CARD’s 4th Annual Statewide Autism Conference
Evidence Based Practice for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders across the Lifespan

The 4th Annual Statewide Conference was held at the OnCenter Complex and Convention Center in Syracuse, NY. Dr. Sonja R. deBoer presented the keynote on “Successful Inclusion for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Considerations Before Creating an Inclusion Program.” The presentation provided parents, and school and community professionals with useful information on how to choose the least restrictive environment, designing the appropriate structure for an ASD inclusion program along with how to define the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the inclusion of children with ASD.


The afternoon presenters included two CARD Albany staff members, Erin Berical, MS.Ed. presenting “Bullying and Autism Spectrum Disorders,” and Melissa Rinaldi, Ph.D., presenting “Strategies that Motivate: Using Positive Approaches to teach Social, Academic, and Daily Living Skills to Individuals with ASD.” In addition to CARD staff, Michael L. Wehmeyer, Ph.D. spoke about “Promoting Self Determination of Students with Autism” and Thomas Zane, Ph.D. and Mary Jane Weiss, Ph.D., discussed “Challenging Behaviors and Autism Spectrum Disorders.”

We’d like to thank all our presenters, The Bookhouse of Stuyvesant Plaza, and The OnCenter Complex and Convention Center for helping to make this 4th Annual Statewide Conference a success. We look forward to another wonderful conference next April in Westchester, NY.

Save the Date
9th Annual Autism Conference
Kenote Speaker: Robin Brewer, Ed.D.
Friday, October 29th, 2010
The Holiday Inn
205 Wolf Road
Albany, NY

NYSED Training Now Offered Online

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities in Albany is pleased to announce it is now offering the required 3-hour autism training course, “Responding to the Needs of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders,” in an online format.

The NYS Education Department now requires that all persons applying for a teaching certificate or a license as a special education teacher, in addition to all the other certification or licensing requirements, complete a 3-hour course in the area of children with autism.

Individuals mandated to take this course in order to be certified or licensed as a special education teacher can now register for and take this course from the convenience of their personal computer at any time.

Registration forms for the webinar are located on the CARD Albany homepage. Individuals must register and pay the course fee ($75). Once payment and registration are processed, CARD Albany will send the registrant the webinar link and a password to access the training. Registrants should be able to log in and take the training from their personal computer.

Full course instructions and computer system requirements can be found on the CARD Albany home page http://www.albany.edu/psy/autism.
CARD Albany’s Family Activities and Seminar

What do Smoothee-the-Clown, cotton candy and face painting have in common? They were all at CARD Albany’s Second Annual Carnival in April. Families snacked on goodies, played games and won prizes while Smoothee made balloon animals for each child. No one went home empty handed.

The Family Picnic at The Crossings in Colonie is an event that many families look forward to each year. This year was no exception despite the very hot and humid weather in July. The weather, however, did not seem to slow any of the children on the playground. Thank you to all the families that braved the heat and made the event enjoyable. Hopefully next year we will choose another sunny, but less humid day!

Our indoor, and air conditioned event, did not disappoint either. This is the second year CARD has had an event at Spare Time Bowl in East Greenbush. The staff was very accommodating to make sure the families had a blast. We saw many skilled bowlers and STRIKES!

In September we are hosting an Apple Picking event at Sands Flat Orchard in Fonda. We hope Mother Nature cooperates with us this year and we hope to see you there!

Thank you to all the families that participated this year. CARD Staff always look forward to spending time with families.

The Parent Seminar this past year was “Preparing for College: Considerations for Student’s with Asperger Syndrome. Three 2-hour seminars were held around the Capital District, each one informed parents of how the laws and regulations in college differ from high school along with the rights of the student with a disability in college. The training also presented parents and adolescents with supports and strategies to help increase independence.

CARD is hoping to continue the seminar series for the 2010-2011 year with a new training on adolescent issues.

