is correct before starting.

In the field of autism diagnosis is very important, sometimes elusive, and often confusing. In the past parents have been quite frustrated in getting a comprehensive diagnosis, or frustrated finding a diagnosis that fits or describes their child. At other times, diagnosis can be confused with blame of the parent or the child, and the process is hurtful.

In our opinion, a diagnosis should be completed after a thorough evaluation which includes input from both parents and teachers, should be done by members of professionals working as a team, and all information should be presented to parents in an understandable manner.

In the education of a person with autism, diagnosis plays a vital role at different times in the person's life. Initially a correct diagnosis can give parents a thorough understanding of their child's disability, can direct the parents to a great deal of information and research, and can open doors for effective treatment. An initial diagnosis can serve as a starting point for understanding and effective treatment.

Diagnosis can play a second role in the life of a person with autism. Once treatment is initiated, it can help determine whether or not that treatment is effective for a particular child. For example, if the parent is faced with the decision to start their child with a developmental language program it may give the parent both information and insight as to how effective or ineffective that particular treatment may be for their child.

Diagnosis can also help the parent in determining whether or not co-morbid conditions are also hindering their child's functioning. Conditions such as ADHD, anxiety, depression, Torrette's Syndrome, or other disorders may also be in need of treatment.

Finally, diagnosis can help as the person matures. As the person with autism grows older s/he begins to note how s/he is the same or different from others. Often persons with autism may be excluded from peer groups. Adjustment disorders may begin to impact the individuals functioning and may need attention.

Given the number of decisions that the parent of a person with autism faces, the growing challenges that the person with

medical and educational treatment options; the importance of not only a correct but ongoing diagnostic process is crucial. With the battery it was only a boat and only an inconvenience. With a youngster with autism it's a life and a lifetime.

I DREAM OF A BETTER WORLD

- Alyson Olson 5/21/93

*I dream of a world with more
peace and love.
I dream of a world without
poverty and war.
I dream of a world with clean
air and fresh water.
I dream of a world without
pollution and crime.
I dream of a better world.*

**That JuNgLe we Call
"Recess"**

Carol Gray

Twenty or so children are reading silently in their classroom. A bell rings. Suddenly desk tops fly open and shut in a pattern which defies any union or logic. Pencils fall to the floor. Children move to the door and papers fall from counters to mark their passing. In record preparation time that would put an army infantry to shame, a playground is suddenly filled with 534 children. Squirrels suspend efforts to gather nuts and birds decide to fly south. It's time for recess.

To a child with a disorder on the autistic spectrum, the confusion is only beginning. There are fifteen to thirty eternal minutes to go. Longer than it takes to read this article. Longer than it takes to load a dishwasher. To a child with autism, longer than it takes to do just about anything. As one child describes, "The problem with recess is all the children are free." In the words of another child, "Recess is when I am supposed to have fun and my teacher says 'Go outside and have fun'...but I don't."

The safest place in any jungle would seem to be on its fringes, and as a consultant, that is where I often find my students. If my students are not on the physical fringes of a playground, they are often on its social fringes. Many children with autism would like to play with others, but are seemingly lost and struggling to find direction in a land without signs or arrows. We've some ideas for those children which may help.

First, remember that the social struggle we may observe in children with autism at recess is not the problem - it is a result of the problem. The fact that s/he is often excluded is not the problem - it is also the result of the problem. Therefore, we need to take time to identify the problem from the perspective of the child with autism, *and* from that of other children. Asking the child with autism questions found in the recess section of *The Social Cues Questionnaire may yield insights. Talking with other children at recess can also be informative. It's important to "know the jungle" before you attempt to "advise all the wildlife."

Once you understand recess, improving the understanding children have of their classmate with autism may be helpful. Talk with the classmates of the child with autism, explaining the challenges that child faces. One idea we have which is proving effective (based on informal feedback from teachers) is a presentation and class exercise which demonstrates what it's like to have difficulty with social skills. After briefly reviewing the five senses, this presentation identifies social ability as "The Sixth Sense." A class exercise follows which demonstrates how our "sixth" social sense works for us.

