



# Angels Bridging Gaps

Palm Bay Autism Support Group  
www.angelsbridginggaps.org

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## Newsletter

Sept 27, 2010

### ***Finding friends for your special needs child***

by Dawn Villarreal, One Place for Special Needs, September 2010



Kids want to have friends. But it's not so easy for special needs children to find meaningful friendships with others. Some children are shunned because of physical differences. Others have social and communication deficits that make it difficult to start and keep friendships. While it is impossible to address the nuances of every disability, here are some general tips toward finding friends for your child.

#### **It can be done**

As a parent of two special needs kids, finding meaningful friendships is near and dear to my heart. I have used all of these methods and it has helped me build a small group of close knit friends who are able to look past my children's disabilities and form a genuine friendship.

It takes time, a little bit of detective work and being able to handle some rejection, but you can find friends for your child too!

#### **Ask your child's teacher**

Your child's teacher sees which children in the classroom go out of their way to talk to your child. They see the classmates who take the time to assist your son or daughter without asking. Ask who these children are and contact their parent. You can start your conversation like this:

"Mrs. Smith told me that your son and my son really get along in class. I'd love the chance for them to get together."

Depending on the disability, it is up to you if you wish to disclose the disability at this point, at the start of the play date or after the play date. You can help spread disability awareness by creating a one-page info sheet on your son that explains the disability and how to interact in kid terms. Or purchase a kid friendly book on your child's disability to loan or give as a gift.

#### **Find the gems during birthday parties**

If you can afford a birthday party and invite all the classmates, this is a great opportunity to see for yourself which children interact best with your child. The children that want to sit next to the birthday boy or girl are good candidates for future play dates. A child that makes sure your birthday child is included while the rest of the kids run off to an activity will be worth his weight in gold. Don't discount children who are a different gender from your child. For instance, many girls can become nurturing and caring friends to boys with disabilities.

**Article continued on page 3...**

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<http://www.oneplaceforspecialneeds.com>)

### Events

**10/2 - ASD Family Potluck and Beach Barbeque (PALS for UCFCARD)** Lori Wilson Park in Cocoa Beach. Saturday 11am - 2pm. Registration deadline by Sept 25th. Call 407-823-6001  
[lcarrol@mail.ucf.edu](mailto:lcarrol@mail.ucf.edu)

**10/2 - MEGU - Challenger Soccer**, Palm Bay. South West Park (Florida Ave. Off Babcock St) Practice begins Saturday 11am - 12 noon Contact - Stuart Nicholson Call 321-480-4765, [stuart@snicholson.net](mailto:stuart@snicholson.net)

**10/2 - Tim's Kids Hockey Program Free trial (Special Needs) Beginners: Sled Hockey.** Space Coast Iceplex, Rockledge. Saturday from 5 - 6 p.m. Hurricanes Sled Hockey team will be playing Ft. Myers from 3:15 p.m. to 4:45 p.m - free trial session to follow game. Contact - Tom Reinarts Call 321-720-2043; [tomreinarts@earthlink.net](mailto:tomreinarts@earthlink.net)  
[www.timskids.org](http://www.timskids.org)

**10/7 - Special Olympics Basketball** Southwest Middle School, Palm Bay. Practice every Thursday 5:30pm - 7pm Contact - Sandy Early Call 321-724-1403

**10/27 - Dr. Tony Attwood Aspergers Syndrome: Social Skills, Behaviors & Emotions** DoubleTree Hotel, Orlando. Wednesday, October 27, 2010 8am-5pm Cost \$130 Call 407-823-6001 or [www.ucf-card.org](http://www.ucf-card.org)

**10/27 - The Job & Community Based Service for Independent Living for Young Adults - Betsy Farmer** Scott Center for Autism - FIT, Palm Bay. Wednesday, 6:30-8pm Call 321-674-8106

#### **Our upcoming Events**

**9/28, 10/12 & 8/26 - Parent Support Meeting** - Malabar Baptist Church, Malabar 6pm-7pm. Call 723-1602

**9/27, 10/11 & 10/25 - Bowling** - Shore Lanes, Palm Bay 4pm-5pm Come out and join us. \$3.00 including shoes

**10/09 - Horseback Riding** - Rescued Horses Saves Kids, Malabar. 10-12noon. R.S.V.P. By 8/13. Contact [jbyearby@angelsbridginggaps.org](mailto:jbyearby@angelsbridginggaps.org)

