



Angels Bridging Gaps
 Palm Bay Autism Support Group
www.angelsbridginggaps.org

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Newsletter

April 14, 2009

April is Autism Awareness Month

Events

4/15- Bob the Builder King Center, Melbourne 4:00 & 7:00pm. Stage Show. Call 242-2219

4/17- StoryTime Palm Bay Public Library, Palm Bay 11:00am. Also offered on other days at different times. Call 952-4519

4/18 - BIG (Sky Show) BCC Planetarium & Observatory, Cocoa 7:00pm. Entertaining sky show on the universe that includes 3-D computer animation and surround sound. Other movie titles also showing like **The Living Sea** at 8:00pm. Call 433-7373

4/24 - Acoustic Picking Concert Malabar Baptist Church, Malabar. 7:00pm. Local musicians participate in a christian acoustic concert. Call 723-1602

4/25 - Third Annual Autism Awareness Festival BCC Pavilion at Wicham Park, Melbourne 10:00-3:00pm. Games, music, arts and crafts as well as state and local resource representatives that service Autism.

4/27-The Crayon Court King Center, Melbourne 10 & 11:45am. Stage Show. Call 242-2219

4/28 - Bounce for Autism Event Pump It Up, Melbourne. 5:30-7:30pm Jumping marathon to raise money for autism. Call 956-7867 or visit www.bouceforautism.org

4/29 - FIT Workshop Serving Students Across the Spectrum in Brevard Public Schools FIT, Melbourne 6:30-8:30pm. 674-8104

Our upcoming Events

4/27 - Bowling - Shore Lanes, Palm Bay 4:00-5:00pm Come out and join us. \$2.99 including shoes.

4/28 - Parent Support Meeting - Malabar Baptist Church, Malabar 6:00pm-7:00pm. Call 723-1602

Shore Lanes Palm Bay
 4851 Dairy Road Palm Bay
 (321) 723-7400

Encourage inclusionary during-school and after-school activities at the local school

Post informative flyers at your local businesses, supermarkets, etc. about Autism

Write your local and State legislators for more funding, research and support

Attend community meetings to inform the public about Autism

Thank God for his love, grace and strength

Volunteer to read Autism-themed books to children at the library

What can you do ?

Donate money, time or resources to Autism organizations

Have a movie night and invite friends and family over to watch an Autism-themed movie

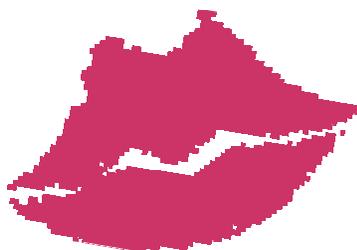
Volunteer to put up an Autism Awareness display at your local library, church or community center

Make Autism Awareness ribbons

Attend and support Autism Awareness events

Wear Autism-themed clothing or accessories

But most of all, you can give your child a big kiss!





Spiritual Corner

Not what I expected

By Joanne Sher

This absolutely poured out of my heart, through my pen, and onto paper this afternoon. I originally thought I was writing fiction, but God showed me otherwise. I pray that it blesses and touches someone else. I know it has me. (September 27, 2008)

"Hi, Mommmmmmmmm!"

My son's voice, almost a scream, decreases in volume as he speeds away on his too-small bicycle. I look up from my clipboard and smile at the streak zooming away in the distance. "Hi, Andrew."

Probably too late to buy him a bike that fits for this year. October is only a few days away, and the rain and eventually the snow will prevent him from riding much if at all before the spring thaw, and who knows how much bigger he'll be by then? He's not complaining, anyway.

Fall has been so slow in coming this year. Here it is, September 27, and I'm in shorts and a T-shirt. It's probably in the upper 70's, if not 80. I'm usually drinking hot apple cider by now, but currently a glass of ice cold lemonade sounds much more appealing.

Yet, the autumn signs are upon us. The kids are back in school. They have been for nearly a month. The local grocery store has had Halloween costumes and bags of miniature candy bars at the front of the store for weeks. And the oak tree in front of our house is beginning to put on its fall colors and drop its "clothing" onto the grass below.

As I survey the school playground from my vantage point under a small shade tree, I notice that my oak isn't the only foliage beginning to display its seasonal beauty. The branches above my head, last month covered with a lovely green, are beginning to include tinges of yellow. The grass I sit upon has been sprinkled with those same yellow leaves, along with some brown crinkled ones. No matter the temperature, fall is here, meaning winter is closer than I'd like to think.

I look up to find Andrew has left his bike by me (where his helmet is nobody knows) and is now playing in the sand with his younger sister Annika and two other kids who, from here, appear to be about Annika's age.