Often parents and professionals will express concern that "all the children tease" the child with autism. It's important to *accurately* identify the problem, as most likely only a few children are teasing. Try taking time to understand the child who is teasing. Considering teasing is viewed as insensitive and cruel, the temptation is to remind the aggressors of "how you would feel if you were being teased." They probably already *know* how they would feel, and may be looking for someone to acknowledge *their* feelings. While correction is in order, so is understanding, and an intervention based on understanding yields better results long term.

In addition, children who are teased need assistance to learn how to respond. Try beginning with "pencil and paper solutions" to real life teasing. For example, for a child who needs assistance to identify the "good guys" from the others on the playground, make two lists on a piece of paper. On one list are the children who ask "you to do things that you know are silly, or not right." In the

other list, are children "who never ask you to do those things." One child saw the two lists and, taking the pencil from my hand, crossed off the children who were giving him trouble and announced, "There, they're gone." Once he had control of them on paper, he wrote down some solutions that he thought might "cross them off" at recess. The idea is to structure the discussion while providing visual feedback, enabling the child to determine his/her own solution (see *Comic Strip Conversations*, page 7.)

A piece of chalk (or outdoor paints) may help to simplify a playground. Use these materials to add some visual, social structure to recess. For example, use chalk to create "waiting boxes" for a turn shooting baskets, with students walking from the last box to the first for a turn. Or, write playground rules on the blacktop. Identify for a student where to line up by writing the student's name in chalk on the pavement (others may want to write their name, too.)

Depending on the student and situation, social stories may be effective for a variety of recess challenges. Remember to begin by taking the perspective of the child. Photographs have been used successfully in *recess stories*, describing each of the basic activities and equipment, thus "taking apart" a situation which may be overwhelming as a whole.

Pam Wolfberg, Ph.D. candidate, has developed *Integrated Play Groups* to assist children as they learn to play with others. The purpose is to "provide children who have difficulty playing in both social and symbolic ways opportunities to learn and play with

socially competent peers in supported play programs.” (To order the Integrated Play Groups Resource Manual and accompanying instructional videotape, contact: California Research Institute Project, 14 Tapia Drive, San Francisco, CA 94132. Phone: 415-338-7847, FAX: 415-338-6121.)

Another idea comes from Holmes Elementary School in Spring Lake, Michigan. An “outdoor classroom” with a seating area has been designated as a reading area on the playground. Students can take books outside and read during recess. This provides children who may not want to swing or play baseball with another free time option.

The recess bell rings and the process reverses. That social phenomenon known as recess comes to an end. The children return to their seats. By visually assisting our students through a variety of activities, the hope is that we can make “the jungle we call recess” more accessible and successful for children with disorders on the autistic spectrum.

We invite you to send us *your ideas (with your written permission to reprint and share them) to help simplify recess. We will pass them along, giving you full credit. Send them to Maureen Dutkiewicz at the address on the first page.

**** Copies of materials referred to in this article are available. Write and request “Taming the Recess Jungle,” enclosing \$6 to cover costs (use the order form on page 11). The packet includes:***

- 1. The Social Cues Questionnaire;***
- 2. The “Sixth Sense” (a guide to implementing the presentation);***
- 3. A sample recess social story;***
- 4. Socially Simplifying a Playground with a Piece of Chalk (one page handout)***
- 5. Copies of all the ideas you send us.***

***Special Request:
Anyone have any ideas on how to teach someone to tie their shoelaces? We’d be very appreciative - please write to Dale Ranson at the address on the first page with your ideas!***

Still Going... Nothing Outlasts the Energizer Bunny and a Parent’s Love

Editor’s Note: We receive many letters, and wish we could print them all. Below, an excerpted version of a letter from Kari Hicks, Akron, Ohio, shares a solution to her child’s fear of the Energizer Bunny.

