

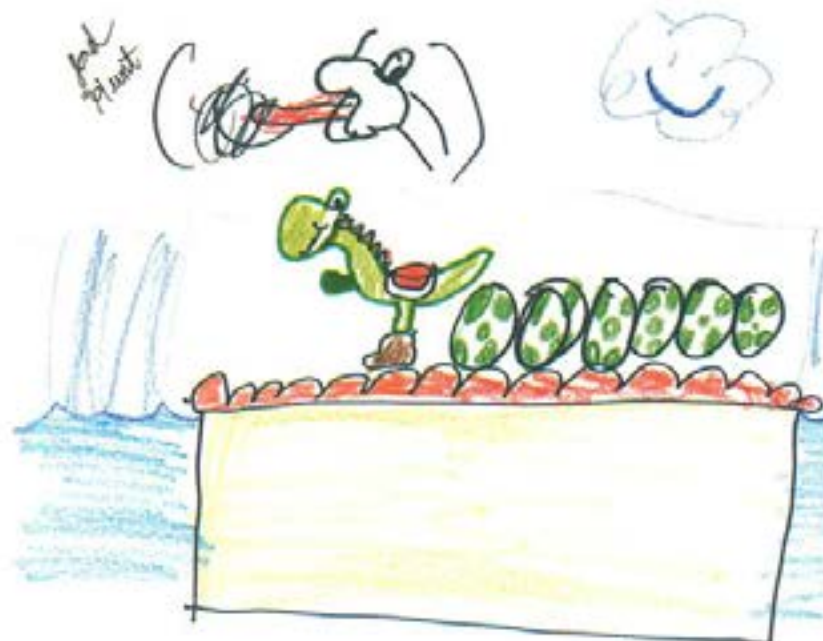


THE MORNING NEWS

Jenison Public Schools

Fall '96

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



This is my picture of me on the inside. Here you see my personality and talents. It's a work of art. I signed my name to it, just like a great artist.

**Featuring a special section (pgs. 5 - 15):
Explaining a Diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome**

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

A special welcome to our international authors:

*In this issue, we are pleased to include articles from
Dr. Tony Attwood, Queensland, Australia and Dr. Edna Smith, British Columbia, Canada.
Our sincere appreciation for their wonderful contributions to THE MORNING NEWS.*

Fall 1996

**Featuring a special collection of three related articles:
Explaining a Diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome
pgs. 5 - 15**

About our cover: *A drawing by Joel Hunt from his
"Pictures of Me" workbook. See article p. 8.*

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THE MORNING NEWS Pen Pal Registry (pg. 16 - 19)*

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Seven Habits of Highly Effective Programs for Students with Autism

- Edna Smith, Ph.D.



Editors note: An American by birth, Edna retired as Director of Missouri's Project ACCESS and moved to Canada to become an educational and behavioral consultant for the Gateway Provincial Resource Program. Edna is the mother of a young adult with Asperger's Syndrome and holds three degrees in Communication Disorders and Child Development. Currently she works with teachers and their students who experience autism. Her life outside of autism includes developing and presenting self esteem seminars, enjoying the beautiful British Columbia outdoors, and taking advantage of the cultural opportunities that abound in Vancouver. MORNING NEWS authors are always invited to submit either a current or childhood photo. In the above photo, Edna is the youngest child seated next to her dad.

I was introduced to the work of Stephen Covey about six years ago by Carol Gray. Carol had used Covey's habits to frame *What's Next?* (formerly titled *The Curriculum System*), her

system for transitioning students with disabilities from school to adult life. I noticed as I read Carol's book and Covey's best seller *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* that something seemed vaguely familiar. I then realized that the characteristics which Covey outlines as habits of successful people are almost identical to the principles of effective programs for students with autism which I had been presenting in Project ACCESS workshops for several years. They were couched in different terms but the similarities were indisputable. I smugly observed to friends that even Covey had acknowledged that great minds run on the same tracks. Maybe, I thought, the principles of successful parenting and teaching students with autism, of business success, and being a successful human being were all essentially the same. Therefore, with apologies to Stephen Covey, I present seven principles which I believe underlie successful programs for persons with autism.

1. BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND.

When I first became a parent I thought my responsibility was to have "well behaved" children. Somewhere along the line I realized that it was also my responsibility to produce socially responsible, independent, reasonably happy adults (who would, incidentally, be kind to me in my dotage). Usually the methods for producing well behaved children and competent adults appeared to be the same but sometimes they didn't. At that point I had to decide which was more important. The key to my decision was to keep the end in mind. I knew that these little people would be adults much longer than they would be children and usually decided that the ultimate outcome was more important than the immediate "behavior" issue. The fact is that

we won't know if we were good parents until our children grow up. And we really won't know if we were good educators until our students are adults.

I have noticed an interesting similarity between U.S. and Canadian educational institutions. Every board of education and every teachers organization has a mission statement of some sort. Committees meet and argue and sort and define and eventually produce essentially the same mission statement as every other school board and teachers organization on the continent. It usually says something like this: The goal of education is to produce productive, clear thinking, responsible, self-actualized citizens. Another way to say that is that the outcome we want is employable, independent, socially competent adults. Although we educators currently work with children and adolescents the products of education are adults. Both parents and educators must begin with that end in mind.

2. FIRST THINGS FIRST: Educational programs which produce the most competent adults start with good individualized educational plans. I believe that the best IEPs are usually the simplest ones. IEPs are not lesson plans, but the structure of the educational program. One simple way to organize IEPs is to start with simple long range goals in five areas. Four of the goals are in the life domains of Self Help / Domestic, Vocational / Academic, Recreation / Leisure, and Community Access with an additional goal for Transition Planning. Communication, sensory/motor, behaviour, and social skills are embedded into the activities which make up the objectives under each long range goal. Without the important first step of a solid, well-thought-out structure for the educational program we can expect nothing better than piecemeal series of thrown together school days. We must put first things first. Good IEPs come first.

3. THINK WIN/WIN: If parents and educators are going to develop programs which lead to competent adults, the adversarial attitude which I see in so many instances simply must stop. Parents and educators are responsible in

equal measure for this attitude. Educators are not insensitive lazy demons. Parents are not unreasonable, demanding, tyrants. Individuals with autism are described as having difficulty taking the perspective of other people. What about us? Let us all vow to try to walk a mile in the other's moccasins and see the situation from the other guy's point of view. The result will almost inevitably be something different than either envisioned initially. This is true collaboration and the only way to a Win/Win solution. Only if both educators and parents "win" will the student with autism win in the long run. We must replace Win/Lose strategies with a Win/Win philosophy.

4. SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND: Behaviours are messages. When we take the time and attention needed to understand the messages underlying the challenging behaviours our students exhibit, we can develop behaviour supports which will lead to positive life style changes for our students. If we do not understand the messages of behaviour we simply cannot develop proactive educational programs.

5. BE PROACTIVE: Since the 60's behavioural interventions have looked not at just the behaviour a child with autism displays, but also at the antecedents and consequences of that behaviour. Early behaviour modification techniques tended to focus on manipulating the consequences of behaviour. In other words, when a behaviour occurred consequences were applied which either reinforced or punished that behaviour. We are now learning that challenging behaviours can be reduced when we focus our greater energies on the antecedents of the behaviour and manipulation of the environment and curriculum. Applying proactive positive behaviour supports simply reduces the need for reactive behaviour modification procedures. By being proactive everybody wins.

6. SYNERGIZE: An effective educational program is evidence that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Really good educational programs use a transdisciplinary approach. There is a good deal of role release

and role transfer. Each team member shares their knowledge and expertise with other team members. They teach one another as well as the student. Related service professionals such as behaviour therapists, psychologists, speech/language pathologists, and occupational therapists can train parents, classroom teachers and special education assistants to carry out programs which the related service staff has designed. In turn, these related service providers depend on those in daily contact with the child to share their more intimate knowledge of the student and to help "fine-tune" special programs. Some years ago Carol used the term "collective expert" to define that group of people around the student who can best plan and implement programs for him/her. Use of the collective expert is synergy in operation.

7. SHARPEN THE SAW: Covey tells the story of the man who was expending a great deal of effort to cut down a tree with a dull saw. When asked why he didn't stop to sharpen the saw the man complained that he was simply too busy. In the meantime the saw became duller and duller and the job increasingly difficult.

