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By Nagla Moussa

I started writing this article like I do most years around this time about the approach of the summer season and the resources, camps and opportunities available for our children during the summer. Somehow a post I recently read on Facebook kept nagging at me and I just couldn't forget about it.

This post was from a mother who sounded very distraught and not in a "tomorrow will be a better day" type of way. She sounded desperate. She asked (and I am rephrasing) what do you do when you can't afford any more therapy, your children are not well and need the help badly, you are in tremendous debt to the point where collection agencies are calling you daily and you can't even pay for medication refills. Mom said she was depressed, tired and has no help.

My heart sank when I read this. I worried about the mother, I worried about the children. How will they manage with no therapy and no medication? Do they have enough to eat? I wanted to run over to mom and hug her and say, "it's okay, there is a solution, don't despair".

What do you do in a situation like this? How do you dig yourself out of this deep hole?

-First thing is to reach out (and I am so glad this mom did).

-Begin with going to a financial counselor like Consumer Credit Counseling and have them work out a payment plan to stop the collection agencies from calling (they contact your creditors, try to reduce the debt and work on smaller monthly payments).

-Next you reach out to family and friends or to your church to see if they can help temporarily so you can refill your medication prescriptions and have food on the table. Research emergency grants and scholarships like United Health Care Children's Foundation, NAA, Generation Rescue grants or NAA-NT scholarship.

-Most importantly don't isolate yourself and (I say it again) **REACH OUT** to people, to friends, to family to agencies and foundations for help. Having one or two children with ASD is lonely, it's expensive, and it can drain you emotionally. Please don't get to the point of despair and terrible depression. We have a wonderful community of families who will wrap their arms around you and help as much as they can with resources, emotional support, warmth, and most importantly non-judgmental understanding.

I will be thinking about this mom and all of our families and children daily. Life can be very difficult with autism in the mix, but we can all "get by with a little help from our friends".

NAA-NT 2015 Teacher Appreciation Dinner

The NAA-NT likes to celebrate Autism Awareness Month every year by honoring the teachers and therapists that take extra special care of our kids. Parents invite their chosen guests to join us for a fun time of eating, chatting and celebrating the progress our kids have made. Mark your calendar for the first Tuesday in April 2016 to join us!



Angel Award Winner: Kenneth Kellam III

Our angel was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome in his late 30's, he has overcome many obstacles to finish high school and in 1987 he successfully graduated from Oklahoma Christian University with a Bachelors degree in Mass Communication. For the past 12 years, he has worked for the Autism Treatment Center. He is also a dynamic public speaker who has presented numerous times on his experiences with Asperger Syndrome to various organizations, schools and agencies.

Our angel has a beautiful singing voice and has lead the song service at his church since 1988. He has been married to Rachel Chamberland Kellam for 4 years.

He has volunteered for the Autism Society in Dallas and in Collin County for over 10 years, and has lead their Self advocacy programs. He has served on the Autism Society board of directors in Dallas and in Collin County for over 8years. Currently he helps facilitate three different self-advocacy groups that help teach, guide and provide social opportunities for individuals with autism.

When not involved with the autism community, he enjoys playing piano, writing blogs, and spending time with his wife and their cat, Harvey.



Your Stance on Vaccines Doesn't Matter

By Julie Hornok

Your stance on vaccines doesn't matter. And neither does mine. Let me explain.

In response to the recent Measles outbreak in California, Senator Villalba has proposed a bill that will do away with conscientious and religious exemptions for vaccines in Texas. This means unless you are fully vaccinated to the current CDC vaccine schedule, you will not be allowed to attend public school.

Nobody wants the measles, and nobody wants an innocent child with a compromised immune system to get the measles. Think this bill is a good idea? Think deeper and look at the big picture of what this might mean for our community.

My daughter, Lizzie, was diagnosed with autism just days after her second birthday, the kind developmental pediatrician told me, "The only proven therapy for autism is Discrete Trial ABA." She gave me some literature, and I was on my way....sent out into the world to fix my daughter on my own. I was terrified. "Alright", I thought. "I will hire someone and let's get started with this proven therapy!"

About a week after looking into it, I knew this type of therapy did not fit my daughter's learning style. She needed a more play-based ABA. My heart was torn, and I spent hours and hours going through the pro's and con's of each therapy. The only pro for the discrete trial ABA was that it was proven and that in itself was very comforting.

