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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PEN

By Nagla Moussa

Recently I've had the privilege and the pleasure of meeting several young children with autism and their families. Watching them interact, I was struck by one common factor. Most of the parents who I met were very serious about helping their children and extending their education beyond the school day. This made me think about the impression that parents impart to their children, the parent/child relationship, the sibling relationships, and the child's self-esteem.

Please don't get me wrong, I was thrilled and excited to see the level of involvement these parents had with their children! Despite many of them working full time and taking care of siblings, and everyday chores, they seemed to put their child's needs for learning ahead of everything, and they put in a heroic effort to teach their children.

What I was thinking about is how does that child feel being in a constant learning environment? Does that affect the child's view of themselves when their primary relationship with their parents is that of teacher and student?

It also brought back memories of my son and how hard I pushed him and how much he pushed back when he was at school. We studied every night for at least 3 hours after school in order to catch up with all the unfinished school work and homework. There was barely enough time for my son to have dinner, take a bath and just breathe! I think if I had to do it over again I would still push very hard, but I would also make some time every day for my son to have fun, relax and do something he enjoys that is not necessarily educational. I might have made it clearer to him that I love him just as he is, and I think he hung the moon just by doing 6 math problems!

Another consideration is family dynamics, siblings, and maintaining a healthy marriage. Spending time feeding your marriage, giving attention to siblings, and caring for yourself can only benefit your child. Sometimes we have to be intentional about carving time out especially for ourselves. We feel guilty, but what we don't realize is we will be better parents and better teachers if we take care of ourselves.

It's a fine line a parent of a child with a disability has to walk between accepting their child as they are and making sure they are always learning and progressing. Parents feel the urgent need to catch their child up developmentally, they worry about their future and they want them to learn and be independent. Maybe considering fun time as a learning experience as well will ease some of the urge to always practice academics.

MONTHLY SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

Parent Get Together and Support Group Meeting

For parents of children with autism of all ages:

When: 2nd Tuesday of each month, 9:30a.m.-11:00a.m. (**Original Pancake House**, 2301 North Central Expwy #156, Plano, TX 75075)

3rd Tuesday of each month, 11:30a.m. - 1:00p.m. (**Corner Bakery 2401 Preston Rd A**, Plano, TX (In the Whole Foods Market Parking lot).

March 3rd, 2018 7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. (St. Andrew UMC, 1401 Mira Vista Blvd. Plano, TX 75093).

Spanish Parent Get Together and Support Group Meeting

N Grupo de Apoyo Para Padres en Español

Fechas de las reuniones: 3 de Febrero, 3 de Marzo, 7 de Abril, 5 de Mayo

Cuando: El primer Sábado del mes

Donde: The Hill Community Center

2121 Bay Hill Dr.

Plano, TX 75023

Hora: 4:00pm-5:30pm

******No habrá guardería para niños pero pueden traerlos.*** Por favor contáctenos si necesitan más información o ayuda para encontrar el edificio. **July Talavera Bekker** (214) 802-5767 (cell)

Self-Advocacy Group

For Teens (7th Grade and up) & Adults with Autism Participants will learn about autism and its effect on their lives, while developing a great appreciation for their individual gifts and talents. It is important that participants know they have autism. Trained volunteers, including some with autism, facilitate this group. Bring an object, book, picture or other item that represents your talents and interests, \$5.00 to pay for pizza, snacks and drinks.

When : 1st Tuesday of each month, during the school year, at 7:00 pm

Where : St. Andrew UMC, 1401 Mira Vista Blvd. Plano, TX 75093. Please check in at the Theater room upstairs on the 2nd floor),

Sibshop Group

Siblings ages 6 to 10 years old will have a fun time with activities, snacks and friends who share their same experience of having a brother or a sister with ASD

Cost : \$5 per child

When: February 3, March 3, April 7, May 5 2018 4pm – 5:30 pm

Where: 2121 Bay Hill Dr. , Plano, TX 75023 (**Please note our new venue!**)

Hosted by : Rose Henke . To register and request scholarship email :Rosehenke@yahoo.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Teacher Appreciation Dinner

When: Tuesday, April 3rd , 2019 (7-9pm)

Where: Glen Eagles Country Club, 5401 W Park Blvd, Plano, TX 75093

Celebrate your child's achievements and milestones with all those teachers, therapists and caregivers who contribute to their success. Parents have the opportunity to show their appreciation through an evening of dinner and raffle prizes. Visit our website or like us on Facebook for more updates on this event!