The message to us as parents and educators is that we must take time to sharpen our own saws, to renew ourselves. I have found that the Kootenays of British Columbia have an expression similar to one I heard in the Ozarks of Missouri and Arkansas. It says "You can't dip water out of an empty bucket." To keep our saws sharpened or our buckets filled we need to find ways to rejuvenate ourselves mentally, physically, and spiritually. The most successful parents and educators I know go to conferences and take courses to learn how to better do their jobs. They take care of themselves physically by getting enough rest, exercising, and eating right. They find a spiritual practice which works for them, whether it is participating in organized religion, individualized meditation, or simply getting in contact with the beauty of nature on a regular basis.

The principle of good programs for students with autism are the same as those for successful living. I think I can safely say that the success of our children is proportionate to our success as educators, as parents, and most importantly, as humans.

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How Do You Share the News?

-Dr. Tony Attwood, Clinical Psychologist
M.Sc., Ph.D., MAPS., AFBPsS.

Queensland, Australia



Editor's note: Dr. Tony Attwood is a Clinical Psychologist who has specialised 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. His original postgraduate research was conducted with Dr. Uta Frith and examined the social skills of children with autism. He has subsequently conducted research on diagnosis and challenging behaviour and has published several papers, chapters, and a book in this area. He has always been a full time practicing clinician with a special interest in early diagnosis, severe challenging behavior and Asperger's Syndrome. He is currently writing a book on Asperger's Syndrome or High Functioning Autism for parents and professionals. He has been invited to be the keynote speaker at international conferences and currently works in private practice in Brisbane. He is also an honorary supervisor at the University of Queensland. His professional qualifications were obtained in the United Kingdom. He became an Australian citizen in 1988.

Parents often ask whom they should inform about the diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, how and when. The teacher and school authorities will certainly benefit from this information, as they can obtain access to resources and strategies to help the child. Should the other children in the class be informed? The answer will vary according to each child and their circumstances. For some it may help if the diagnosis becomes public knowledge, while for others it may be preferable that they are not distinguished from other children. There have been instances when the term Asperger's Syndrome has become a derogatory term to tease the child, with the name changed to "Asparagus" Syndrome or "Hamburger" Syndrome. The author adopts the principal of - who needs to know? If not, then exercise discretion with such confidential information.

How do we tell their brothers and sisters? They will probably overhear conversations and somehow learn of the diagnosis. If they have a level of maturity to understand the nature of the syndrome, then they should be informed. Fortunately there is now some literature on how to inform siblings, (1) and parent support groups have organised activities just for siblings. These are usually coordinated by an adult who is the brother or sister of someone with Asperger's Syndrome. The sessions enable siblings to share and discuss their feelings, learn ideas to cope with specific situations such as the response of their friends when they visit, and that feelings of embarrassment or rivalry are quite natural.

They may feel they have an extra responsibility for them, especially at school, be confused as to why their parents are so concerned, wonder if their brother or sister will get better, and how they can help them.

When do you inform the child that they have Asperger's Syndrome? There is no simple answer. Very young children will not have the maturity to understand the concepts. Older children may be extremely sensitive to any suggestion they are different. Their vehement denial of any inadequacy in social abilities is more an attempt to convince themselves than others. The answer may be to tell the child when they are emotionally able to cope with the information and want to know why they have difficulties in situations that other children find so easy. Sometimes this should be undertaken by parents, sometimes by a professional.

Carol Gray has designed a workbook entitled "Pictures of Me", which can be used to introduce the child to their diagnosis.¹³ The workbook is completed by the child, their parents, and a professional, and involves a very positive attitude to the syndrome. The activities focus on the person's talents and abilities.

The author has found that their qualities of personality include being honest, loyal, reliable, forthright and having a strong moral code and sense of justice. Their cognitive qualities include an exceptional memory, enthusiasm and knowledge about their special interest, an original way of thinking, good imagination and remarkable ability to think using pictures. These qualities are not unique to the syndrome but are enhanced by it.