For more information about CARD’s upcoming seminars and events, please call us at 866-442-2574 or visit our website: http://www.albany.edu/psy/autism.

Parent Education Program for Families of Children Newly Diagnosed with Autism

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at UAlbany, in collaboration with Capital Care Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics, is pleased to announce a no cost education program for parents of children recently diagnosed with an autism spectrum (ages 12 months to 5 years) who reside in the Capital District. The program is funded by a grant from the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), formerly, the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD). Given the importance of families in the development, education, and behavioral support of children with an autism spectrum disorder, it is imperative that programs aimed at increasing parent knowledge, decreasing parenting stress, and improving family quality of life be available in a timely manner and in a format that is both efficient and effective. Since little support is currently available for parents following a diagnosis of autism in their child, the program provides an essential service that does not presently exist locally.

The education program consists of 5 two-hour group sessions on critical topics recognized as important to families and specific to autism including: Autism 101, How to Choose Treatment, Medical/Developmental Issues, Accessing Resources, and Living with ASD. The groups are led by experienced staff from CARD Albany and Capital Care Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics and being held at the Center on select Tuesday evenings. The series is being offered on a continuous cycle so parents can access important autism information in a timely manner.

If you are interested in more information please contact Dr. Kristin Knapp-Ines at 518-442-5418 or visit the CARD Albany website: http://www.albany.edu/psy/autism.
Research: A Review of Strategies for Teaching Children with Autism to Read for Meaning

It may be easy to overlook the fact that as you read this passage you are engaging in a highly complex process that requires you to decode strings of symbols while simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning (Snow, 2002). Once mastered, this ability to read for meaning becomes second nature. For many children, however, difficulties in mastering reading comprehension can result in roadblocks for subsequent learning. While it is not uncommon for children without developmental disabilities to struggle with reading comprehension, specific research explains why children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may find reading comprehension particularly challenging.

Researchers have identified the common deficit among both typically and atypically developing children exhibiting poor comprehension to be the inability to easily shift attention from word-level reading to whole text comprehension (Oakhill et al., 2003; Yuill & Oakhill, 1991). More recently, however, research has focused on the cognitive deficits associated with autism that contribute to this inability in children with ASD. In order to understand the basis of the specific challenges children with ASD face in learning to read for meaning, it is helpful to understand the skills upon which reading comprehension is dependent. Besides basic word recognition, other more complex skills include the ability to integrate separate pieces of text, continuously monitor one’s understanding of text, make inferences, and use working memory (Perfetti et al., 2005). Secondary components that contribute to good comprehension also include knowledge of general story structure and vocabulary.

Although children with ASD may have no trouble decoding and reading fluently when reciting text, they may still be unable to infer any meaning from it. This advanced development of word recognition skills prior to any ability for comprehension has been termed hyperlexia in children with developmental disabilities (Grigorenko et al., 2002). One explanation for this has to do with one of the primary features of autism, which involves a preoccupation with parts. Because of this preoccupation, many children with ASD are able to focus on details such as single words but experience difficulty with global understanding and coherence of a whole story structure (Nation, 1999). Certain studies have also indicated that differing cognitive processes among children with ASD may explain differences in how they comprehend text. Visual fMRI studies focusing on areas of activation within the brain have shown that individuals with ASD tend to rely more on visual imagery to understand sentences (Kana et al., 2006). Since individuals with ASD also have social and communication deficits, they are also less able to comprehend abstract ideas, social contexts, causal links, and internal states of characters that are often included in traditional story structures. For this reason, children with ASD usually experience more difficulty in interpreting meaning from narrative stories compared to more informative, expository texts (Diehl et al., 2000).

