

AUTISM SOCIETY

Improving the Lives of All Affected by Autism

Nebraska

AUGUST 9, 2011



NEWSGRAM

**Thank you to everyone who came out for our
4th Annual Fire Safety Day!**



Thank you to the exceptional folks with Bellevue Fire Department! This was a fantastic event and once again they put together an amazing experience for our families!



Teacher to Teacher

by **Melissa Trautman, Ms. Ed.,**
Regional Coordinator with the Nebraska Autism Spectrum Disorders Network

Welcome Back Teachers!

As the start of the 2011-2012 school year approaches, it is important to spend a little extra time thinking about your student with an autism spectrum disorder that will be in your classroom. The key to having a successful year is learning about your student's specific needs and putting the appropriate supports in place to address those needs. Here are several activities that you can do that help you start off on the right path.



Learn about the characteristics of autism spectrum disorders. Learning about the characteristics of your student will help you understand how your student thinks and learns. Behaviors that you may encounter over the school year are directly related to the special characteristics of individuals on the spectrum. For example, a student with an autism spectrum disorder may make rude comments, but in reality, it is their lack of theory of mind that causes them to not understand that the comments they are making may hurt other people's feelings.

Get a hold of the student's IEP. Before school starts, you should know the goals your student is working on and the accommodations and modifications they receive. The IEP is what should guide and direct the type of services and programming for your student on the autism spectrum.

Learn about specific strategies or interventions that are being used with your new student. For some students, this may mean learning how to communicate with your student using the Picture Exchange Communication System. For other students, it may mean learning about specific curriculum or type of intervention that is currently being used.

Incorporate visuals into your classroom. Most students on the autism spectrum are visual learners. Posting the daily schedule on the board and then having an individualized schedule for your student will help decrease any anxiety about what is happening next in the classroom. For older students, visuals may mean a copy of the notes on the board or written out instructions of what your students are expected to do.

Talk with the parents of your incoming student about their child's strengths and needs. Find out about your student's strengths inside and outside of school, along with specific needs that you may need to know about. Learning about what your student likes and dislikes will help you create ideas that you can use for reinforcement. Knowing about other activities that your student enjoys can help build rapport at the beginning of school.

Teacher to Teacher (continued)

Evaluate your classroom or environment. After learning about the needs of your incoming student, take a look at your classroom or the environment that the student will be in most of the day. If your student has some sensory or attention issues, then try to figure out a good place in your classroom that the student will not be bothered by the sound of the pencil sharpener or the activity outside the window or doorway. If your student has sensory issues being in crowded area, find a desk or a table on the end of a row or on the side for the student to sit at. Reduce the amount of posters on the wall, objects hanging from the ceiling, and materials around the room if your student is easily distracted.

Think about ways to train peers and staff on specific needs that your student on the autism spectrum may have. Sharing information about the student with their classmates and other staff in the building is important to build understanding and acceptance. Make sure that you get permission from the parents before you talk to classmates and other staff in the building.

Write a letter to the student welcoming him to your classroom and/or school building. Anxiety is common in students on the autism spectrum. Knowing that there are teachers that will support and help during the school day helps reduce anxiety and stress level in students.

Invite the student to tour your classroom and the school building before school starts. The best time to do this is when there are not other kids present, so that the student can get used to the building without worrying about interacting with others. For middle or high school students, this is important so that the student can practice their locker combination and find all of their classes without anxiety or pressure. They may need to practice walking through their daily schedule multiple times before school starts.

Hopefully, after doing some of these activities to prepare yourself, having a student with an autism spectrum disorder in your classroom will be a fun and rewarding experience for yourself, your classroom and your school.



Parent to Parent

By Shawn Neff with the help of various Omaha Support Group families

If you are anything like me these next few weeks are a mixed blessing. The return to school...the return of my sanity...the return of so many more responsibilities...the return to chaos and yet a life that (dare I say) feels more normal. Summer 'busy' is just so different from school year "busy". Ready or not, here we go!

Back to school time is rough for everyone yet for families living with autism it goes to an entirely different dimension. I asked the attendees at the August Support Group meeting here in Omaha to help share some Parent to Parent advice for the return to school. Here are some of their tips.