People with Asperger's Syndrome have many positive qualities in their abilities and personality. There are scientists and artists who have Asperger's Syndrome who have used those qualities for great achievement. It is not a condition to be ashamed of, but one to express with pride. It is also important to explain that the person will improve their abilities and that they can achieve their goals in life. It may take some time, and Tom Allen described himself as like a turtle - developing small steps that

eventually help win the race. Others have considered an analogy of climbing a mountain, again using small steps, but ultimately reaching the top. Better late than never!

Teachers can help outline the positive qualities of Asperger's Syndrome by arranging an activity where the child, class or teacher prepare a story or play where the qualities of the person with Asperger's Syndrome are an advantage. They are the hero. The child can also examine the biographies of famous scientists and artists for indicators of whether they had the same attributes and personal experiences. A useful starting point is the biographies of Einstein, Mozart, Wittgenstein and Bartok. This could be a homework or library exercise. Hans Asperger had a very positive attitude towards those who have the syndrome. In one paper he wrote (3) -

It seems that for success in science or art, a dash of autism is essential. For success the necessary ingredient may be an ability to turn away from the everyday world, from the simply practical, an ability to re-think a subject with originality so as to create in new, untrodden ways, with all abilities canalised into the one speciality. (p.49)

Great advances in science and art have been attributable to people with Asperger's Syndrome.

Once the person knows they have this syndrome it can provide a sense of relief and understanding. This information may not have been acquired by a planned discussion with a parent or professional, but by reading literature on the subject. Christopher Gillberg describes how a twelve-year old entered his office and by chance found a leaflet for parents on the syndrome.¹⁴ The child then said,

"This is something I've never heard anybody say a word about before. I think I'll call it A.S. for short." On reading the text aloud he soon remarked, as though in passing: "It seems I have A.S! By golly, I do

have A.S. Wait till my father hears about this. My parents just might have A.S. too, you know, my father in particular, he too has all absorbing interests. Now I can tell my classmates the reason why I pace the school yard - isky ten times up and down each break all the year round as I have A.S. And it will get my teacher off my back. If you have a handicap condition they have to tolerate you." (p. 138)

How do you explain the syndrome to other children? Carol Gray has written a program for school children called *The Sixth Sense*, i.e. the social sense.⁴⁵ A series of activities highlights each sense and demonstrates how the sixth sense works. They are then encouraged to imagine what it must be like to have an impaired social sense and not fully understand the perceptual, cognitive and emotional perspective of others. For example, they are asked -

- Would it be easy or difficult to take turns if you didn't know what others are thinking or how they feel?
- Would it be easy or difficult to talk to others about something they did?
- Would it be easy or difficult to make friends?

Finally, the children are encouraged to identify how they might assist their classmate with Asperger's Syndrome.

Sometimes it may be necessary to explain the nature of Asperger's Syndrome to the parents of other children in the class. They can believe the child is unusual due to some parental inadequacy, or the child is a potential danger to their son or daughter. The child's parents or a professional can address the school's Parents and Citizens Association to allay their fears and to consider ways they can help the child and their family.

Asperger's Syndrome is a developmental disorder and eventually the person does learn to improve their ability to socialise, converse,

understand the thoughts and feelings of others, and the accurate and subtle expression of their own feelings. The author uses the analogy of completing a jigsaw puzzle of thousands of pieces without a picture on the box. Over time, small, isolated sections of the puzzle are completed, but the overall "picture" is not apparent. Eventually there are sufficient "islands" of parts of the puzzle to recognise the full picture and all the pieces fall into place.

There has yet to be a study of the long term outcome of children with this Syndrome. Professionals and service agencies tend to see adults who are having problems who are conspicuous and this may lead to an overly pessimistic view of the long term outcome. The author has met many adults with Asperger's Syndrome who have described how in their late twenties or thirties they eventually managed to intellectually grasp the mechanisms of social skills. From then on the only people who know of their condition are their family and those who know them intimately. Nevertheless, they can be very unusual characters. In this author's opinion, they are a bright thread in the rich tapestry of life. Our civilisation would be extremely dull and sterile if we did not have and treasure people with Asperger's Syndrome.

1. Davies, J., *Able Autistic Children - Children with Asperger's Syndrome: A Booklet for Brothers and Sisters*. Child Development Research Unit, University of Nottingham, 1994

2. Gray, C.A., *Pictures of Me*, The Morning News, Jeonson Public Schools, fall 1996, pg. 8-14.

3. Asperger, H., "Problems of Infantile Autism", *Communication*. Journal of the National Autistic Society, London, 1979.