I decided to go out on a limb and do the play-based ABA therapy, and wow her language begin to soar. And then I tried some more unproven therapies. We started Sensory Integration through Occupational Therapy, and she slowly became more comfortable in her own body. We put her on a gluten free, casein free diet, and her snotty nose that she had for years disappeared. We treated her gut for yeast, supplemented with vitamins and minerals, treated for heavy metals, and she began to sleep through the night and became more aware of her surroundings. We then switched to Floortime Therapy and soon after, tears streamed down my face because my daughter looked me directly in the eye all on her own. Soon she became engaged in our world, and now she is happily mainstreamed in school with lots of friends, in advanced gymnastics classes, and a true passion for life! Now each of those therapies are proven to work for autism in my home!

Sure, we did some other unproven therapies that didn't work as well, but wasn't it my right to try what I thought was best for my daughter? I cannot imagine where my daughter would be today if the only intervention we were allowed were the ones that were proven and sanctioned by the government.

Making vaccines mandatory is quite simply taking the power away from the parent. Forcing vaccines is just the first step to parents losing their control over medical care for their children and for themselves. I need to be the one making these decisions for my child. No one knows her better than me. No one cares about her more than I do. If my choices of how I am going to care for her are limited to what the government tells me I can and can't do, then her best interest in no longer looked after.

Believe me, I absolutely hate politics. It turns my stomach to get involved in something so controversial. I believe everyone has a right to their opinion, but when my right to care for my own child is threatened, I have no choice but to act. I need to protect my kids, and I need to protect the future kids that will be diagnosed with autism tomorrow, next month and the years to come to ensure they have the legal right to get the treatment they need.

I urge you, regardless of your stance on vaccines, to get involved in protecting your right to continue to try whatever interventions you see fit to help your child with autism progress.

Get involved. Protect your right to parent. http://capwiz.com/a-champ/issues/alert/?alertid=64072626&queueid=%5Bcapwiz%3Aqueue_id



Do you shop on Amazon?!



Support families with Autism all year round just by doing your normal shopping!

Just click <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/20-8388811> to support the National Autism Association when you purchase at Amazon. Your Amazon prices are the same, and with each purchase, they give money to the NAA-NT!

Thanks for your support!

Do You Know a Child with Autism that Wanders?



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.

Are You Buying or Selling a House?

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

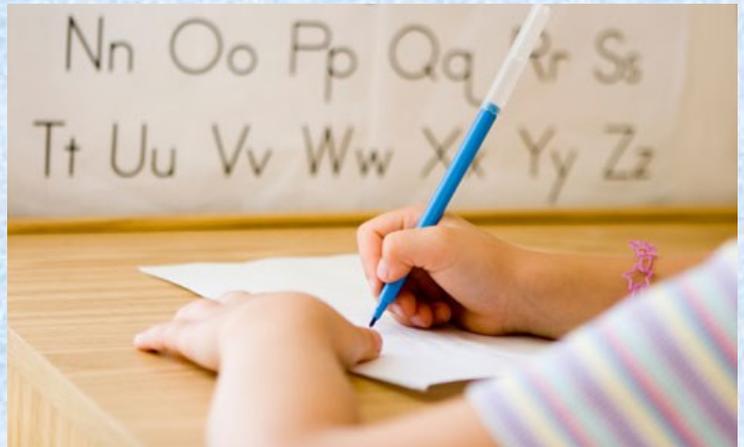
Check out his page <https://www.facebook.com/kirk.iverson.942?fref=ts> or <http://BuyHousesSellHomes.KWRealty.com>



Fine Motor Skills & Handwriting with ASD

By Jan McCleskey, MA, OTR

Fine motor skills is as important as learning the ABC's for students entering Kindergarten! Students with ASD often are delayed in fine motor skills and handwriting. Due to focus and attention, many young students only do fine motor activities such as coloring, drawing or writing when it is teacher, parent or therapist directed. If you are interested in a fine motor program for your child, we have free resource online where you can read about how to start a program! Go to www.TeachersPayTeachers.com and search for "Developing a Fine Motor Program for Children - Article by Jan McCleskey, MA, OTR". This will get you started on a home program of fine motor activities for your child – all from an occupational therapy perspective.



