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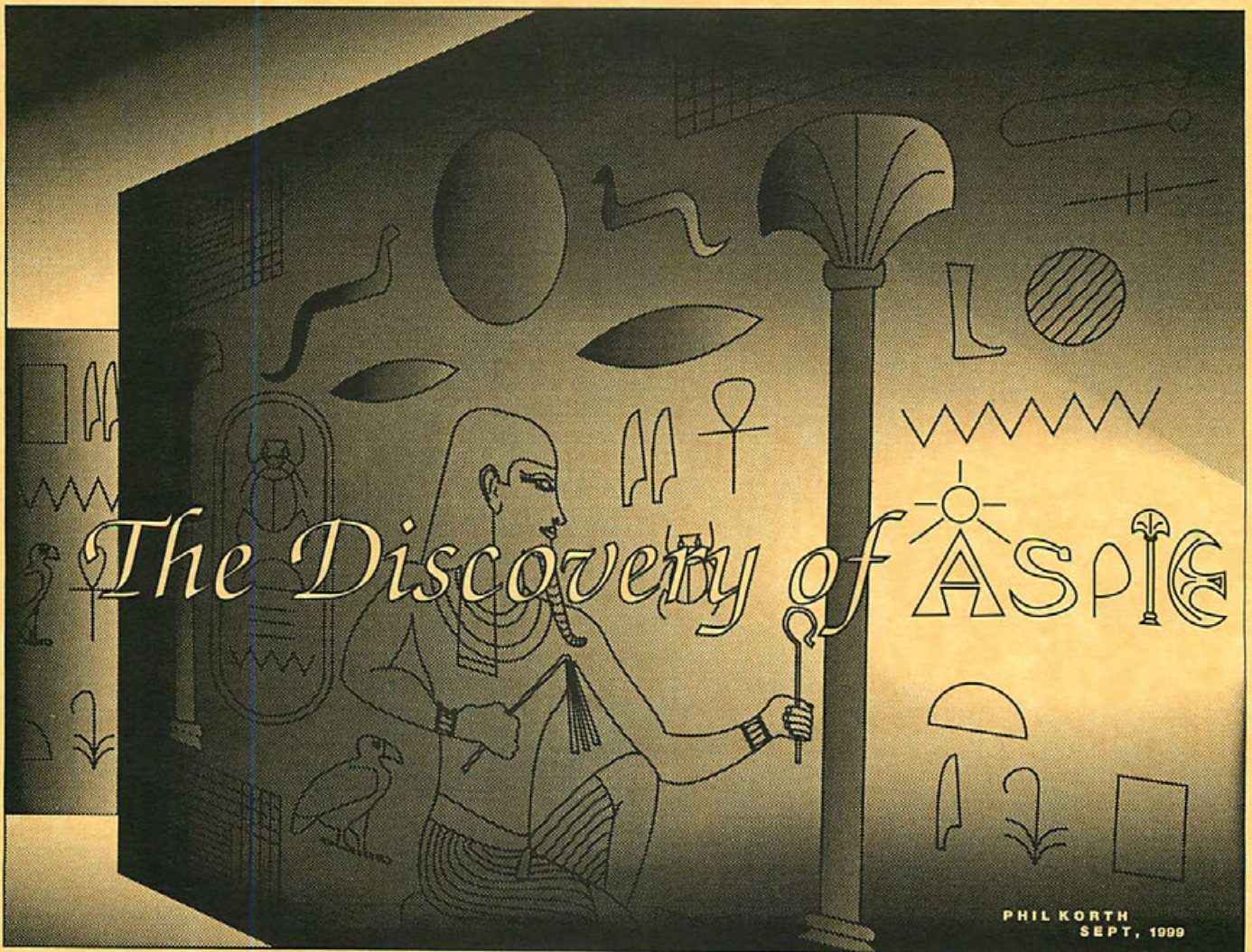
Jenison Public Schools

# MORNING

# NEWS

Fall 1999

Dedicated to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities and those who work alongside them to improve mutual understanding.





# THE MORNING NEWS

A publication of Jenison Public Schools, Michigan  
Fall 1999, Volume 11, Number 3

*Dedicated to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities and those who work alongside them to improve mutual understanding.*

## Practically a New Century Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter 1999

*Closing the century that introduced us to autistic spectrum disorders with four issues devoted to the very best creative and practical ideas.*

Introducing a MORNING NEWS distributor  
in the United Kingdom (see inside back cover)

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Our cover design is by Phil Korth, a talented Jenison High School senior. Phil's interests include theater, films, and art - especially painting and sculpting. After graduation, Phil hopes to attend Northwestern University to prepare for a career as a film director.