It makes me think of my own childhood. When I was in elementary school, I would always feel more comfortable with younger children. Sure, I had a few friends the same age as I was, but if given the choice, I would opt to play with kids a couple of years younger. I liked their games better, the simplicity of them, I suppose. My step-mother would discourage it, but it certainly didn't change my preferences. It wasn't until I was in my mid-

teens that the majority of my friends were of my own age group.

I wonder what kinds of struggles Andrew will have as he grows up in a world where he doesn't quite fit. What do his "second grade friends" think when they see him acting immaturely? Do they whisper about the fact that he'd rather watch "Dora the Explorer" than "Spiderman?" Do they shy away when he's too demonstrative? Does he understand, will he ever understand that his awkward movements, his inability at times to control his energy and emotions, are likely to make him a "less than ideal" social companion to some? Does he realize that some people are laughing at not with him?

Will he ever be able to think abstractly beyond the rote memorization where he so excels? Can he truly understand the salvation message? Will his sister, nearly three years younger, soon advance emotionally, intellectually, and socially beyond him? Will that bother him? Her? Me?

As I sit beneath an autumnal tree on this summerish afternoon, I am reminded that life doesn't always happen the way you suspect it will. Sometimes there are snowflakes in May. Sometimes it's 80 degrees in autumn. And sometimes your child isn't exactly what you were dreaming of when the doctor first told you that you were pregnant.

But just because life isn't predictable doesn't mean there is no reason to rejoice and thank the One who put the world, and every "off kilter" part of it, in motion. It is all from Him: the summer snow, the autumn heat, and my mildly autistic son. And though life may be hard and, yes, unpredictable, I know Andrew and I will both be richer for it, and that my son will (and has!) bless me and others in ways that he never could if he were "normal." And because Andrew is undoubtedly my gift from God, I know that he is right where he is supposed to be.

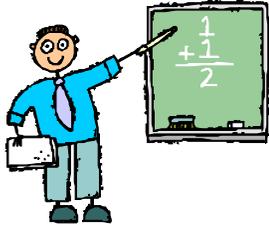
I love you, Andrew, just the way you are.

Heavenly Father, thank You for meeting me under the tree in the Kettle Lake playground this afternoon, through my own pen. I praise You for working in me to think and pray through this issue I didn't even know I had. Help me, Lord, to trust You, and to turn my wonderful, special son and my concerns about him over to you as many times as I must until I really mean it. Thank You, Lord for knowing all and for being in control. And I thank you especially today, dear Lord, for my precious son. In Your Son's name I pray. Amen.

(c) Joanne Sher 2008

Joanne Sher is a Christian writer saved out of Judaism. She is currently working on "Ailing Body, Nourished Soul," a nonfiction book about God's workings in her family during her husband's serious health issues. Learn more about her at <http://joanneshers.blogspot.com>.

Education is Key



Dear Parents, This article is intended for classroom teachers, but as you'll see there is great insight to be gleaned from it regarding parenting.

Why Punishment - Based Systems Don't Work: Yet we're stuck with them

by Kathie F. Nunley

Research tells us that punishment is ineffective. Psychologists are in agreement that punishment does more harm than good. Thousands of studies and years of practice show what punishment does teach - fear aggression and avoidance. People who are punished do not quickly learn to stop a behavior - what they quickly learn is next time don't get caught, or let's just avoid the whole situation if at all possible.

So why does punishment persist in our society, in our homes and in our schools? Is it because it's easier? Goodness- no. Everyone knows if your number one goal is to change a behavior, punishment would be the last thing you'd choose.

However, in situations where punishment is used, changing the behavior is not usually our number one goal - taking care of some uncomfortable or unpleasant emotion generally is.

We punish in anger. We punish in frustration. We punish in an attempt to establish dominance. At the moment, changing the behavior is not the priority.

So, if "non-aversive" (without punishment) methods are better, quicker and more efficient, why are we not seeing them in every classroom in the country? Just the opposite is true. In fact nearly all classrooms use some variation of the biggest punishment-based system of all - (the one where the game is to see how many times your name gets on the board and how many checks get next to it before you are out the door).

Those who are concerned with violence and aggression in our schools should look to one of the big causes - the widespread use of punishment - based management systems. How can we, who are so genuinely concerned about children and America's future allow such systems to persevere? Three main reasons:

1. In order for non-aversive techniques to work, the environment inside the classroom must be more desirable than the environment outside the classroom.

This is a tough issue but at the very heart of the matter. Ask yourself, "do students want to be here?" If I send them out, has their situation improved or worsened, in their mind?

Being in the classroom should be the reward. Students who show respect, participate and follow rules are "allowed" to stay. If this thought causes you to chuckle, then you may want to go back to the last question. If students feel like being in a school classroom is punishment, then any behavior they can exhibit to get

out of that environment is being reinforced when you "force" them to leave. Imagine how you would feel if someone "forced" you to get rid of a bad headache.