Handwriting comprises many skills – fine motor, visual motor, form constancy, visual attention and awareness of how letters make words. At our clinic, we start children with ASD, on lower case letters first. Sometimes children with ASD have trouble with flexibility, and if upper case letters are taught first, it is very difficult to transition the child to using lower case letters when writing their name, words and sentences. Children who have weak visual attention to writing, often do well with more highly visual activities. One favorite is “punch writing”. Try taking a golf tee, or a corn cob holder (one prong cut off), and having your child punch to trace and copy letters. You can use a mouse pad underneath or craft foam. We group letters by their first stroke – for example, all lower case “circle stroke” letters are taught together. We often hear the students singing “circle stroke o”, or “circle stroke a” as they hear a very consistent way of forming circle letters o,a,d,g,q and c. When searching for a handwriting program for your child – look to minimize the language, and to teach upper and lower case letters separately. Young students just do not have the visual memory skills to learn the starting points (where to place the pencil) for 26 lower and 26 upper case letters when taught at the same time. That is 52 different starting points to remember! Students with ASD also do very well learning to form letters in a vertical plane. Purchase a marker board, a chalkboard, or an easel. An example might be if a therapist tells a child to make “h” as a “tall line down, and a hill”. If the paper is flat on a table, the child is drawing on a horizontal plane. Some students might not understand the direction of “down”. If the student was using a marker board, then “down” really is in a downward plane. For a child with ASD, the verbal cueing and processing sometimes needs to be clear.

Ipads, computers, and swiping smartphones are usually high interest activities for students with ASD. One of the very best phone or IPAD apps, is called “Letter School”. It is highly visual, does not have language or speech in the program, and is superior to most “handwriting” apps. It helps with teaching the sequence of letters.

With enough repetition, in interesting ways, children with ASD often improve fine motor skills, grasp, and handwriting. The key is to do a little every day. Even if you start out with some hand over hand to trace letters, often children will begin to get the motor memory of the letters and will soon become independent in writing letters!

Jane McCleskey is the owner of The Handwriting Clinic in Plano, Tx. Please check out her website www.thehandwritingclinic.com for more tips on handwriting and fine motor skills for kids with autism.



How to get the Most Benefit from Digestive Enzymes

By Devin Houston, Ph.D.

Enzyme supplement use continues to grow in popularity. More people are realizing the importance of a well-maintained gastrointestinal tract and are seeking effective supplements that support gut health. But when faced with which enzyme products to use, the consumer often hits a brick wall. The names of enzymes often don't lend a clue as to their function and the activity units associated with each enzyme are meaningless to most people outside the industry. Listed below are some tips in helping to determine if you need enzymes and which enzyme could help you most.

1. What is your gut telling you?

Everyone seems to have some foods that cause problems. Whether it's lactose intolerance from eating dairy, problems with wheat, or just general gas and bloating, an enzyme may help but you have to know which enzyme works with each food type.

Lactase is the enzyme needed for lactose intolerance and does a great job in alleviating the cramps and bloating that can occur after eating that bowl of Rocky Road ice cream.

Gas and bloating often result from incomplete digestion of starchy foods. Gut bacteria begin feeding on the leftovers and then produce copious amounts of gas as their population rises. Enzymes that specialize in breaking down carbohydrates, such as amylase and glucoamylase, can help keep the gut clear of undigested starches.

Non-celiac gluten intolerance is on the rise. Gluten is a protein and requires protease enzymes to be broken down. However, gluten is especially difficult for our own digestive enzymes to break down. A combination of plant-based proteases is most useful for dealing with this obstinate protein. Look for an enzyme called **DPP-IV** in combination with other proteases to help gluten break down.

2. Can enzymes be used as an alternative to diets such as the Gluten-Free/Casein-Free Diet?

Wheat and dairy proteins often cause gut problems for many, including children on the autism spectrum. For these children, restriction of wheat and dairy products often produce benefits in digestive function. While the GF/CF diet can produce great results, it is also difficult for many to use. Protease enzyme combinations can often provide results similar to those seen on the diet. Because the plant-based proteases are active in the stomach, the gluten and casein proteins can be broken down before they can be absorbed in the small intestine. This prevents production of the exorphin peptides that seem to produce problems for many.

3. Which enzyme products are best?

The best product is the one that works for you. It is also difficult to fully educate people in the scope of one short article. The best way to find out which enzymes will work best for you is to find a company that specializes in enzyme formulation and takes the time to understand your specific needs. Houston Enzymes is dedicated to educating consumers about the benefits of enzymes.