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Jenison Public Schools publishes *THE MORNING NEWS* to provide a source of information and ideas. Articles appear in the *position of Jenison Public Schools and the opinions expressed may be expressed.*

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## The Discovery of "Aspie": Criteria by Attwood and Gray

- Carol Gray and Tony Attwood, M.Sc., Ph.D., MAPS., AFBPsS



*Carol Gray is a consultant to students with autistic spectrum disorders (a.s.d.) at Jenison Public Schools in Jenison, Michigan, and director of The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding, a non-profit organization serving children and adults with a.s.d., their families, and professionals. Carol has initiated and developed strategies and materials designed to teach social understanding, including Social Stories, Comic Strip Conversations, Pictures of Me, Social Review, The Sixth Sense, and The Morning News. Each year, Carol completes several presentations and workshops throughout the world.*

*Dr. Tony Attwood is a clinical psychologist who has specialized in the area of autism for over 20 years. This experience covers the full range of expression along the autistic continuum from those who are profoundly disabled to university professors. Dr. Attwood has published several papers, chapters, and two books. His most recent book, Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London and Philadelphia, 1998) has assisted parents and professionals throughout the world in their efforts to assist people with Asperger's Syndrome. Dr. Attwood presents several workshops internationally each year.*

*Tony and Carol often co-conduct workshops, most frequently in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. Currently, they are co-authoring a book. Excerpts from that book will appear in THE MORNING NEWS in the coming year. Tony and Carol invite and appreciate feedback from subscribers on this article, and others that will appear in the future. The above photo was taken near Brisbane, Australia this past summer.*

*The authors wish to thank Mr. Brian Gray, a school psychologist at Jenison Public Schools, for the ideas that inspired this article, and his further contributions and review. In addition, the authors express appreciation to Dr. Liane Holliday Willey, Mr. Jerry Newport, Ms. Sue Moreno, Dr. Cathy Pratt, and Dr. John Woods for their review and feedback on a draft of this article. (An additional note: this article contains quotes from the book, Pretending to be Normal, by Dr. Willey. This book is reviewed on pages 16-17 of this issue.)*

Some of this century's best discoveries were creative and determined efforts to answer "What if...?" questions. What if people could fly? What if electrical energy could be harnessed to produce light? What if there was an easily accessible, international communication and information network? The answers have resulted in permanent changes: air travel, light bulbs, the Internet. These discoveries have rendered their less effective counterparts to relative extinction from use: gone is the stagecoach, gas lighting, and multi-volume hardbound encyclopedias. These improvements remind us of our option and ability to experiment, re-mold, re-think, and imagine. In that spirit, this article submits a new question: What if Asperger's Syndrome was defined by its strengths? What changes might occur?

## Moving from Diagnosis to Discovery

Making any diagnosis requires attention to weaknesses, the observation and interpretation of signs and symptoms that vary from typical development or health. Certainly it would be a little disarming to visit a doctor for a diagnosis, only to have her inquire, "So, what feels absolutely great?" The DSM IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) assists in the identification of a variety of disorders. It is used by psychiatrists and other mental health professionals to match observed weaknesses, symptoms and behaviors to text. In DSM IV Asperger's Syndrome is identified by specific diagnostic criteria, a constellation of observed social and communication delays and/or deviations. Once diagnosed, a child or adult with the diagnosis is referred to with politically correct "people first" terminology, i.e. a *person with Asperger's Syndrome*.

Unlike *diagnosis*, the term *discovery* often refers to the identification of a person's strengths or talents. Actors are discovered. Artists and musicians are discovered. A great friend is discovered. These people are identified by an informal combination of evaluation and awe that ultimately concludes that this person – more than most others – possesses admirable qualities, abilities, and/or talents. It's an acknowledgment that, "...you know, he's better than me at...". In referring to people with respect to their talents or abilities, politically correct "people first" terminology is not required; labels like *musician*, *artist*, or *poet* are welcomed and considered complimentary.

If Asperger's Syndrome was identified by observation of strengths and talents, it would no longer be in the DSM IV, nor would it be referred to as a syndrome. After all, a reference to someone with special strengths or talents does not use terms with negative connotations (it's *artist* and *poet*, not *Artistically Arrogant* or *Poetically Preoccupied*), nor does it attach someone's proper name to the word *syndrome* (it's *vocalist* or *soloist*, not *Sinatra's Syndrome*). Focusing on strengths requires shedding the former diagnostic term, Asperger's Syndrome, for a new term. The authors feel that *Aspie*, used in self-reference by Liane Holliday Wiley in her new book, Pretending to be Normal (1999), is a term that seems right at home among it's talent-based counterparts: *soloist*, *genius*, *aspie*, *dancer*. With fading DSM potential, the authors submit a description of "aspie" for placement in a much needed but currently non-existent Manual of Discoveries About People (MDP I) (Figure 1).

New ways of thinking often lead to discoveries that consequently discard their outdated predecessors. Similarly, the change from Asperger's Syndrome to aspie holds interesting implications and opportunities. It could result in typical people rethinking their responses and rescuing a missed opportunity to take advantage of the contribution of aspies to culture and knowledge.