ABA and Behavior Therapy Panel

Experienced BCBA therapists in the metroplex will get together on a panel to offer their insights on some of the most important challenges, especially with behaviors, that our kids face!

When: Tuesday, May 1st, 2018 (7:00pm - 8:00pm)

Where: St. Andrew UMC, 1401 Mira Vista Blvd. Plano, TX 75093

PARENT RESOURCE PACKET

Looking for an autism friendly pediatrician, dentist, private school, hair salon, attorney , therapy providers for speech, OT, ABA, or just about any services that make your child lives easier?

Email Nagla Moussa at nagla_alvin@verizon.net for a comprehensive parent resource packet. It's invaluable!

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR SPONSORS

St. Andrew United Methodist Church

Concept Connections-Jenny Keese

Junior League of Collin County

The Behavior Exchange - Tammy Cline-Soza

Gordon Biersch Restaurant/Kraft Works Corporation

Region 10 Educational Service Center

RBC Wealth Management (Plano)

Therapy and Beyond - Regina Crone Ph.D

Help, Hope, Solutions – Cristina Busu

COMMUNITY EVENTS

NAA-NT hosted its annual holiday party on Dec 16th, 2017. About 150 family members enjoyed a holiday lunch with their kids, who also had pictures taken with Santa in a stress-free environment, a bounce house, music corner and arts corner with the support of an aide.



Our special thanks to the sponsors:

Therapy and Beyond, <<http://www.myteachme.com/>> <http://www.myteachme.com/>
Jr. League of Collin County, <<http://www.jlcollincounty.org/>> <http://www.jlcollincounty.org/>
Sound Starts Music Therapy, <https://soundstartsmusic.com/>
Jesse 'Santa' Latham

SENSORY FRIENDLY IN THE CITY

Plano Parks and Recreation Center offers various programs for the special needs community at their libraries:

Sensory Backpacks are available for check-out featuring books, manipulative, activity guides, and more. Engage your child in learning about-

- Self regulation, Yoga/focus, Conversation, Community Helpers, Community Neighborhood, Daily Living and the Library.

Sensory Story time (ages 3 & up):

An interactive, inclusive story time ideal for children with special needs such as ASD, sensory integration challenges and short attention spans. Activities are designed to stimulate the senses and promote learning — read books, sing songs, move around and have fun. Visit the children's desk at any of the Plano libraries or email sensorystorytime@plano.gov for more info and to check availability.

Sensory Saturdays (all ages):

Plano libraries offer art, music and other sensory learning activities geared to children with ASD.

Crayola Experience is set to open a one-of-its-kind store at the Willow Bend mall in Spring 2018. Look out for details about Sensory Time on Sundays, where children with ASD can enjoy their own time in a less stimulating environment especially geared towards their needs.

Dallas Zoo

April 15, 2018
8 a.m. – 11 a.m.

The Dallas Zoo welcomes individuals with autism, their families, and others who may benefit from a sensory-friendly experience. Modifications around the Zoo will include sound adjustments and quiet zones to create an enjoyable environment for the whole family. In addition families will be provided with social stories and parent tips prior to the event. Special activities will include a sensory activity tour featuring primates, reptiles, and invertebrates with special animal encounters.

Myia Kuykendall

What do those words make you picture? Using Visualization to Support Your Child's Comprehension

Think about the last time you were lucky enough to read a book that kept you up way past bedtime. Regardless of whether it was Harry Potter, Stephen King, or Fifty Shades of Grey, you were engaged because the author's words prompted you to visualize - to make a movie in your head as you read. You wanted to keep reading because the movie was so interesting. That ability to visualize is driven by an underlying sensory-cognitive process called concept imagery.