4. Gillberg, C., "Clinical and neurobiological aspects of Asperger Syndrome in six family studies", in *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, U. Frith (Ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991.

5. Gray, C., *The Sixth Sense*. In *Taming the Recess Jungle*, Future Horizons, Arlington, 1993.

Pictures of Me:

Introducing Students with Asperger's Syndrome to their Talents, Personality, and Diagnosis

- Carol Gray, Consultant to Students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Special Editor's Note: Permission is granted to retype and revise the text of the social story, "Pictures of Me", for the sole purpose of sharing a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome or high functioning autism with a student. Story text appears in italics. Story must be re-typed as described in this article with room provided for illustrations. Directions for making the workbook appear at the end of this article. Permission of the author is required to reprint this article or the story in any other form or for another purpose. ©Carol Gray, 1996.

Pictures of Me is a special social story. Following a "workbook" style format, *Pictures of Me* guides a series of activities designed to introduce a student with Asperger's Syndrome to his/her personality, talents, and diagnosis. To date, *Pictures of Me* has been piloted with upper elementary age students. *Pictures of Me* uses aspects of both social stories (Gray & Garand, 1993) and Comic Strip Conversations (Gray, 1994) to assist parents/professionals in sharing diagnostic and personal information with a student. The social story is modified to meet the unique and specific needs of each student. Activities directed by the story include the completion of three lists and several drawings. The result is a process of positive self discovery. The completed workbook is a resource that provides a student with a "souvenir" of himself/herself; a tangible reference containing important personal information.

Pictures of Me was initiated by Phil and Kathi Hunt, whose 10 year old son, Joel, had recently been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. Phil and Kathi asked for assistance in explaining the diagnosis to Joel in a way that would be meaningful for him and easy to understand. The result was *Pictures of Me*, first piloted with the Hunts early in 1996. The author expresses sincere appreciation to the Hunts for their permission to share Joel's completed workbook as a sample in this article.

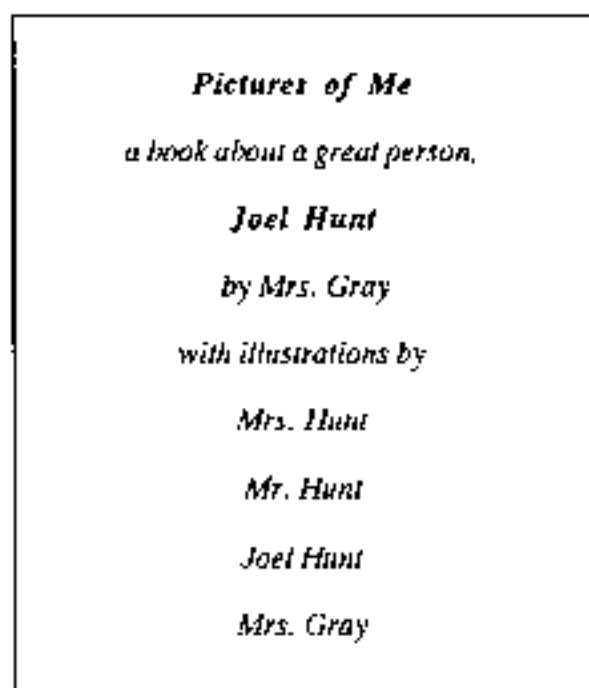
Pictures of Me is reviewed by the parents prior to meeting with the child so that the story may be revised and individualized for the student. Creative additions to the story can improve it's effectiveness. For example, parents may choose to add personalized explanations to the story similar to those offered by Ellen Tanis and Debi Donaldson in the following article. In addition, modifications may need to be made to ensure that the story accurately describes a student's family, for example, in cases of divorce, single parent families, or foster families. This article and sample *Pictures of Me* social story shares a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, with minor modifications the story could be tailored for students with high functioning autism as well.

Completing *Pictures of Me* requires a relaxed and quiet environment. The workbook takes up to two hours to complete, and may require a few break sessions. A time of day that is likely to be free of interruptions, for example, early evening at an office or school, or during the day at the

student's home, is suggested. The student is encouraged to select a favorite activity and treat that can be shared during break times. Phil, Kathi, and Joel Hunt met with this author in an office at Jenison High School.