Figure 1: Discovery criteria for *aspie* by Attwood and Gray

A. A qualitative advantage in social interaction, as manifested by a majority of the following:

- (1) peer relationships characterized by absolute loyalty and impeccable dependability
- (2) free of sexist, "age-ist", or culturalist biases; ability to regard others at "face value"
- (3) speaking one's mind irrespective of social context or adherence to personal beliefs
- (4) ability to pursue personal theory or perspective despite conflicting evidence
- (5) seeking an audience or friends capable of: enthusiasm for unique interests and topics; consideration of details; spending time discussing a topic that may not be of primary interest
- (6) listening without continual judgement or assumption
- (7) interested primarily in significant contributions to conversation; preferring to avoid "ritualistic small talk" or socially trivial statements and superficial conversation
- (8) seeking sincere, positive, genuine friends with an unassuming sense of humor

B. Fluent in "Aspergerese", a social language characterized by at least three of the following:

- (1) a determination to seek the truth
- (2) conversation free of hidden meaning or agenda
- (3) advanced vocabulary and interest in words
- (4) fascination with word-based humor, such as puns
- (5) advanced use of pictorial metaphor

C. Cognitive skills characterized by at least four of the following:

- (1) strong preference for detail over gestalt
- (2) original, often unique perspective in problem solving
- (3) exceptional memory and/or recall of details often forgotten or disregarded by others, for example: names, dates, schedules, routines
- (4) avid perseverance in gathering and cataloging information on a topic of interest
- (5) persistence of thought
- (6) encyclopedic or "CD ROM" knowledge of one or more topics
- (7) knowledge of routines and a focused desire to maintain order and accuracy
- (8) clarity of values/decision making unaltered by political or financial factors

D. Additional possible features:

- (1) acute sensitivity to specific sensory experiences and stimuli, for example: hearing, touch, vision, and/or smell
- (2) strength in individual sports and games, particularly those involving endurance or visual accuracy, including rowing, swimming, bowling, chess
- (3) "social unsung hero" with trusting optimism: frequent victim of social weaknesses of others, while steadfast in the belief of the possibility of genuine friendship
- (4) increased probability over general population of attending university after high school
- (5) often take care of others outside the range of typical development

## Rethinking Typical Responses

Many baby boomers may remember the early elementary reading workbook of years past titled, Think and Do. The title alone held great educational merit. It identified an important sequence of events that is occasionally forgotten or overlooked: *think* first and then *do*. Recently, the Indiana Resource Center distributed a flyer with a similar subtle reminder. It is titled “Rethinking our Responses” (Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, 1999). The title presents an implied challenge to parents and professionals to “think again and do differently”. Armed with the positive criteria of aspie, rethinking reveals some new ideas and options for responses.

The diagnostic criteria for Asperger’s Syndrome and the defining characteristics of aspie are markedly different, although they describe the same group of people. Ultimately, what distinguishes people with Asperger’s Syndrome from aspie individuals is how *others* respond. Three helpful re-thought responses are: 1) a focus on potential, 2) meaningful affirmation, and 3) a discarding of social arrogance for accommodation and acceptance.

A focus on potential. There is no argument or doubt that aspie children and adults need support and assistance, just as those diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome do. They need to be informed and learn the secrets of typical social understanding, and require help negotiating through the social world that surrounds them. The challenge may be more comfortable for aspies than for those with Asperger’s Syndrome as a direct result of the people who surround them. Consider this example:

At eight years old, Patrick is demonstrating exceptional artistic talent. He completes projects far beyond the abilities or products of typical elementary students. Of particular interest and fascination, in fact, are the statues and models that he creates. Patrick’s work has been displayed in local libraries and county offices. His parents and teachers guess that in the future Patrick may be a renowned sculptor or commercial artist – and that his talent should be fostered and encouraged. Patrick is a fun child with many friends. In the classroom, he can work effectively in small groups or large, and lives for the rough and tumble social opportunities of recess. Patrick also struggles with math, requiring tutors and special help to keep afloat in the midst of numbers and their operations. The school year is beginning soon, and Patrick’s new teacher, Mrs. Calder, is excited to be part of his educational career, appreciates his incredible gift, and is looking for ways to build his math skills. Mrs. Calder talks of Patrick’s potential, never once referring to his weak area as his mathematical *prognosis*.

Miguel is also beginning in Mrs. Calder’s classroom this year. Miguel is very aspie. Like Patrick, Miguel has incredible abilities. Above all else, Miguel is valued for his unique, seemingly three-dimensional visual thinking; knowledge of extinct South American rain forest insects and Sears home dehumidifiers; honesty that puts his peers to shame, and compliance with rules and routines. Unlike Patrick, however, Miguel’s parents and Mrs. Calder admit they “can’t even guess” where his unique talents and abilities may lead in the future. Still, they admit that Miguel, at age 8, can do things that they cannot. They also conclude that he possesses unique abilities with a future they cannot conceptualize or imagine, gifts that should be fostered and encouraged. Mrs. Calder is aware of the social struggles that surround Miguel on the playground and in small and large group activities, and is looking for strategies to build mutual understanding between Miguel and his classmates. Miguel is looking for genuine kindness in others – Mrs. Calder is determined he will find it in her classroom, on the playground, and at lunch. She wants him to maximize his gifts, just like Patrick.