2. Tradition tells us that rules come with punishment, not rewards. Look at the rules in your classroom. Do you have rules, and then a list of what happens if you don't follow the rules? When was the last time you saw a list of rules and then a list of benefits that come to those who follow them. Sometimes I've seen lists of rewards but they are sitting next to the list of punishments and I know from personal experience as the mother of 4, that even in those classrooms, my children never experienced the things listed in the reward category (despite them following the rules). What would students think if all that was listed were rules and benefits?

3. Punishment is negatively reinforcing to the punisher.

That means that the actual act of punishment makes us, the punisher, feel better. Generally punishments are given out when someone under our control has gotten out of our control. A child breaks curfew, a student talks while we're giving instruction, our dog chews our favorite shoes, etc. We are angry. Angry is O.K. It is a natural, normal emotion. However, it is generally uncomfortable and an emotion most of us seek to get rid of sooner rather than later. So, punishment does that for us. When we punish, we feel an immediate decrease in the anger emotion - instant relief. And so, who has learned? The punisher has learned. The punisher has learned, next time I feel this way, just punish and I'll feel better. The punishee has learned, next time don't get caught, next time don't come, this is not a place I want to be.

What does all this mean for the classroom teacher? Should we never get angry, never lash out, always make sure the classroom is full of fun at all costs so students are thrilled to attend? Well that would all be nice in a perfect world. But that is not our world. We are human. We get angry sometimes and so be it. Classrooms can't be all fun. Work is not always fun, and learning is work. But I think an important first step is an awareness of these relationships and principles of classroom management. Awareness helps us share these realities with students. Awareness helps build and preserve the learning relationship. Classrooms should be welcoming. Classrooms should be places where students always feel valued and encouraged, not belittled and degraded. When these relationships are solid, then students understand us and we can better understand them. And things will begin to improve - a lot.

Kathie F. Nunley is an educational psychologist, author, researcher and speaker living in southern New Hampshire. Developer of the Layered Curriculum® method of instruction, Dr. Nunley has authored several books and articles on teaching in mixed-ability classrooms and other problems facing today's teachers. Full references and additional teaching and parental tips are available at: <http://Help4Teachers.com>

Cool Stuff



Yes, I know the economy is tough and yes I know many of us do not have the current funds to splurge on non-necessities like T-shirts with cute sayings on them, but I just had to share. Besides, these shirts are about autism and it is Autism Awareness Month. How could I not?



At CafePress.com, you will find a large variety of T-shirts, buttons, mugs, keychains, hats and other items sporting autistic themes, as well as a variety of other topics. And if you don't see what you are looking for you can move on up (as the Jeffersons would say) by designing your own items and selling them yourself. Then, in the process you'll turn this whole economy around and have more than enough money to spend on non-essentials like cute T-shirts with sayings on them. See how I turned that around. Yes, I thought you'd like!

For Kids



Florida Tech Artwork Contest Draws Awareness about Autism

MELBOURNE, FLA.—In observance of Autism Awareness Month in April, the Scott Center for Autism Treatment and School of Psychology at Florida Institute of Technology will host "The Power and Potential of Communication" artwork contest. The third annual contest recognizes the talents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Children with ASD under the age of 18 are encouraged to participate.

Winning artwork will be displayed at Florida Tech's Third Annual Autism Conference in November and included on all printed materials. All entries will also be displayed at the conference. The winner will be chosen by the end of April and notified by a committee member via e-mail or U.S. mail.

Artwork entries of 8.5" x 11" should be submitted between March 2 and April 17 to the Florida Tech School of Psychology (attn: Theresa Travis), 150 West University Blvd., Melbourne, Fla. 32901-6975. They can also be e-mailed to ttravis@fit.edu.

For entry forms and more information, log on to <http://411.fit.edu/autismconference> or contact Theresa Travis at (321) 674-8104.

as taken from <http://www.fit.edu/newsroom/brief.html?id=2532>

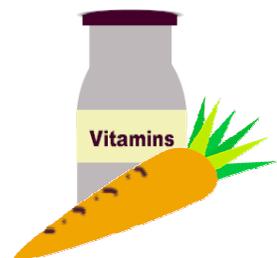
Fun Stuff

Word Search

BioMedical Interventions for Autism

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- AMINOACIDS
- GLUTENFREE
- MINERALS
- CASEINFREE
- IMPROVEDIET
- VITAMINB
- GLUTATHIONE
- MELATONIN
- VITAMINS



"I may be the star but you are the heavens"

- Dustin Hoffman to Kim Peek (inspiration behind the movie Rain Man)