Get back into a bedtime routine. Gone are the days of letting the bedtime slide. No more "just one more Phineas and Ferb episode" or "just one more battle with Bowser". Let's face it, bedtime is now going to start before the sun has even decided it is time to depart. For many of our kids it takes hours to wind down and each family has to find their own routine that works. Some of you live this routine summer, fall, winter and spring with no exception. Well, the bad news is that for those of you who were fortunate enough to have that reprieve, your time is up! In fact, many of our support group families have been working hard to get their bedtime routines back into place so that they have a few days under their belt before that first day back at school.

Create a morning routine. Have you ever gotten out of bed and then felt like nothing was going right? If so, I imagine you would do anything to crawl back in bed and stay there. For many of our loved ones on the spectrum this is what every day feels like. You can help them bring some calm to the start of their day by helping them create a morning routine. Imagine their stress and anxiety about school and then magnify it by ten after having to rush around the house searching for homework, a backpack and perhaps even a lost shoe.



The goal of waking up with plenty of time to get ready, finding exactly the clothes they want to wear and having a breakfast of their liking is pretty lofty. Our challenge is to set the stage so that they can do it as independently as possible without wearing the same clothes every day and eating the same two foods every meal. Oh, and to accomplish this with as little stress as possible. Veteran parents cautioned though that it is important to not do everything for your loved one. Start with a basic routine and as they master a skill add a new one in the mix.



The best advice from other parents was to pick your battles and do as much as you can the night before!



Parent to Parent (continued)

Focus on growing independence. Forward momentum. That is the ultimate goal. There will always be steps forward and a few shuffles backward but the ultimate goal is forward momentum. Every new school year brings a time of reflection. What is one more thing that they can learn to do for themselves? Perhaps it is time for their very own alarm clock? Maybe it is putting his own shirt on himself or tying her own shoes? As time passes and they master a skill we need to remember to move on to another skill. As children grow up they become more independent. Children with special needs deserve the opportunity to grow too. Maybe it is pouring their own cereal in the morning or even packing their own lunch. Maybe it is simply being accountable for finding their own shoes and backpack in the morning. No matter where your loved one is on the spectrum there is something to focus on to help them expand on their skills of independence. And as a parent it is our job to find ways to empower them and help them grow to be as independent as they can be.

Preparing for the school environment. Continuity is HUGE! One of the hardest things for our kids is to get in the routine of school and then be told they have two months off. Finally they return again but to find a new classroom, new teachers and often a classroom full of new faces.

Some schools will share with you the name for next year's teacher. If you are one of these lucky families than you can spend the summer talking about the new teacher and maybe even looking at her picture (you can get from last year's yearbook or even the school web site). Some teachers will even be willing to exchange emails with your child to help build a rapport over the summer months. This doesn't have to be frequent but just a couple times goes a long way towards helping build a connection with the child. Our family spends a lot of time talking about our teacher so that our son stays familiar even though he hasn't seen her in several weeks. In our world, out of sight equals out of mind. But by talking about her we keep her in our sights.

Some great parent to parent advice has been to keep the school in your summer routine. Make it a priority to go to the school playground over the summer to play on the equipment and talk about which doors they use in the morning and which ones they use at recess. Do anything you can do to keep the school a familiar and comfortable place to them during the summer months.



Your loved one needs some quality time in their new classroom before the first day of school. Most schools host an open house; however, those are over stimulating for everyone (even those without diagnosed sensory issues!) Your son or daughter should make a brief appearance that night but that is not the time to show them around and help them explore their new classroom. Try to schedule a visit with your teacher during a quiet time of the day. Most teachers are there the week prior getting the classroom ready. Check with your teacher and see if you can make a short visit to see the classroom and get acclimated. Your child will benefit greatly from being able to spend some one on one time with you finding his desk, exploring the room, and mapping out that route to the lunchroom and even the bathroom.

Parent to Parent (continued)

Coming Out. To disclose or not to disclose. That is a loaded question! And it is truly a decision the family must make together.