Dear Carol,

We have a son, Zachary, who is four and diagnosed as having Aspergers Syndrome. He can read at, at least, a third grade level with comprehension. He has also always responded to anything written, so we felt that he would really benefit from social stories.

Zachary had a terrible fear of the Energizer Bunny. He had so much anxiety about seeing this that there were stores that he refused to enter because of their display. Zachary would become intensely upset. It would often take hours to calm him down and then we wouldn’t be allowed to have the TV on again for several days. I called the Eveready company for a schedule of commercials in our area. We felt that we had absolutely nothing to lose by writing a story.

I sat down to write the following story:

INTERRUPTIONS (pink cover)

When something is stopped before it is finished, I can say that it has been interrupted.

An interruption is a surprise because I don't know when it will happen.

Interruptions can never hurt me or anyone else.

I sometimes see interruptions on the TV and I don't like them. They make me cry.

One interruption I see on TV is the Energizer Bunny.

The Energizer Bunny interrupts commercials and surprises me.

The next time I see a commercial with an Energizer Bunny in it, I have choices.

I can ask someone I love for a hug, or I can close my eyes until the commercials are done.

People who love me are happy to give me hugs whenever I ask for one.

I know the Energizer Bunny cannot interrupt me.

I made the book at night while Zachary was sleeping and then gave it to him in the morning. He was fine until the first page where the Bunny was mentioned and immediately began to cry and threw the book. I put it up on the shelf, in sight,

and told him to ask if he wanted it. A bit later he asked for it and we sat and got one page further before he cried and threw the book. This went on for about five more times and by the end of the day, he was able to get through the entire book and not cry.

Then he wouldn't let me take the book away. He carried it around for a week reading it by himself and for others whenever they would let him. The back cover is pink paper with a big magazine cut-out of the Bunny which was added after a few days of his acceptance. He took it to preschool and his teacher had him read it to his classmates. He read it to his doctor and everyone in our family. He talks about it all the time and we are now allowed to have the TV on. We have yet to see a commercial, but at least we are allowed to watch TV. He laughs about it often. Our TV guide this week had a picture in it of the Bunny and he showed that to everyone, too.

Social stories make life a bit more understandable for these children who might not understand what others find so clear.
-Kari Hicks

I USED TO BE.... BUT NOW I AM

- Alyson Olson 5/21/93

I used to be small

But now I'm tall.

I used to like school

But now I don't like it that much.

I used to see well

But now I don't.

I used to be 12

But now I'm 13.

THE SOCIAL STORY NEWS

a newsletter within a newsletter

Social stories are short stories written in a format and style based on the learning characteristics of children with autism, which describe social situations in terms of relevant social cues and expected responses. For many children, our experience indicates that "they work," often with apparently "dramatic" results. The results are less dramatic, though, and more logical, once you understand the theory and rationale behind social stories. Beginners to this approach may contact us for more information (see pages 10 & 11). For those of you who are familiar with this approach, this is an update.

Comic Strip Conversations

Building from Larkin Sasseville's idea of using drawings to communicate (see story pages 8-9) we've found a clearer way to communicate with some elementary age children with disorders on the autistic spectrum. A pencil and paper (or a small laminate marker board with markers and an eraser, available in office supply stores) is all you need.

When discussing a specific situation (sharing at recess, for example) draw several squares in a row, like a comic strip. Begin by identifying the setting with a representative line drawing in the first square ("We are at recess" and draw a swing set.) Review the situation step by step, drawing as you go, writing what people say, etc.. Make sure the child has a marker and knows he can "draw" events or write comments as they occur. The child may also choose to "correct" a response s/he had in the past by erasing it, (which is why laminate boards are so useful!) and writing a new response s/he might use in the future. This approach visually displays the conversation, and assists the child in working through challenging situations.