Those who genuinely understand aspies see their strengths clearly and regard their struggles with patience and support. Describing her closest friends, Liane Holliday Willey writes: "...They simply illuminate that which is made better by my AS, my straight forwardness and assertiveness and creativity and tenacity and loyalty. Because they see me first as someone who possesses many good qualities, and only then as someone who is just a tiny bit different, they give me the notion to begin to see myself in that light as well." (p. 73)

Meaningful affirmation. Affirmation is an important social process. A child is praised as valued traits are recognized and acknowledged by others, "Sam, what a great helper you are!" or "Angie, what you did is very thoughtful!" Children have the ability to perceive even the most indirect "plus" or praise. For example, John helps a classmate find the correct page, and notices an approving glance from his teacher. In an instant, her approval is noticed and may encourage John to assist others in the future. John receives several similarly subtle but important "pluses" throughout the day, enough to help him weather correction from the lunch assistant for failing to toss his trash. A child readily understands the meaning of verbal and non-verbal praise, important messages that influence self esteem. If self esteem is the personal belief that it's "a.o.k. to be who you are", *affirmation* is the demonstration, and understanding, that others agree.

In contrast, missed opportunities and misunderstanding can derail the efforts of parents and professionals to affirm aspie children. The traits an aspie child values in himself (logic, memory, intelligence, accuracy and honesty) may be different from the traits typically valued by parents and professionals (sensitivity, generosity, helpfulness). This can make others amiss in responding positively to qualities the aspie child views as very important. From the child's point of view, "No one ever notices or appreciates me." Supportive, caring parents and professionals may praise an aspie child as they would a child who is typical, using phrases like "Good job!" or "How nice of you to share...". These statements may hold little meaning to an aspie child who thinks in visual, tangible terms. The child's lack of interest in such praise can be misinterpreted, with typical people assuming, "He just doesn't respond to praise". By the end of the day, an aspie child may feel overwhelmed and unsupported; his parents and teachers may feel equally at a loss to discover something to motivate him. Even though affirming "blocks to the bridge" do exist on both sides of the social equation, the blueprints are sometimes different.

To meaningfully affirm an aspie child, an understanding of his strengths and social perspective is helpful. Recognizing and praising the traits the child values in himself, in addition to those skills and achievements that demonstrate social growth, can build a child's self esteem while he tackles an often challenging social world. Figure 2 describes five specific strategies to add *meaning* to praise, affirmation, and social gains.

Ultimately, the aspie criteria could return confidence to a deserving population of people. Knowing that others recognize and acknowledge personal strengths, could provide needed confidence to build and explore personal talents and tackle challenges. In a description of her friends, Liane Holliday Willey indicates "...they are so loyal in their affirmations that I am fine just the way I am. Through their eyes I am perfectly fine. Each of them dismisses my idiosyncratic ways with a smile and a wave of the arm... They rein me in when I travel too far, they protect me from obvious blunders, and they applaud me when I stumble over some part of me that is particularly worthwhile." (p. 72)

Moving from arrogance to accommodation and acceptance. No fault or finger-pointing intended, typical people are socially arrogant. It seems to be their nature, something they really can't help. Proof in point: typical people are fascinated by – and concerned about – anyone who isn't totally thrilled or enamored by their invitations to converse or play. How could this be? Typical people regard themselves as golden social opportunities; *of course* anyone should be delighted to be their partner in interaction. That is, if they are "normal".

Figure 2: Five strategies to add meaning to praise, affirmation, and social gains

- 1) The best praise is when others notice a personally valued trait or strength. It's important for parents and professionals to take time to learn those traits that are the most important and/or valued by the aspie child or adult. In addition, discovering strengths via the new aspie criteria, parents and professionals may more readily identify and acknowledge them when they are demonstrated. Traits like loyalty, honesty, perseverance, logic, intelligence, and sincerity are worthy of frequent praise.
- 2) Meaningful affirmation relies on accurate attribution. For example, a child may doggedly persevere because he's related to nine family members who also demonstrate that trait. While aspie may be associated with certain strengths, it does not replace the influence of other important factors, like age, personality, character, or inherited personality and talent. Looking to those factors first when giving credit increases the meaning and accuracy of praise. If other factors do not explain a trait or talent, or it's intensity, the aspie factor may deserve the credit, or at least "honorable mention" as one of a combination of factors.
- 3) The meaning of praise can be enhanced with access to interests (books, music, computers); someone taking time to show interest in a topic important to the child, or the use of visual materials to clarify abstract achievements ("blue ribbon effort", or "gold medal helpfulness").
- 4) Social Stories add meaning to social information, including praise. They are "right at home" praising the traits an aspie person values in herself. A Social Story can describe a child's use of logic and intelligence, applaud an achievement, or celebrate a talent. Placing the information – and related photos or work samples – in a story creates a tangible, positive record that may help a child understand his strengths and value.
- 5) Some consideration of the words and phrasing parents and professionals use to express praise – especially for social achievements – may yield big results. Mentioning a talent when applauding social gains ("What a logically friendly thing to do!" or "What an intelligent idea to invite Amber to play!" or "It's smart to let Beth to play with the toy for a while!") may recruit a child's attention and add meaning to the acknowledged social skill.