This is a very common discussion at our support group. We have learned from many parents how very powerful this disclosure has been for their loved one. Several of our families have crafted letters to the parents of the other students that explains autism/ aspergers and how it impacts their child. This is often paired with some autism information and a classroom talk to the children about autism. People fear the unknown and many families have found that by removing the “unknown” they have improved the classroom environment. Yes, this is a very scary “coming out party” but family after family has shared how this has truly helped their situation. We just want you to give it some thought. Every situation is different and every year is different.

And for those of you who do disclose, your child is now in a classroom with a bunch of new faces and not all of them will have been there for last year’s talk. Time to pull out your letter and see if you need to make any changes!

Strengthening the team. Send a brief email to the teacher just checking in and offering to help with any issues that may arise. Keep in mind the start of the school year is CRAZY for them. Odds are that you are not the only one clamoring for their time. Keep your message clear and concise and friendly. Now is not the time for a list of demands but rather a friendly message of help. Let them know if you are available to help out in the classroom or maybe by helping plan holiday parties. Either way, the goal is to let them know that you understand that they have many demands on their time and that you want to be there to help any way you can and that you want to help strengthen the team!

Many of our families send a short letter to their teachers every year sharing the strengths of their loved one as well as giving a heads up on those magical reinforcers that mean the difference between compliance and non-compliance. Providing the teacher with concise, helpful, up to date information about the child creates a win for everyone. By sharing this information you reduce the learning curve for the teacher thus making everything better for the child, teacher and the parents!

These are just a few items from a parent to parent perspective to help you prepare for this transition back into the classroom. Before you know it you’ll be back in the swing of things and settling into your new routines. Please come join us on the [Autism Society’s Yahoo Group](#) and share your back to school stories or questions. Good luck and remember we are out there if you want to chat!

Easter Seals Nebraska Family Fun Fest Kickball Tournament

Who: Easter Seals Nebraska Friends & Family
What: Easter Seals Nebraska's Family Fun Fest 2011
When: Saturday, August 27, 2011
Where: ALLPLAY Sports Complex, 72nd and Harrison

[Visit Easter Seals Nebraska for more information.](#)

OMAHA: Council for Exceptional Children—ART INSPIRES

Save the Date! Saturday, August 27, 2011 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

A Free adapted art workshop for youth and families

University of Nebraska - Omaha PEP Bowl 6001 Dodge Street

Download a flyer [HERE](#).

LINCOLN: Special Needs Fishing Clinic

This is a special clinic for special youth and young adults that need a smaller and more hands on experience at fishing. The Nebraska Walleye Association puts these clinics on all over the state of Nebraska. This year we are partnering with O.N.E. (Organizations Networking for Everyone) Coalition. We've made this clinic smaller in size (max of 50) to give special youth and young adults a chance to tryout fishing. No rods or reels are needed. We will provide a short lunch, instructional training (about 1 hour), fishing gear, bait and assistance with fishing. All that you need are your children and a lawn chair. Brothers and sisters are welcome but please sign them up at the same time. We will check the kids in starting at 11:30 AM at Holmes Lake, August 27th.

To sign up, email Vicki at vdepenbusch@msn.com.

http://www.nebraskawalleye.com/html/clinic_pages/2011_lincoln_special_kids.pdf

OMAHA: Little Leaf Learning Center

Little Leaf Learning Center has been created to help students with disabilities reach their full academic potential by providing early academic, social, and life skill interventions for students 18 months to 6 years. Tutoring services for school aged students in cooperation with their school districts are also available.

Preschool services are available for 1-3 hours per day and up to five days per week. Available services include instruction in the areas of life skills, social skills, math, and literacy.

Tutoring services for school aged students are available during the evening hours . Learn more by visiting mylittleleaf.org

LINCOLN: Art Planet offers classes for special students

Children with special needs often have trouble expressing themselves, but one form of communication can help transcend all barriers – art. A new kids’ art studio opening in Lincoln aims to nurture the creative spirits of special-needs children, and along the way help them gain confidence, develop social skills, and of course create their very own works of art.

The studio, Art Planet, is the creation of artist and educator Tamara Weber, who got the idea while talking with a parent of a child who has Asperger’s syndrome. “There just aren’t a lot of creative programs in Lincoln that are geared towards children who have special needs, such as those on the autism spectrum,” says Weber, who has a Master of Education in Special Education and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. “Art Planet is a place where these students can explore the creative universe in a way that’s developmentally appropriate and also a lot of fun.”