# Treatments & Therapies

## *A New Perspective On Autism*

By: Joseph Kirk DC

Within the Autistic Spectrum we find individuals with great potential. However, the number diagnosed seems to increase each day while any real solutions to their challenges seem to be nonexistent. Does our current health care system have what it takes to get the desired results? Albert Einstein said, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting to get a different outcome." Currently our children are placed in boxes with a label on it--Autism, Asperger,s, AD/HD, OCD, Tourette,s Syndrome. There is even a box where they put them when there is no other box that fits, called PDD-NOS. Yes, labels or a diagnosis is important for insurance benefit purposes but the labels should stop there! The old perspective of addressing the undesired symptoms or problems does help but it is obvious that it doesn't affect the root of their problems.

The latest scientific research and science has opened a new door. Top scientists and brain researchers are now helping us understand how we can make genuine changes in our children. This starts with understanding brain function and how we develop neurologically as children. We can now see what went wrong and how that affects cognitive function. A solid understanding of childhood neurological development and cognitive rehabilitation is what is necessary to give your child the best chance he or she has. There is a new treatment approach that can give your child dramatic improvement in his or her symptoms or problems. This new model is one that is fueled by the latest research and a passion for a cure. It is one that looks deeper into brain function and uses therapies to strengthen specific networks for more normal cognitive function (i.e. improved attention, socialization, communication, memory, emotion, thoughts, movement, etc.)

This new model is described by Functional Disconnection Syndrome or FDS. This groups the diagnoses listed earlier on one spectrum. The reason for this is because they all are variations of the same underlying issue. We see all of the time, even with the current system, that children often have traits from each box. With these disorders it is now known that there is an imbalance between the right and left hemispheres of the brain and they are not in communication. So one side is too low or underdeveloped and not up to speed with the other half.

The researchers who developed this new model took a step back and asked, "What is really going on with the whole child?" The answer is that almost everything is going on; often every body system is involved. It is not just a socialization and communication problem and to ignore all of the other symptoms you will miss what is really happening in the brain. A thorough neurological

exam from a doctor who is trained to know what to look for will bring to light the underdeveloped neurology.

Functional Neurology is a new field that doesn't use drugs or surgery, but uses powerful therapies to make changes in the brain. When Mother Nature built cognitive abilities in us she used all of our senses and motor activity. This may seem too simplistic for complex problems but it is the way it is. To put it simply our brain is built on symmetrical body input. Our neurology is built through stimulus, and an imbalance in stimulus will result in an unbalanced brain. One example is increased processing power but low comprehension. Parents often see imbalances like this already but now it can be explained neurologically. It even becomes more obvious when you look at all of the right brain vs. left brain functions. With these children it is usually a decreased right side of the brain. In contrast, with dyslexia it is the opposite (poor processing but excellent comprehension.) The idea is to do therapies that target the lower functioning side of the brain, and from here the two sides can sync. When both sides are working evenly it is amazing! It is truly rewarding to see a child begin to emerge and to take part in life more fully.

As a specialist in this field I have two main goals. The first is to apply this new science clinically in practice. This is accomplished through my "Brain Works Program," which encompasses sensory, motor, cognitive, and nutritional aspects. The second goal is to educate parents and other professionals. This will be done by providing free lectures in a 6 part series. Topics will include possible causes and prevention, early detection, primitive reflexes, right vs. left brain, at home therapies, and nutrition.

For more information.

**Brain Works Functional Neurology & Chiropractic**

20 Culver Drive Suite 4, Palm Bay, Florida 32907

321-473-8185

***BrevardBrainWorks.com***



## ***Finding friends for your special needs child***

### **Ensure a successful play date**

When a new friend comes to play, control the environment to make sure this new friend has a positive experience. Don't set up a three hour play date if your child can only handle one hour. Set up a schedule of preferred play activities if your child is unable to verbalize these on her own. Intervene arguments before they escalate. If your child has difficulty socializing, start out with an activity (e.g. going to a movie) that allows shared enjoyment with minimal social interaction.

Emphasize with the friend's mom how much fun both children had during their get together. Remember, the success of the first play date will dictate whether or not future play dates take place. Gradually build up to less structured get togethers.

### **Don't let age get in the way**

We all would like our children to play with children in their age group. But this is not always possible due to a child's particular deficits or lack of willing peers.