The Pictures of Me Social Story

The Title Page: As mentioned earlier, the *Pictures of Me* social story directs the activities of the participants. *Pictures of Me* opens with a title page that introduces the student and those who will be helping complete the workbook:



Page 1: The first page of the story contains two large, side by side, blank vertical boxes. These are frames for pictures that are drawn by the parents. Under these frames, are titles for the pictures that will be drawn in the frames. For the Hunts the frames were titled *My Son, Joel, by Mrs. Hunt* and *My Son, Joel, by Mr. Hunt*.. This page is often assigned as homework for the parents, to be completed at another time. This usually is not a problem: students often enjoy seeing homework assigned to their parents! Directions for completion of these first drawings by the parents are included in the opening text:

My name is Joel. I am a wonderful person. Many people think I'm pretty neat, including my Mom and Dad. Above, they have drawn their pictures of me. Mom drew the one on the left, Dad drew the picture on the right. This is how they think I look on the outside (p.1).

Page 2: This author believes it's important to attribute personal traits to personality and talent to keep Asperger's Syndrome in perspective. In general, attributing personal traits first to personality, personal preference, or a student's age may be a helpful rule of thumb. A student's disability ends up playing a smaller role when it is perceived as one of several factors that may explain a given trait or behavior (Gray, 1996).

The second page introduces a student to his/her personality and talents with the completion of two lists. These lists are completed with everyone working together. The student decides who will serve as "secretary". In this case, Joel volunteered to record the lists of his personality traits and talents:

I have a personality.

All people have personalities. On the inside, I have a personality. Personality can be a hard thing to explain. I have a wonderful personality. My Mom, my Dad, Mrs. Gray, and I tried to think of words to describe my personality. Here is our list:

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. <u>I LIKE</u> | YOSH ³ | 3. <u>Happy</u> |
| 2. <u>Friendly</u> | | 6. <u>Fun</u> |
| 3. <u>Good Brother</u> | | 7. <u>out-going</u> |
| 4. <u>WEATHER</u> | | 8. <u>nice</u> |
| | | 9. <u>enthusiastic</u> |

I have talent.

All people have talents. On the inside, I have talent. Talents are a little easier to explain than personalities. Some people can dance and sing. Some people can draw great pictures. Some people have wonderful memories, or school work is very easy for them. I have talents, too. My Mom, Dad, Mrs. Gray, and I tried to think of words to describe my talents. Here is our list:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. <u>INTELLIGENT</u> | 4. <u>IMAGINATION</u> |
| 2. <u>ACTOR</u> | 5. _____ |
| 3. <u>NINTENDO PLAYER</u> | 6. _____ (p. 2) |

Pages 3, 4, 5, and 6: The next four pages of the workbook require each person to draw a picture of the student's personality and talents. Joel's drawing of his personality and interests appears on the cover of this issue of THE MORNING NEWS:

This is my Mom's picture of me on the inside. Here you see my personality and talents. It's a work of art. She signed her name to it, just like a great artist (p.3).

This is my Dad's picture of me on the inside. Here you see my personality and talents. It's a work of art. He signed his name to it, just like a great artist (p.4) .

This is Mrs. Gray's picture of me on the inside. Here you see my personality and talents. It's a work of art. She signed her name to it, just like a great artist (p.5).

This is my picture of me on the inside. Here you see my personality and talents. It's a work of art. I signed my name to it, just like a great artist (p.6).

After these pictures are drawn they are shared with the other *Pictures of Me* participants. Each person has the opportunity to describe their drawing, and to explain why they decided to include certain items in their picture. Joel has a real strength in this ability to read, and this author drew Joel reading a book. Mrs. Hunt drew Joel playing *Nintendo*, illustrating his skill at mastering video games. Joel's father used his picture of his son's personality and talents as an opportunity to draw Joel as a hero. Mr. Hunt's picture illustrated how Joel had saved the life of Lexi, Joel's sister, who had swallowed some pennies. In sharing his picture with the other participants, Mr. Hunt proudly shared his gratitude for Joel's quick action and heroism.