As a private tutor who works with children with different types of learning challenges, I regularly take calls from parents whose children struggle with comprehension. Many of these calls come from parents of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Often these children decode very well but their ability to visualize the author's words is impacted by a weakness in concept imagery, which also impairs the child's oral language comprehension. Parents tell me that it is as if information "goes in one ear and out the other".

When a child struggles to comprehend, he or she has a tendency to dislike reading because it becomes a passive activity rather than something the student finds engaging. Strengthening concept imagery by teaching these children how to visualize is an effective technique to improve both reading and oral language comprehension as well as vocabulary, critical thinking skills, ability to follow oral directions, and even expressive language skills.

There are several things parents can do to utilize visualization as a way to strengthen a child's concept imagery and support comprehension.

- **Develop the concept of visualization.**

- Use a character that you and your child are **familiar** with and ask him to close his eyes and make a picture of the character in his imagination. Ask him to describe what the character looks like.
- Question him for **descriptive details** such as size, color, shape, background, etc. Use questions that stimulate imagery - ask "what do you picture for the color of Minnie Mouse's dress?" or "what do you see for the shape of her ears?" rather than questions that can be answered with a yes or no response.
- This may not be a skill your child can do independently so your questions should help to **guide him in verbalizing the image**. If needed, do this activity multiple times over the course of several days in order to build independence. If your child has difficulty creating or verbalizing an image, you can further

WHAT DO THESE WORDS MAKE YOU PICTURE?

guide his imagery by asking choice/contrast questions. You can also model an image by saying something like, “I see that Minnie Mouse wears a large pink bow on her head”.

- **Develop visualization of short sentences and paragraphs.**

- Once your child can **create and verbalize a mental image** to match a character, you can expand the exercise to sentences and eventually paragraphs. Read a short descriptive sentence. For example, “The small gray koala bear sat high in the tree eating green leaves”. Follow up by asking “what do those words make you picture?” Using language such as “what do you picture...?” or “what do you see...?” directly stimulates concept imagery.
- Ask again for **descriptive details** such as shape, color, size, background, etc. Make sure your questions are specific. Ask “what do you picture for the shape of the leaves” or “what do you see for the size of the tree?” rather than “tell me what you see for the tree.” Practice this task until the child can consistently verbalize an image that matches the sentence with just a few clarification questions from you.
- You can then **expand on this task** by reading and visualizing chunks of 2-3 sentences at a time and eventually larger chunks of 4-6 sentences or a whole paragraph. With these larger chunks and paragraphs, guide your child to focus on imagery that helps to support the whole picture instead of just the parts.

- **Apply visualization to textbooks, novels, and worksheets.**

- After your child has demonstrated that he can create and verbalize a mental image to match a chunk of sentences or a whole paragraph, you can apply the visualization skill to homework and novels.
- Read a section from a workbook or textbook and ask your child to verbalize the most important points. When reading a novel ask your child to **verbalize his images for the characters, setting, or for the major plot points.**
- Take advantage of **images provided in the text** by asking your child to look at the image for one minute then have him close the book and tell you what he pictured in the image. Question for details to make sure your child has locked this image into his visual imagery. If he has difficulty, you can look at the image with him and talk about what you see together. Then close the book and ask again what he pictured. This technique works especially well for history and science content.

- **Apply visualization to vocabulary.**

- Concept imagery is critical in the acquisition of new vocabulary words. Children can be taught to attach meaning to words through imagery, rather than teaching them to memorize a definition.
- Do a Picture Snapshot for concrete words and applicable abstract concepts. Pull up a photograph or video online or a detailed drawing from a book. Ask your child to look at it for about one minute, then

WHAT DO THESE WORDS MAKE YOU PICTURE?

take the image away and ask your child, “what did you see for (the new word)?”. Ask again for details like size, shape, color, etc and make sure to continue to ask questions that stimulate imagery. Check for retention a few days later by asking the child to tell you again what he pictured for the new word.