In Figure 1, the list of social advantages of aspie individuals has its roots in the social challenges of people with Asperger's Syndrome. Regarding someone as socially "new" or "unique" has more potential than the negative counterparts of "awkward" or "inappropriate". This requires social creativity. In this case, it may be helpful for typical people to regard social interaction as a trip through Immigration and Customs. Anyone who travels between countries knows the anxiety of approaching a customs agent, that country's appointed keeper of the rules of entry and acceptability. Here the rules are rigid; the questions straightforward and a little rude: "Why are you here and when are you leaving?" "Are you here for *personal* or *business* purposes?" (In other words, "Are you here to *visit* Los Angeles or *buy* it?") The process raises social anxiety - Do I look safe and kind enough to these people (who look dispassionately authoritarian and mannerless to me) to be among them in their country? Or, do they need to rummage through my personal belongings to judge if I can be included? For aspie people, there is a daily Social Immigration and Customs process - a continual anxiety of doing it "right", saying it "right", having the necessary social "passport" that typical people constantly seek in others before befriending them.



What social criteria are absolutely necessary for typical people to admit aspies through Social Immigration and Customs - is it at all possible to widen the rules of acceptability? Can typical people show interest in an unusual topic? Is typical inflection and smooth coordination of facial expression – mastery of the sometimes conflicting concert of intended and stated meaning - essential for someone to be considered a friend? Is it okay to show joy by moving your fingers and arms? Is it possible to patiently take time to explain a situation that seems as though it should be obvious? Is it okay for someone to have cognitive abilities that are not usually found in the typical population?

Replacing arrogance with acceptance is similar to the use of air masks on airplanes. Airline flight attendants begin each flight by reviewing a life saving rule regarding the use of air masks: “assist yourself before assisting others”. It’s a rule contrary to the natural inclination to assist those who seem most helpless first. Problem is, following the inclination could leave two people struggling for air and survival; those who assist others to an air mask first may forever lose the opportunity to be helpful in the long run. Social acceptance works on the same principal. It’s worth the effort to explore the assumptions and biases of Social Customs and Immigration – to discover their influence and make corrections where necessary. Then assist others.

## **Rescuing a missed opportunity**

Typical people are quite sharp at identifying missed opportunities, and often clearly demonstrative when they do. The train leaves the station and those remaining can readily identify who wanted to be on that train, but isn’t. A young man interviews for a desired position in a company, spends an eight hour day waiting by a phone for the call that arrives at 5pm, telling him the position has been filled by another applicant. He disconnects the phone and refers to the company by a novel but unkind new name. Opportunities are not usually difficult to identify, nor are they unnoticed when they slip from grasp.

The discovery of aspies brings into focus valuable, endangered opportunities that have repeatedly marched past without adequate notice of their potential. There is the opportunity to make new friends; a chance to consider those who may seem comparatively awkward, but decidedly more honest and genuine. In addition to discovering new friendships, there is the opportunity to utilize unique perspectives and talents to tackle problems. There’s work to do in the following century – diseases to cure, environments to save, freedoms to preserve. Fortunately, there are people with minds capable of the challenge, with the ability to focus and persevere. They possess perspectives and talents unique enough to solve the biggest of problems, or enhance the most challenging projects. They are aspies. They are living proof that the best places to play will always be those that are discovered.