Page 7: The seventh page of the workbook introduces the student to his/her diagnosis. Part of that introduction includes a reference to *The Morning News Pen Pal Registry* (Gray, 1995). The registry was developed for people with autistic spectrum disorders as a continually expanding resource for meeting others who share similar interests and experiences. Mentioning the Pen Pal Registry in the story directs the student to others who share the same diagnosis. The registry provides tangible evidence of other people with Asperger's Syndrome: their ages, addresses, interests, and in many cases, photos.

Recognizing the individual nature of the disorder, the description of Asperger's Syndrome is presented as a list that is completed by the participants. This is a list of skills that may be more difficult because of Asperger's Syndrome, although mention is also made of positive aspects of the disorder (Atrwood, 1996). Other information on Asperger's Syndrome is available to the student through the parents, and/or subsequent meetings with the professional.

I have Asperger's Syndrome.

Some people have Asperger's Syndrome. Many of the students in the Pen Pal Registry have Asperger's Syndrome just like I do. Asperger's Syndrome can be a difficult thing to explain. I cannot see Asperger's Syndrome, but I know it is there. Asperger's Syndrome may make some things more difficult for me than for other students. Asperger's Syndrome may make some things easier for me than for other students.

On the inside, I have Asperger's Syndrome. Asperger's Syndrome can be a hard thing to explain. My Mom, my Dad, Mrs. Gray, and I tried to list things that may be more difficult for me because of my Asperger's syndrome. Here is our list:

1. LOOK AT PEOPLE 5. _____
2. STAY ON SUBJECT 6. _____
3. MAKING FRIENDS 7. _____
4. UNDERSTANDING OTHERS 8. _____

All people have difficulty with these things as they grow up. I may have more difficulty with these things than most people because I have Asperger's Syndrome (p. 7).

The last drawing in the *Pictures of Me* workbook is completed by the student with Asperger's Syndrome. This picture illustrates several personal traits, including personality, interests, and the diagnosis:

This is a complete picture of me on the inside. I have drawn pictures of my personality, my talents, my interests, my likes and dislikes, and my Asperger's Syndrome. I have signed my name to my drawing like a great artist (p.8).

Page 8: On the last page of the story the student is reminded of his/her support system: the people who will continue to assist the student in the future, and how they will help. Applying theory of mind information (Baron-Cohen, 1995), this page explains what adults know, mentioning who has information about Asperger's Syndrome and growing up, and how that information can be accessed. In addition, the feelings the parents and professionals have for the student are expressed in writing. Mrs. Anderson, mentioned on this page, is Joel's speech therapist.

My Mom and Dad love me very much. They can help me develop my wonderful personality. They will help me develop my talents and interests.

They can also help me with the things that are more difficult for me. Some of the things that are difficult for me will be difficult because I am growing up. All people have some difficult times growing up.

They can also help me with the things that are difficult for me because of Asperger's Syndrome. Mrs. Gray, Mrs. Anderson, and my teachers will help me, too. They know how to help me learn to develop my personality and my talents. They know about Asperger's Syndrome, too.

I might have questions about Asperger's Syndrome. That's where Mrs. Gray will help me. She knows all about students and growing up. She was once a student, and she grew up, and she knows it was sometimes difficult - and sometimes easy. She also knows about Asperger's Syndrome. Whenever my parents or I have questions about Asperger's Syndrome, we can ask Mrs. Gray.

Mrs. Gray likes me very much. She thinks I have a great personality and a lot of talent. She feels very lucky to know me (p.9).

Pictures of Me defines the starting point for a gradual process of self discovery that requires continuing guidance and assistance from parents and professionals. The *Pictures of Me* social story, workbook, and activities are only a beginning. Follow up activities are currently being developed. In the meantime, parents and professionals are encouraged to provide opportunities for questions and discussions as a student considers and applies personal information.

In summary, *Pictures of Me* is a social story that guides a series of workbook style activities. The goal is to successfully introduce a student to his/her diagnosis, personality, and talents. Activities are completed by the student, parents, and a professional, and involve the collective completion of lists and drawings. The end result is an individualized, illustrated social story that introduces a student to his/her diagnosis, while at the same time keeping that information in perspective among other positive personality traits and talents.