Dr. Devin Houston received his Ph.D. in biochemistry from South Alabama School of Medicine. As the CEO of Houston Enzymes, Dr. Houston formulates digestive enzyme products and educates others through workshops, articles, webinars and his website at www.houston-enzymes.com. Contact Dr. Houston at devin.houston@houston-enzymes.com or 866-757-8627.



Upcoming NAA-NT Events

May 5th 2015 7pm to 9pm: Sibling Panel

A panel of smart, funny, loving, and outspoken siblings will share about their families and how they feel about having a sibling with autism, how they deal with uncomfortable situations, and what peers and friends say about their sibling with autism. Join us and bring your children who are siblings to listen to these amazing children and hear what they have to say.

Please RSVP for this meeting by emailing nagla_alvin@verizon.net

St. Andrew United Methodist Church, Room 126, 1401 Mira Vista, Plano, TX 75093

No Meetings: June and July 2015

August 4th 2015: Swim Party

Watch our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/NAANorthTexas?fref=ts> for more details!

Monthly Support Groups

Parents of children of all ages: Meets 3rd Tuesday of each month at 11:30 am—1:00 pm at Corner Bakery (941 N. Central Expy, Plano). Facilitated by Nagla Moussa and Dori Schaefer. - Meets only during the school year.

Parents of younger children: Meets 2nd Tuesday of each month, during the school year, at 8:45-9:45 am at Corner Bakery. Facilitated by Nanci Roessner and Nagla Moussa. - Meets only during the school year.

Self-Advocacy Group (SAG): Meets 1st Tuesday of each month at the same time and location as the NAA-NT's general month meetings. 7:00 pm, @ St. Andrew United Methodist Church, 1401 Mira Vista, Plano, TX 75093 - Meets only during the school year.

Spanish Speaking Support Group: Meets the 1st Saturday of each month from 7:00 - 8:30 pm at St. Mark's Pastoral Center, 1100 West 15th Street, Suite 209, Room 5, Plano. <http://naa-nt-spanish.squarespace.com> - Meets only during the school year.

Please Support Our Sponsors

Speech TX/ Julie Liberman SLP

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Sally Neff, Stella & Dot

Concept Connections- Jenny Keese

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Therapy and Beyond

Plano ISD SAGE Committee





Po Box 261209 Plano, TX 75026-1209 (214) 925-2722
 Tax ID # 20-8388811 <http://naa-nt.org/>

Did you know that

- all the money the NAANT raises goes directly to help families dealing with autism in the North Texas area?
- the NAANT uses donations to educate and serve our community by holding educational seminars?
- the NAANT gives grants to local families for autism treatments?
- the NAANT works with the law enforcement to ensure the safety of our kids?
- the NAANT holds weekly parent support groups?
- the NAANT provides fun events to help families dealing with autism relax?
- the NAANT provides support for autism couples and financial assistance for counseling?
- the NAANT provides a yahoo support group join at: <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/ascc2/>

The national Autism Association of North Texas (NAANT) is a 501C3 chapter of the National Autism Association (NAA). The mission of the National Autism Association is to educate and empower families and individuals affected by autism and other neurological disorders, while advocating for those who cannot fight for their own rights. By donation to NAANT you are helping children and their families who live in our community.

"No person was ever honored for what he received. He was honored for what he gave."
 – Calvin Coolidge

NAA-NT honors each and every one of our contributors that have made all of the above programs possible. It is from what you gave that our families are able to move forward with success.

Donations can be made by check to the PO Box: NAA-NT PO Box 261209 Plano, TX 75026

Or by credit card online at: <http://naa-nt.org.eventbrite.com>

This letter can serve as your tax deductible contribution.

Date: _____ Amount given: _____ Name: _____ email: _____
 Amount: \$10 \$20 \$30 \$40 \$50 other \$_____ Thank you so much!

NAA-NT Board

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Vice-President: Sherry Pearson

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Join Our Fundraisers

Amazon Smile Support families with Autism all year round just by doing your normal shopping!
<http://smile.amazon.com/ch/20-8388811>

Are you buying or selling a house? We are excited to have the support of a generous real estate agent, Kirk Iverson! He will donate 25% of net proceeds directly to NAA-NT anytime anyone buys or sells a home and mentions NAA-NT sent them. Check out his page <https://www.facebook.com/kirk.iverson.942?fref=ts> or <http://BuyHousesSellHomes.KWR Realty.com>