Different colors may be used to represent communications with different emotional content. For example, teasing comments can be written in red ("STOP words") and sincere invitations to play in green ("GO words"). The child identifies what "color" certain communications might be.

Social Poetry

Recognizing the wonderful poetry that individuals with autism have created in the past has resulted in the use of poetry to assist children with autism. The theory and rationale are identical to social stories, but social poems use a rhythmical format. The hope is that social information presented in a poem may be easier for some children to understand and recall.

The following poem is designed to help children wait. By selecting a different number - almost any number ending in "8" - a child is given a "handle" regarding how long s/he will have to wait. When in doubt about which number to give a child, select a HIGHER number than you believe you will need.

I CAN WAIT 'TIL 98

I can count to 98,
and that's about how long I'll wait.
About means I may count *higher*
or *lower*,
and that's because I may count
faster or *slower*.
1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...

Social poems may be used at the end of a social story to summarize the main points, while making the most important concepts easier to recall. The possibilities are unlimited!

Here We Go Again!

Last year, 1992-1993, the Psychology and Sociology students at Jenison High School wrote THE SOCIAL STORY BOOK. This book has been a phenomenal success. This year, the students are at it again - in May, 1994, an addition to the original SOCIAL STORY BOOK will be available, containing 25-50 new stories on expanded topics. Watch our Spring 1994 issue for more details and ordering information.

An idea from Robert and Teri Sasseville, and their daughter, Larkin,
of Fairburn, Georgia:

Social Drawings?

Editor's Note: *We received the following (excerpted) letter from Teri Sasseville:*

Ms. Gray,

My own daughter uses a kind of "Social Stories" process to talk her way through difficult situations. She also draws or has someone else draw situations that have been confusing or distressing to her. We have learned to not only draw the disturbing situation she requests, but also to draw the sequence of events that leads to an appropriate conclusion to the situation. Larkin takes great comfort from these drawings and can then use that information to help herself in future similar situations.

I'd be interested in talking with parents or professionals you know who might be doing something similar. If you know anyone using this method, please share my address and phone number with them.

Sincerely,
Teri Sasseville

We contacted Teri and asked her to send us information and samples to share with MORNING NEWS subscribers. Those wishing to write to Teri may contact us for her address. The additional information Teri sent us follows:

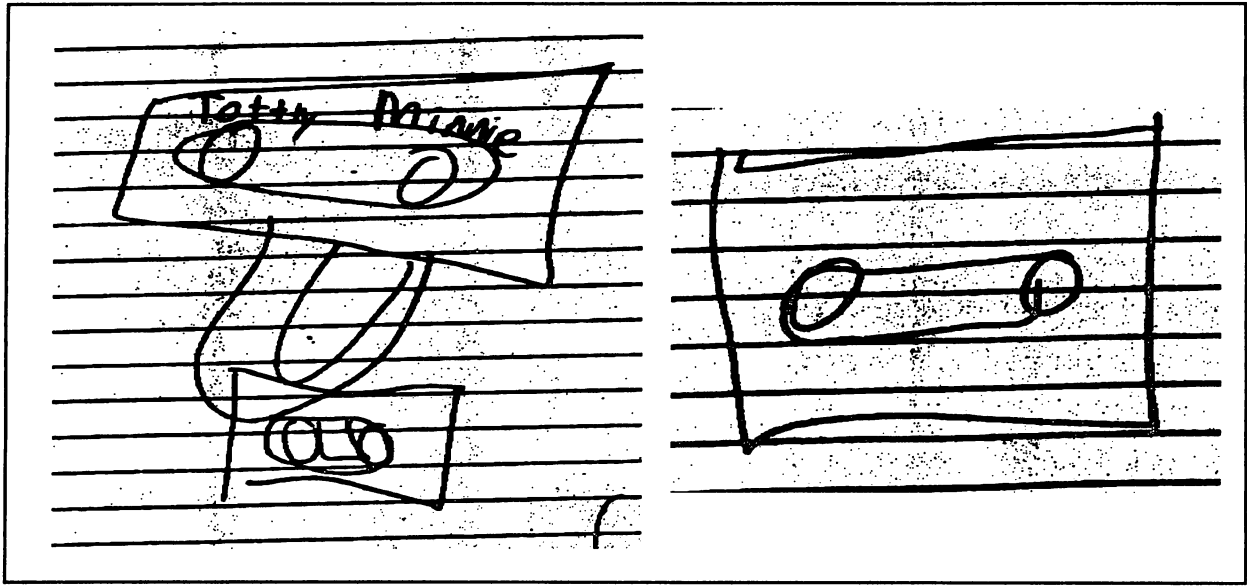
Here are Larkin's drawings. I think we have come up with a fairly representative sample - and a sequence that shows how we have taken *her lead* and used this method to help her develop coping skills.