- For words that the child learns from context, present the word in a sentence and follow up by asking, “what did those words make you picture?”. Question for imagery. Depending on the vocabulary word, your questions may focus on details (for actions or objects, for example) or on the big picture (for concepts or feelings, for example). Finish by asking the child to create a definition of the word and use the word in an original sentence.
- Make a Visual Vocab Flash Card for new words. Write the word on the front of an index card. On the back of the card, draw a line down the middle. Have the child write the definition he created on the left and his original sentence on the right. Leave a blank for the word so that he can use the cards to practice the new words.

Some children will be able to create and verbalize mental images with little instruction or prompting from parents. Others will have more difficulty due to the severity of their underlying concept imagery weakness. These children require more intensive and direct instruction than parents may be able to provide. Tutors trained in a multi-sensory program that teaches children how to visualize may be required to provide the supplemental instruction that your child needs.

Improving the child’s ability to visualize will improve his ability to learn new information. The child will benefit from instruction in this area not only when he is reading books but also when he is exposed to information in class and in conversation with adults and peers. Learning how to use visualization to process information also aids in expressive language skills as the child learns that his words create imagery for other people.

Reference:

Bell, Nanci. (2007). *Visualizing and Verbalizing for Language Comprehension and Thinking*. San Luis Obispo, CA: Gander Publishing.

Myia Kuykendall is the founder of Read Texas Tutoring. Read Texas Tutoring provides specialized in-home instruction for students with difficulty in reading, spelling, comprehension, expressive language, and math. Read Texas tutors are trained in research-based multi sensory programs and experienced in working with students diagnosed with learning challenges ranging from dyslexia and ADD/ADHD to students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders, as well as those struggling without a diagnosis. Myia can be reached at at 972.922.2536 – info@readtexas.com.

Archana Dhurka

Generally speaking, the two most important transitions for children with Autism occur when the student enters school for the first time and when the student moves on to a new grade level or to a new school placement entirely.

Leaving an ABA program to enter a more formal educational system represents a major transition for every parent and child. There will be different challenges, the environment or the setting is different and a new relationship is formed. This is a stressful situation for a parent but it actually represents an opportunity for learning, engaging with typical peers, building new relationship with peers and teachers.

Some of the things that we, as parents, need to ensure a successful transition are:

- Talk to the teacher about how the day is structured
- Talk about a seating assignment for your child, maybe close to the teacher
- If your child will require an aide, how the aide should blend in the classroom helping other children too (once in a while) and how to fade the presence of an aide.
- Talk to the principal and take a tour of the classroom and school. Take lots of pictures so you can make a social story or explain with visuals so your child is less anxious.
- Take a tour of the playground and again, lots of pictures.
- Prepare a page (with bullet points because it is easier to read) about your child's strengths, challenges, likes, dislikes, supports (token system?) and specific strategies that has worked for your child.
- An ARD/IEP meeting will be scheduled to discuss your child's needs and goals. Make sure you take all the important people in your child's life to that meeting. Be prepared. Ask for a daily communication report that goes back and forth from home and school (for example: you can mention to your teacher if your child did not sleep well). Ask for any assignments /lesson plans to be sent to you before hand so you can work on it at home.
- Volunteer to provide training on ASD to staff and other students. Spread awareness.
- Tell the school staff that you want a positive experience
- Tell the school staff that the transition should be productive for your child and everyone involved.
- Invite the teacher/staff at school to observe your child at the ABA clinic.
- Most importantly, keep a positive attitude. Everyone wants a successful transition.

Archana Dhurka is mom to Ankush, 18 years old with ASD. She is also a BCBA. She can be reached at adhurka@gmail.com.

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DO YOU HAVE A CHILD THAT WANDERS?



Keep your
child safe!

The National Autism Association's Big Red Safety Box is back in stock! If you have a child that wanders or know one that wanders, please click on this link <http://nationalautismassociation.org/big-red-safety-boxes-now-available> to learn how you can get this box with tools to help keep children with autism safe.

BUYING OR SELLING A HOUSE?

We are excited to have the generous support of a real estate agent, Kirk Iverson! Kirk will donate 25% of net proceeds directly to NAA-NT anytime someone buys or sells a home and mentions NAA-NT as a referral.

Check out his page <https://www.facebook.com/kirk.iverson.942?ref=ts> or <http://BuyHousesSellHomes.KWRealty.com>

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