Learn more at www.artplanetlincoln.com and specifically learn about their special needs classes [HERE](#).

OMAHA: Little Leaf Learning Center Presents ‘Game Night’

Starting Friday, September 9, 2011

6:00 pm—8:00 pm

\$10 per week

Game Night will focus on one social skill per Game Night and practicing that skill through games and social interaction.

Register online at www.mylittleleaf.org/game-night or by phone to Kim Yaeger at 402-515-7234. Please register by Thursday, September 1, 2011

OMAHA: Bellevue TOPSOCCER Fall Registration

Registration is now open for the Fall 2011 TOPSoccer season.

Bellevue TOPSoccer is a co-ed soccer league for children, teens and young adults with special needs. A player does not have to be a resident of Bellevue to play in this league. They have players from all over the Metro area and surrounding Sarpy County, Cass County and Council Bluffs areas.

Their goal is to enable young athletes with mental and physical disabilities to develop their physical fitness, technical skills, courage and self-esteem, through the joy and excitement of playing soccer.



TOPSoccer groups players by ability (we are proud to offer a unified league for our more advanced and competitive players) so that the best possible experience is available for our players. Players wear soccer uniforms, play on soccer fields with nets/goals and Soccer Buddies are available for players that need assistance.

This league plays in both the Spring and the Fall. They meet one time a week on Sunday afternoon, practice 30 minutes followed by a 30 minute game.

OMAHA: ALLPLAY'S Miracle League Baseball Fall Registration

Registration is open for the fall season of ALLPLAY'S Miracle League Baseball. OPENING DAY is August 20th.

Returning players, buddies and volunteers – email bfroendt@cox.net to sign up. No fee is needed for fall registration for returning players.

New players – please print the registration form, complete, and mail in with \$10 to play in the league.

Games will be played on Saturday morning at 9am and 10:30am. The last game day will be Saturday, September 24th.



OMAHA: Support Group / Pump It Up

Join us at Pump It Up - The Original Inflatable Party Zone - for a night of bouncing, jumping and climbing! This will be a private event for families with children on the autism spectrum.

WHO: All Autism Families
WHEN: **Monday, September 5, 2011**
6:00pm - 8:00pm
WHERE: Pump It Up 960 S 72nd (72nd and Pacific)
COST: \$5 per child (\$10 maximum charge per family)

OMAHA: Biomedical Discussion Group

Thursday, August 18, 2011 7pm

The Biomedical Discussion group meets the third Thursday of each month at 7pm at Whole Foods in the Lifestyle Center room. Whole Foods is located just south of the Westroads mall at Regency and Dodge. This is a discussion forum for those families currently involved in biomedical treatments. Contact Chrissy Cameron chryssycameron@cox.net or Karen Falconer Al-Hindi karen.alhindi@gmail.com for more information.

LINCOLN: A day of fun with Easter Seals Mobile Day Camp

Join us for a day of fun with the Easter Seals Mobile Day Camp at Holmes Lake on August 13 from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. We are bringing the camp to Lincoln for families with kids with special needs to enjoy for FREE!

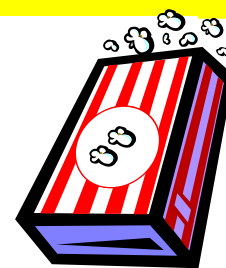
- Godfather's Pizza is providing a pizza lunch for everyone.
- Kids can invite friends and join the fun.
- The first 100 kids at the camp can pick out school supplies for FREE.

The mobile day camp is open to special needs of any kind (autism, spina bifida, down syndrome, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, hearing impaired, etc). PLEASE REGISTER BY AUGUST 10 so we have a counter of how much pizza to order. Download a flyer [HERE](#).

To register for this camp please email afnlincoln@aol.com

SENSORY FRIENDLY FILMS

The Autism Society is very thankful to AMC Entertainment for their leadership in bringing families affected by autism and other disabilities a special opportunity to enjoy their favorite films in a safe and accepting environment. We have now had almost two full years of Sensory Friendly Movies here in Omaha and for many of our families this has been an amazing way to overcome some of the isolation we as a community tend to experience.