For your information: Larkin is 10 years old, is currently in the "plain old" 4th grade (with 1 hour a day in resource for math) at our neighborhood school. She is doing beautifully both socially *and* academically with the assistance of a regular ed. teacher and an assistant who have no *formal* training in autism, but are "naturals" at facilitating Larkin's inclusion. We are very proud of Larkin and grateful to Mrs. Hearn and Mrs. Stiggleman! Larkin underwent Berard Auditory Training with *amazing* results.

My drawings are always in response to Larkin's drawings - unless she is just too agitated about a situation and insists that I draw the situation for her - then I still follow up with my conclusion - sometimes accompanied by a cryptic "social story." Hope this is helpful.

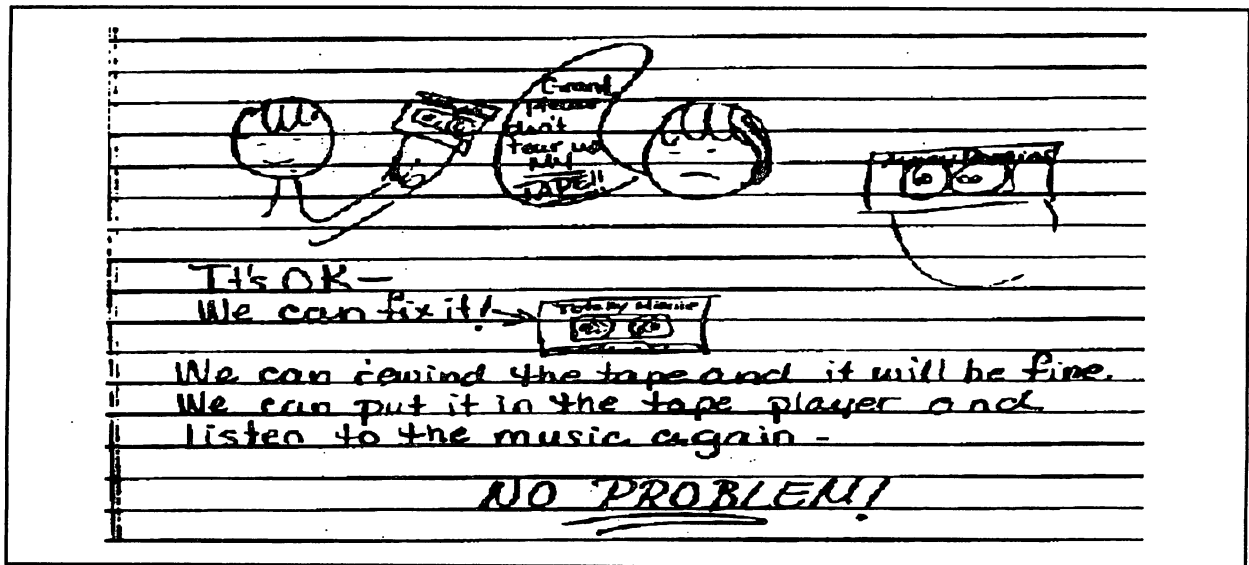
One of the samples of the drawings Teri sent us, along with Teri's explanation, appear on the following page. Teri's insights, and feedback from others, have expanded our ideas on the possible use of simple pictures to illustrate social stories. Thank you, Teri, for taking the time to share Larkin's drawings (and her success as a fourth grader!).