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Baron - Cohen, S. (1996). *Mindblindness*. The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge.

Gray, C.A. (1996). How big is autism? Honey, I shrunk the syndrome. *The Morning News*, Jenison Public Schools, spring 1996.

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How to Make a "Pictures of Me" Workbook

To make the social story, *Pictures of Me*, into a workbook, follow these simple instructions:

You will need:

- a 1" 3 ring binder, clear vue cover, with pockets
- a set of fine line markers
- a photo of the student

It's nice if:

- you have a computer
- you print the story on heavy paper (card stock)

1. Make a cover for the workbook. The student may want to make the cover. The clear vue cover protects a variety of items that may be chosen to decorate the cover. Photos, drawings, items of interest, etc.. Be creative!
2. Type the social story, *Pictures of Me*, from the preceding article. Be careful to type the text on each page according to directions in the article. Make modifications to individualize the story to match the student's family and ability level. Other additions may be made to personalize the story, and this may add additional pages.
3. Save the story on your computer to use at a later date with other students.
4. If possible, print the story on card stock. If the printer for your computer does not handle card stock, any quick print facility can make a copy of the story on card stock for you. **IMPORTANT:** Print the story on ONE SIDE ONLY of each piece of white card stock. This will allow participants to draw their pictures simultaneously.
5. Punch holes to match the three ring notebook in the left margin of each page. Insert the story into the notebook and place a set of fine line markers in the pocket.
6. General directions for implementing a *Pictures of Me* session are included in the preceding article.
7. Share your experiences using *Pictures of Me* by writing to THE MORNING NEWS! We would love to hear from you!

Ideas from Parents of Children with Asperger's Syndrome

- Ellen Tanis and Debi Donaldson



Ellen Tanis and son Wesley about ten years ago!

- Ellen Tanis

Is your brain a computer formatted to ASOS or POS? Ask my son Wesley and he can tell you that he is ASOS and his mom is only POS, but she is learning to adapt to an ASOS format.

Wesley is a very intelligent young man, just starting the sixth grade. He has known for a long time that he understands things differently than the other children around him. When he was told the reason was specifically Asperger's Syndrome, that really raised more questions in his mind than it answered. My husband and I had been searching for months for an accurate and positive explanation to help him understand his diagnosis. After talking about it for some time I realized that Wes' perception was keyed on the word "Syndrome" and that indicated to him some sort of sickness or disease. I wanted to assure him that he was not diseased. I explained that this syndrome doesn't get worse and then go away like a cold or flu. It is just another way or format some people use for processing information.

Wes loves anything to do with a computer. He reads and talks about them constantly. "Do you have a computer? PC or Apple? What's your RAM capacity? Do you have a quad speed CD-ROM drive? How about your operating system, is it a DOS compatible? Is it

expanded memory?" These are important questions to my son. In a moment of inspiration I said that maybe his Asperger's Syndrome is like having a different operating system in your personal computer. If you plug a DOS formatted disc into a Macintosh computer you will only get jumbled information, no usable data can be retrieved. I suggested that since he learns about things differently than I do and differently from most of the rest of the children in his classroom, perhaps he has an ASOS (Asperger's Syndrome Operating System) and we only have a POS (Plain Operating System). There is nothing wrong with either system, they just process information differently. As a matter of fact, his system seems to pick up on a lot of information that mine misses.

This really seemed to click with Wes. Not only did he understand the difference, he also saw that he is not a diseased kid but a wonderful "custom made" kid. This was a great boost to his self-esteem and has already increased his confidence regarding his scholastic challenges for the coming year. Now I am working on expanded ways to interface our operating systems so I can maximize interaction with my ASOS kid through my limited POS mom programming.

-Debi Donaldson

As the parent of a child with Asperger Disorder, it is often difficult to explain to family, friends, professionals and acquaintances just what this disability is all about. I use a word picture to illustrate to them how this "invisible" disability manifests itself in my daughter.

I explain to them that when Emily's computer was built, for some reason her hard drive lacked the programming necessary for acquiring social skills and that no software had been loaded into her computer to aid her. Now that we have the diagnosis, we along with several professionals are in the process of providing her with this software so that she can become more proficient in the art of socialization. For us it has been the key to understanding for those unfamiliar with this disorder.