Experiment having interactions with different aged children. You might find that your child enjoys the big brother or sister role with a younger child. This gives them a sense of responsibility and they can better control the play activities. An older teen or adult can be more patient with the child who wants to talk about special interests. They will also be more understanding to social blunders while same age peers would not.

Ask to borrow a friend's son or daughter, a neighbor's child or a relative for a trial play date. Even an aunt or uncle can become an appreciated friend and mentor to a child with special needs.

### **Find another child with special needs**

Often times, our child is the only one with special needs in the classroom. Wouldn't it be nice to find a fellow friend who is going through the same issues and might have similar interests?

The disability Friends database at One Place for Special Needs helps you find other children (teens and adults too) with a similar diagnosis and/or similar interests. On this free site you can fill out a profile of your child's birth year, gender, diagnosis and interests. Then do a Find Friends search in the community section. Parents can even contact fellow parents for their own friendship and support.

Check with your state disability organization. Some organizations offer parent-to-parent services that might put you in touch with a local family for support and friendship. Your child's speech, occupational or physical therapist may also be able to put you in touch with another area family.

### **Check out enthusiast clubs or recreational activities**

To make up for a lack of friends, your child may have taken up more solitary interests. These days there are clubs and conventions for just about every hobby from dinosaurs to kite flying. Take the time to research local clubs and see if your child can get involved. If the Internet turns up no results, try contacting your area library or museum.

If your child is involved in any sports or recreational activities, chat up the other moms. These are parents who are already aware of your child's disability from seeing him in sports events or before and after classes. Parents who are open and friendly in their conversations may be happy to set up a play date with your child.

### **Have you considered a furry friend?**

In addition to friendship with peers, you might consider a furry companion for your child with special needs. Many children form a close bond with their pet who offers unconditional love. In addition, children learn about responsibility and empathy in taking care of their pet.

A [study](#) in Germany showed 80 percent of children interviewed considered their dog to be an important friend and confidante. A survey in England showed that 85 percent of children regards their pets as a playmate.

### **Conquer your fear of rejection**

In your search to find friends for your child, you will run into rejection. There will be the parent that's not comfortable having your child play with theirs. Other times it's a child that was friends but now has other interests. And sometimes a play date just doesn't quite work out as planned. It's easy to feel discouraged and give up.

Do not let these situations deter you from continuing your search for friends for your child. You will find parents who will look past the disability and encourage their child to bond with your son or daughter. You can find that special child who appreciates your child for who he is. Be strong and be on the look out for friendship opportunities wherever they may turn up.

### **More reading:**

[Play dates](#) - Information on setting up successful play dates with your special needs child

[Making friends](#) - Over 50 resources on helping your child make friends

[Family pets](#) - LWhat are they good for? Lots of things including learning and socializing

[Social opportunities](#) - Links on finding social opportunities for your child

[Teaching your child about peers with special needs](#) -

Encourage your child to learn about and be a friend to children with disabilities

[Explaining disabilities to children](#) - Many links helping children understand various disabilities

[Kids with disabilities want to be treated like other kids](#) - Good article on community inclusion in recreation and sports

## **For those who look at your funny Don't HATE, JUST EDUCATE!!!**



The following websites have printable cards that you can hand out in social situations to explain your child's behavior, if you desire. This not only helps promote autism awareness, but may save you time from having to explain your child's behavior to those who may not understand. Take a gander and print out as many as you would like.  
[www.angelfire.com/pa5/as/awarenesscards.html](http://www.angelfire.com/pa5/as/awarenesscards.html) <http://card.ufl.edu/handouts/Autism-Card-w-border.pdf> and [www.bridges4kids.org/AutismCards.pdf](http://www.bridges4kids.org/AutismCards.pdf)

## **OUR CHILD HAS AUTISM**

We'd like to thank you for your concern. We are making every attempt to allow our child, who is affected by Autism, to experience every day activities that others may take for granted.