Also, we have recently learned that there is an approach to teaching conflict resolution and social skills which centers around the use of children's drawings. If anyone knows of the name of this approach, or who to contact for additional information, please let us know. We will then share that information in the next MORNING NEWS.



Drawing #1 (above): Larkin was very upset that her brother, Grant, had torn up her "Totally Minnie (Mouse)" cassette. She drew this drawing in a very agitated state, brought it to me and (in a very loud voice) demanded that I "draw Grant tearing up my tape."

Drawing #2 (below): I drew this picture, showing how the tape could be fixed and the situation resolved.



A resource for parents: *The National Lekotek Center is a non-profit organization with centers across the country that provide resources to parents of special needs children, including extensive libraries of toys, adaptive equipment, electronic play materials, and books for loan. Address: 2100 Ridge Ave., Evanston, IL. 60210. Phone: (708)328-0001 or 1(800) 366-PLAY. (As listed in Baby Talk magazine, 11/93)*

Materials available from THE MORNING NEWS, Jenison Public Schools
Please note: All materials available at cost. See order form on opposite page.

THE SOCIAL STORY BOOK: Second Edition (1993) arrives in a 2" three ring binder. This book contains 208 social stories written by Jenison High School Psychology and Sociology students, with updated and expanded instructions for writing and implementing social stories. All stories are saved on a computer disc which is included with the book (Macintosh/ClarisWorks).

The Curriculum System: Success as an Educational notebook, ready to use. This 200 page manual describes a variety of learning environments (vocational training, education, etc.). The Curriculum System students with developmental disabilities concepts and forms in the manual. The final chapter describes their social skills in fall, 1994.)

Expect shipment to be sent as soon as possible.



PAST THE 'USE BY' DATE.
Information and/or forms in this section are no longer accurate or usable. Please disregard.

(1992) arrives in a three ring curriculum for use in a wide based instruction, general access to the education of secondary students, though elementary age students.

...ents with autism improve THE MORNING NEWS (which will expire through orders are being accepted. over items, items which are in stock will sent when it becomes available.

Taming the Rec
"Recess", in this iss

...collection of materials referred to in the article, *That JuNgLe We Call* packet includes: *The Social Cues Questionnaire*; *The "Sixth Sense"* (a guide to implementing recess presentation); a sample recess social story; *Socially Simplifying Recess with a Piece of Chalk* (a one page handout); and ideas submitted by subscribers.

The Social Cues Questionnaire: An informal questionnaire containing 49 questions regarding typical school routines. Asking these questions of children with disorders on the autistic spectrum can yield insights into the child's perspective of given situations. Questions are divided into areas including: *The Morning Routine, Rules, My Teacher, Lines, Recess, Getting Help, and Transitions.*

The Social Story Information Packet: This packet contains the following materials: *How to Write Social Stories*, an 8 page handout; four sample social stories; and forms to use to make the social story approach more efficient.

THE MORNING NEWS is currently a free, donation supported international newsletter which shares practical information among parents and professionals working on behalf of individuals with autism. Tax-deductible donations to THE MORNING NEWS are welcomed to support the two issues (Fall '93 and Spring, '94) of the 1993-94 school year (free t-shirt for donations of \$25 or more). Beginning in fall of 1994, THE MORNING NEWS will be distributed quarterly with financial support provided through individual subscriptions. Subscriptions currently accepted for the 94-95 school year (form on last page).

HAPPY HOLIDAYS from the staff of THE MORNING NEWS