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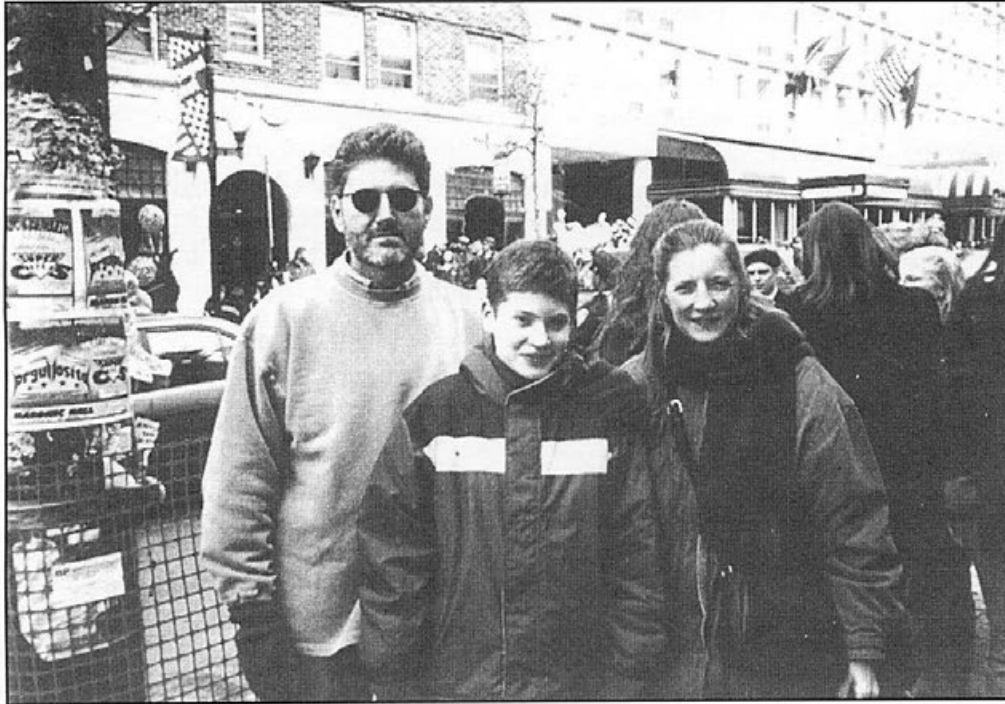
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# Ten Common Mistakes Parents Make During the IEP Meeting

- Matt Foley M.Ed. and Deann Hyatt Foley M.Ed.



*Editor's Note: Matt Foley and DeAnn Hyatt-Foley live in Lubbock Texas. They have been married for 15 years and have one son, Ryan, who is fourteen and in the eighth grade. Matt is a Licensed Professional Counselor with a M.Ed. in private practice. DeAnn has her M.Ed. in Special Education and has been the West Texas Area Development Director for the PATH Project since 1993. The PATH Project is funded through the U.S. Department of Education in Washington D. C. and is a Parent Training and Information Center for Texas. Currently Matt and DeAnn are forming social skills groups for adolescents with Asperger's Disorder and related disorders. Matt and DeAnn have also developed a workshop that teaches parents and educators the special education process. Their workshop has been presented throughout Texas and at the Yale University Autism Conference. The above photo of Matt, Ryan, and Deann was taken in New Haven, Connecticut at the St. Patrick's Day Parade, 1999.*

When our son was diagnosed with PDD-NOS in 1990, we found ourselves ill equipped for our new role as advocates for our son. Our first Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting was overwhelming. We found it very difficult to follow what the educators were talking about. We certainly did not know what our role was in the process. We had the expectation that the trained educators of our IEP team would make the best possible decisions for our son's education. Six months later it became abundantly clear that the decisions we had agreed to in the IEP meeting were not the best for our son's education. It was at this time that we began to educate ourselves about PDD-NOS and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 1991 we began working with other parents to help them become informed about their child's disability and the educational laws that are in place to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education.

It is important that parents become informed and involved in their child's education. There are many sources of information and support in your state. However, the more skills you have and information you learn, the better you can advocate for your child. Over the past few years we have found that parents tend to make some common mistakes during the Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting. The following is a list of ten common mistakes.

**1. Believing the professionals are the only experts.**

It can be very intimidating to sit at a table with several educators and professionals. Professionals/educators do bring a great deal of knowledge and experience to the table. Though most parents do not have a background or degree in education, they have a great deal of knowledge and experience regarding their child. Parents are experts in their own right, they also provide historical information and the big picture from year to year. They know what works and does not work with their child and can be a great asset to the IEP team.

Parents also have an intuitive sense as to what is appropriate for their child. After working with parents for nine years, we are still amazed at how parents are usually intuitively correct about what will work for their child. We encourage parents to follow their hunches, if something does not sound right, check it out. Usually after some research parents will discover their hunch was correct.

**2. Not making requests in writing.**

Any request a parent makes needs to be in writing. This includes requests for assessments, IEP meetings, correspondence, related services, etc. Written requests are important because they initiate timelines that the school district must follow in response to your request. This will also create a paper trail. When you write a letter be sure to send it certified mail. When you have a discussion by phone with a school official, write a letter that briefly outlines what you talked about. Documenting your conversations helps prevent miscommunication.

Documenting requests (i.e., teaching assistant, speech, etc.) for the IEP committee clarifies to the committee what you are requesting and allows you to use your own words (as opposed to the note taker paraphrasing your request). We encourage parents to type exactly what they think their child needs and list why they think it is educationally necessary. This helps parents think through why they are requesting a service for their child. Have the IEP committee record the written request as part of the IEP. At this point, the IEP committee has one of two choices; the committee can accept or deny the request. If the committee denies the request then they must follow the procedural safeguards in IDEA and provide written notice of why they are denying the parents' request. This method makes it difficult for an IEP committee to tell parents "no" without thinking through the options. If the request is not written down then the school district is not obligated to provide the service. Make sure you write it down.