For more information about Autism, please contact the Autism Society of America at 1-800-328-8476 or visit [www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)



# Our Corner

## A Seizure/Autism Service Dog for Rosalie

Written by: Cathleen Oldenburg

Hi All-

Just a note to give you an update on our Service Dog journey. Remember you can always find more on <http://servicedogquest.wordpress.com/>

Rosalie's seizure and AD/HD medications have been increased again. She is now on 1200mg of oxcarbazepine (Trileptal) and 800mg of Lamictal as well as 4mg of Intuniv for AD/HD. She needs blood-work next week to make sure the levels of these medications in her blood aren't too high and to check her liver (rarely, these meds cause liver damage). She has been having lots of little seizures on a daily basis, but she has not had a 'big' one that affected her balance, coordination, or thinking in just over a month! This is the longest we've gone without a major seizure since December!

Rosalie will be turning 8 on Sunday 9/26. If you would, can you send an email with a photo or video of a dog (any dog you like) and write a brief message of happy birthday to Rosalie? She's reading on a first grade level now - see Jane run, go dog go, that kind of stuff. She loves reading, and she is very excited about getting a 'Goldie Dog' to help with her seizures. She got a card with \$5 in the mail today and she said "I get Goldie Dog now I have money?"

Our puppy's momma, Nora, has been bred. So cross your fingers, hope and pray that the breeding takes and that she has a litter of beautiful yellow Labrador Retrievers, one of whom will be ours! Two puppies out of her previous litter have been working fabulously with autistic children. They're smart, easy to train, and best of all they have the perfect temperament to weather out the autistic meltdowns with no problems. Nora's puppies should be born in about 9 weeks, right around Thanksgiving. His or her name will be "Goldie" to most of us, but Rosalie will probably call it "Goldie Dog" for a while.

Our local vet clinic has generously volunteered free vet care for the life of the service dog. We're working on specific details of that agreement (neutering, preventative medications such as heart-worm and flea, etc)

We had our hopes raised that we would have free training for our puppy [which would have meant we needed to raise only \$2000] but that washed out when our application was denied. That particular organization is trying to move more into servicing wheelchair bound children, and I understand that is a huge need.

So now we are continuing on our journey of raising \$5,000 to provide Rosalie with a Seizure Response and Autism Service Dog from the [North Star Foundation](#). So far, no large organization has donated. We've just been blessed by donations from friends and family. And a few very interesting donors - strangers (to us) from Ireland and France. Facebook friends have actually gone out solicited donations for us. Local people are helping by way of donating money from garage sales and portions of the proceeds from jewelry sales! We have had anywhere from \$2 donations to \$200 donations and just about everything in between. And I'm thankful for each and every one - that \$2 donation was hard for that person to give - money's tight, but she decided it was worth it. I nearly cried when she told me that!

I have raised \$1,666 so far. That has guaranteed that we will receive the puppy from Nora's Thanksgiving litter



(if all goes well). We still need to raise the rest of the money before the puppy can move to Florida to it's puppy raiser's home (my sister Eileen). That should be around March. Eileen and her daughter Shania are very excited about working with the puppy and private dog trainer. They are very happy that they can assist us in whatever way they can.

Rosalie will benefit from her service dog when she has a seizure, but this dog will also be a friend to each of the other children too. Because people on the autism spectrum tend to have rather severe meltdowns, the dog will be trained to weather those storms with calm certainty that at the end they will be rewarded. North Star believes that to encourage language and social skills of the autistic children, their service dogs vests have "Please ASK to Pet Me" on them. Along with the autism service dog and seizure response patches. ALL the children in the family are encouraged to have a specific responsibility, with the responsibility for feeding to be Rosalie's alone. This encourages a bond to all the children, not just Rosalie - but of course Rosalie will be viewed as top banana because she will feed the dog and work the most with it. It also proactively combats the envy monster (she got a dog, why can't I!).

If you have sent in a donation, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. It really means a lot to me that you have taken the time to send in a few dollars - or even more - to help out.

There have been a lot of people asking how to donate via mail. You can send checks directly to North Star Foundation (they'll send you a tax deduction receipt) or you can send them to me. You can also click the link to my secure paypal site and donate via paypal or credit card.

North Star Foundation  
c/o Patty Dobbs Gross  
20 Deerfield Lane  
Storrs, CT 06268  
Tax ID EIN # 06-1589586.

Thanks, and God Bless!  
Cathleen Oldenburg  
For more information you can email Cathleen at [yintibbies@gmail.com](mailto:yintibbies@gmail.com)

*(If have a story that you would like to share with our ASD Brevard Community feel free to email me directly at [jbyearby@angelsbridginggaps.org](mailto:jbyearby@angelsbridginggaps.org))*