A movie is something that so many in society take for granted but for those with sensory issues it can be very difficult. For some, walking into a dark theater is terrifying. For others the heart pounding sound system is too much to handle. 2 hours is an awful long time to sit still and for many of our community it is just not possible for them to be totally silent for the entire showing.

So what is a *sensory friendly* movie? This is a movie venue that is accommodating to YOUR needs! The auditorium will have their lights brought up, the sound turned down, and a silence policy will not be enforced. AMC showings do not have previews so plan to arrive on time!

We are thrilled to announce additional sensory friendly opportunities in the area! First of all, AMC has expanded their theaters there are now sensory friendly showings at the AMC –Star 17 theater in Council Bluffs! Also Marcus Theatre has recently developed their own program called **Reel Movies for Real Needs** and there are two Nebraska theatres participating. You can learn more about the Marcus Theatre program [here](#) as some of their accommodations vary.

Spy Kids 4—All the Time in the World

Saturday, August 27

OMAHA: **10:00 am**
Oakview 24 Theater (AMC Theatre)
 3555 S 140th Plaza

COUNCIL BLUFFS: 10:00 am
Council Bluffs Star 17 Cinema (AMC Theater)
 3220 23rd Avenue

Upcoming Showings:

October 1, 2011—Dolphin Tale
November 5, 2011-Puss in Boots

The Autism Society of Nebraska has developed a toolkit to help you approach your local theater about creating sensory friendly showings in your community! Contact us at autismsociety@autismnebraska.org to find out more information about how to create sensory friendly showings in your community!

Autism Society of America Membership

The Autism Society, the nation's leading grassroots autism organization, exists to improve the lives of all affected by autism. We do this by increasing public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people on the spectrum, advocating for appropriate services for individuals across the lifespan, and providing the latest information regarding treatment, education, research and advocacy.

Founded in 1965 by Dr. Bernard Rimland, Dr. Ruth Sullivan and many other parents of children with autism, the Autism Society is the leading source of trusted and reliable information about autism. Through its strong chapter network, the Autism Society has spearheaded numerous pieces of state and local legislation, including the 2006 Combating Autism Act, the first federal autism-specific law. The Autism Society's website is one of the most visited websites on autism in the world and its quarterly journal, [Autism Advocate](#), has a broad national readership. The Autism Society also hosts the most comprehensive [national conference](#) on autism, attended by 2000 people each year. Our [information and referral](#) team, our program staff, and our strong chapter presence serve thousands of families each year who are searching for help in their journey with autism.

When you join the national Autism Society of America you become a member of your local Autism Society chapter here in Nebraska as well. The Autism Society of America is committed to helping the grassroots grow in strength and they recognize that those in the local community have the best understanding of the local needs. The Autism Society of Nebraska has the benefit of being part of a well respected national organization yet we are still able to keep 100% of all of our local fundraising efforts here in Nebraska.

So are you a member yet? It's not too late...you can join online [HERE](#).

Join the Autism Society of Nebraska and help us make a difference here in Nebraska!

ASA's Options Policy:

The Autism Society promotes the active and informed involvement of family members and the individual with autism in the planning of individualized, appropriate services and supports. We believe that each family and individual with autism should have the right to learn about and then select the options that they feel are most appropriate for them.

No single type of program will fill the needs of every individual with autism.

Our goal at the Autism Society is to help YOU be educated and informed about your various options.

[Click here to read the full Options Policy!](#)



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Help us make this Newsgram relevant to you!

We rely on our community to help us find useful information to share with you through this Newsgram. If you have an event that you would like added to the Autism Society of Nebraska Newsgram please email us at autismsocietynewsgram@autismnebraska.org.

You are our eyes and ears across the state. Please help us help you AND your neighbors by sharing your resources and contacts with us!



To have your event added to the Autism Society Newsgram and calendar please email autismsociety@autismnebraska.org or you can post it directly to our calendar at www.autismnebraska.org. Please be aware that it may take 24 hours for your event to appear on the site.

Autism Society of Nebraska

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We appreciate your help including our statewide community events! Please help us help you AND your neighbors!



All information on this Newsgram is also available by visiting our web site at www.autismnebraska.org