**3. Not being familiar with Prior Notice section of the Procedural Safeguards (34 CFR 300.503).**

All sections of the Procedural Safeguards are important to parents. This particular section gives parents some leverage during IEP meetings. Whenever parents make a

request for their child in the IEP meeting, the IEP committee is required under Prior Notice to provide the parents with written notice within a reasonable period of time. The notice must include the following:

(b) Content of notice . . .

- (1) A description of the action proposed or refused;
- (2) An explanation of why the agency proposes or refuses to take the action;
- (3) A description of any other options that the agency considered and the reasons why those options were rejected;
- (4) A description of each evaluation procedure, test, record or report the agency used as a basis for the proposed or refused action;
- (5) A description of any other factor that is relevant to the agency's proposal or refusal . . .

We have found many instances where a parent requests an assessment or service only to have the IEP team tell the parent it can not be done. By making all requests in writing and by requiring the IEP team to provide Prior Notice, the parent makes the team accountable for it's decisions. This practice also takes issues out of the emotional arena allowing all team members to focus on IDEA standards.

**4. Requesting a related service instead of an assessment that supports the need for a related service.**

Many times parents will request services such as speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, etc. in the IEP meeting. Frequently the IEP committee will respond by stating that the student does not need the service. We recommend that parents do not request the service but request the assessment that supports the need for the related service. For example instead of requesting speech for your child request a speech assessment.

Only a certified or licensed professional is qualified to determine if a child needs or does not need a particular related service. As in #2 list the reasons why you think an assessment is educationally necessary for your child and submit your request to the IEP committee as part of the IEP.

**5. Accepting assessment results that do not recommend the services you think your child needs.**

Sometimes parents receive assessment results that do not accurately describe their child and/or do not recommend the amount and duration of services the parents think their child needs. Under 34 CFR 300.502 Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) parents of a child with a disability have the right to obtain an independent evaluation at public expense if they disagree with the results of the school's assessment. When the parent requests the IEE (in writing) the school has one of two choices; they may either provide the IEE in a reasonable period of time or they may take the parents to due process. When an IEE is agreed upon, parent and school must come to an agreement as to who is qualified to assess the student. The examiner for an IEE can not be employed by the school district. Parents should request the school district policy on guidelines and qualifications for their examiners.

6. **Allowing the assessment information to be presented for the first time at the IEP meeting.**

Parents are entitled to have the assessment information explained to them before the IEP meeting. We encourage parents to have the person who administered the assessment give them a copy of the report and meet with them to explain the report several days before the IEP meeting. This enables the parents to think through the information before making decisions for their child. If all IEP decisions are based on the information from the assessment, it only makes sense for the parents to be knowledgeable and informed about the assessment results in a way they can understand.

7. **Accepting goals and objectives that are not measurable.**

Measurable goals and objectives are paramount for your child's IEP. Without measurable goals and objectives, it is difficult to determine if your child has had a successful school year. In working with parents, we have encountered many IEP goals and objectives that are not measurable.

All goals and objectives come from assessment data. Assessment has four different components: 1.) Formal assessment (i.e., WIAT, Woodcock-Johnson, Brigance), 2.) Informal assessment (i.e., classroom work), 3.) Teacher/parent observation, and 4.) Interviews. After the information has been collected about the student it is compiled into an assessment report. Recommendations on how to work with the student are listed toward the end of the report. If you receive an assessment report that does not give you recommendations for potential goals and objectives, the assessment is not complete.

After the assessment has been completed, the IEP committee determines the student's present level of performance (PLOP) and states what the student is currently able to do. The committee then develops the IEP goals and objectives. The goals state what the student is expected to accomplish by the end of the year. Objectives break the goal down into increments. For example:

PLOP

*Based on the Brigance and classroom work Johnny is currently able to read on a fourth grade level with 90% mastery.*

Goal

*By the end of the school year Johnny will be able to read on a fifth grade level as measured by the Brigance and classroom work with 80% mastery.*

Objectives

*By October 1, Johnny will be able to read fourth grade, second month level with teacher assistance as measured by the Brigance and classroom work with 80% mastery.*

*By January 1, with out teacher assistance Johnny will be able to read on a fourth grade, sixth month level as measured by the Brigance and classroom work with 80% mastery.*

A method of determining if your goals and objectives are measurable is to ask someone who is not on your IEP team to read them (i.e., a teacher, another parent, advocate, etc.). Then ask "Hypothetically, if you were to go into the classroom, would you be able to see my child working these goals and objectives?" If someone outside of your IEP team can not answer "yes", then your goals and objectives are not measurable.

**8. Allowing placement decisions to be made before IEP goals and objectives are written.**

Many times after assessment information is discussed, the IEP committee will determine the child's placement. Goals and objectives are always written before placement is discussed. To ensure that the child is placed in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) the IEP committee must determine:

Which of these goals and objectives can best be met in the general classroom?

With the remaining goals and objectives that cannot be met in the general classroom the committee determines:

Which of these goals and objectives can be best met in the general classroom with modifications and support?

This line of inquiry continues until all placement options have been decided upon for all the goals and objectives. The committee must always start with the LRE and then work toward a more restrictive environment as necessary. IDEA is very clear that the IEP committee must always consider the general education classroom as the first option for students with disabilities.

**9. Allowing your child's IEP meeting to be rushed so the school staff can begin the next child's IEP meeting.**

This practice is particularly common at the end of the school year when educators are frantically trying to have IEP meetings for all the students who receive special education services. IEP meetings may be held one right after another. There is no problem with this practice as long as the members of the IEP team feel that all issues have been adequately discussed. Many times, however, parents feel rushed. It is important that all issues are adequately addressed before ending the IEP meeting. When the educators have not given themselves adequate time to address all relevant issues, request that the IEP team meet again at a more convenient time to further discuss your child's education.

**10. Not asking a lot of questions.**

It is very important to ask questions and lots of them. Educators use many terms and acronyms specific to special education. Parents may become confused when these terms are used during the IEP meeting. This can add to the frustration that a parent may already be feeling when they do not understand what is being said. It is important to ask what the

terms or acronyms mean. Unless a parent has a background in special education they are not expected to know the terms and acronyms. Informed decisions cannot be made when parents do not understand what is being discussed.

The proceeding is a short list of common mistakes parents make during the IEP meetings and some suggestions for avoiding these mistakes. At some point in time we have made all the mistakes listed above. We developed the habit of debriefing after every IEP meeting to discuss our performance during the meeting. We have gradually accumulated information and developed skills and we continue to trust our intuition.

We have found that when parents apply the suggestions listed above while working with their IEP team they will see results. It is important that parents continue to accumulate information and develop skills relating to the IEP process. Most parents feel overwhelmed by the special education process. Do not be discouraged in your pursuit to obtain the supports and services your child needs. We found it helpful to break the process down into small steps. When you use the suggestions listed above you will be that much closer to obtaining your child's Free Appropriate Public Education. After using each suggestion listed, pat yourself on the back for becoming an even better advocate for your child.

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## Dealing with Bullying, etc.

Children with autistic spectrum disorders may sometimes be the victims of teasing by classmates and peers. It may be difficult for them to quickly determine the intent of statements or requests made by peers. The book, Dealing with Bullying by Marianne Johnston (1996), is a simple, 24 page children's book that explores teasing and bullying, describing what it is, why it occurs, and how to respond. It is illustrated with full color photographs.

Dealing with Bullying is one of six books in the Hazeldon/Rosen PowerKids Press™ Conflict Resolution Library. Other titles include:

Dealing with Anger

Dealing with Secrets

Dealing with Competitiveness

Dealing with Someone Who Won't Listen

Dealing with Feeling Left Out

To purchase these books, check with your local book store.

# Here they go again! Introducing: My First Social Story Book

In January of 1991, the psychology students at Jenison High School made a significant contribution to children and adults with autistic spectrum disorders when they wrote and published 200 Social Stories. Their book, *The Original Social Story Book* was followed the next year by another, *New Social Stories*. They're at it again. This fall, they will write for children ages 2-7. The text will be clear and to the point, with all stories complete in 8 short sentences or less and accompanied by illustrations. Stories will be contained in a three-ring notebook, so they may be removed individually and placed in a smaller, child-friendly binder that will be included.

## They need your topic ideas...

Every book of stories needs topics, and that is where you come in. To determine the most frequently needed topics, we are asking subscribers to complete the form on the following page. All those who contribute topic ideas will be listed along with their city, state, and/or country in the book. Also, each contributor will be among the first to know when the book becomes available; they will receive a letter immediately after it goes to press.

## and your stories!

The psychology students invite you to write a story for possible publication to the form (opposite)

If you would like to write a story, please fill out the form on the following page and attach it to the form (opposite)

- 1) Use simple, clear language
- 2) Keep the story short and to the point
- 3) Make the story relevant to the child's life
- 4) Use the child's name and the name of the person or place involved in the story
- 5) Proofread the story to ensure it is literally correct
- 6) Ensure the story has a positive, patient, and reassuring quality

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

Use simple, clear language to cover one topic  
Keep the story short and to the point  
Make the story relevant to the child's life  
Use the child's name and the name of the person or place involved in the story  
Proofread the story to ensure it is literally correct  
Ensure the story has a positive, patient, and reassuring quality

Royalties from **My First Social Story Book** will be used for non-profit purposes, and those who contribute stories that are published will not receive compensation. Only stories accompanied by a signed release (form on following page) will be considered for publication.

## The psychology students of Jenison High School

# THANK YOU!