To address the unique aspects of the reading comprehension deficit present among a large portion of children with ASD, Randi, Newman, & Grigorenko (2010) recently reviewed current evidence-based interventions for reading comprehension instruction. Many of these interventions share the goal of shifting the child’s cognitive focus from sound-symbol decoding (i.e., phonics) to generating meaning. In terms of general instructional approaches, evidence shows children with ASD benefit most from Direct Instruction (DI) in natural settings using authentic materials and motivators. Direct Instruction practices are effective for helping students with ASD acquire skills since DI requires instructors to model skills, guide students to practice skills, and ask students to perform skills independently (Flores & Ganz, 2007).

Other more specific “meaning-focused” interventions use collaborative learning activities that involve reciprocal questioning strategies. In these activities, students with ASD are paired with a trained typical peer. These cooperative pairings focus on practicing skills rather than teaching skills by having students quiz each other on reading materials and factual recall. Story map frameworks are often used to prompt students with ASD to generate and respond to questions and support the underlying cognitive processes involved in reciprocal questioning (Whalan & Hanline, 2008).

Anaphoric cuing (O’Connor & Klein 2004) is another method that studies have shown effectively assists students with ASD to understand whole passages by using prompts to call attention to relevant details (Wang, et al., 2007). Shortcuts are provided in a story by underlining important referents within a passage, which helps students to locate and reread helpful reference phrases and extract relevant details. Students are then asked to choose the correct underlined cue in response to comprehension questions.

Other research has focused on programs that use computer-delivered instruction. Certain programs use short, computer-based lessons aimed to improve vocabulary comprehension in children with ASD and provide them with opportunities to apply knowledge of vocabulary in other reading contexts (Bosseler & Massaro, 2003).

Book Review

Girls Growing Up on the Autism Spectrum: What Parents and Professionals Should Know About the Pre-Teen and Teenage Years

Author: Shana Nichols

This is a wonderful resource on a topic (females on the autism spectrum) that has too few resources. The book addresses issues such as puberty, self-esteem, and personal safety in the real world. Included are helpful tools for parents and professionals, as well as for girls themselves. Throughout, there are personal experiences from parents, educators, and girls and young women that help the reader feel that they are not alone. At the end of each chapter, a “resources” list is provided, which is very helpful.

1001 Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Author: Ellen Notbohm and Veronica Zysk

This newly revised and expanded edition has over 600 new ideas not found in the first edition, bringing the total to a whopping 1800! Included are sections on: sensory integration, communication and language, behavior, daily living, thinking social and being social, and teachers and learners. This book was the winner of Learning Magazine’s Teacher’s Choice Award.
Research Continued

When reviewing different intervention options, it is always important to consider individual differences. Since children on the autism spectrum exhibit a range of strengths, deficits, and intellectual abilities, it should be noted that there is no single instructional technique or intervention that is appropriate for all individuals. Since reading comprehension lays the groundwork for subsequent learning, it is critical that interventions are selected and tailored to effectively address individual deficits. This is especially crucial for individuals with learning disabilities who may face compounded educational challenges without a solid foundation in prerequisite skills such as reading comprehension.


Medical Symposium

We are proud to announce Dr. Robert Schultz as this year’s Medical Symposium Speaker. Dr. Schultz is a clinical psychologist with expertise in neuropsychology and neuroimaging. He is the director of the Developmental Neuroimaging Laboratory and the Center for Autism Research at the Joseph Stokes Jr. Research Institute at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and holds an endowed chair in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania.

For more information about this event, please visit our website: http://www.albany.edu/psy/autism or call CARD toll-free at 866-442-2574.

Community Support

Each month Empire Wine in Albany, NY selects a not-for-profit agency to donate 100% of the proceeds from the sale of their wine tote bags. CARD Albany was the recipient of sale proceeds for the Month of March. Thank you Brad and Rebecca Junco and Empire Wine for your generosity!

Website

We are in the process of redesigning our website. It should be up and running in the upcoming months. You can view all the changes by visiting http://www.albany.edu/psy/autism. We have also joined Facebook. Keep up-to-date on all of CARD's upcoming events, news and research by becoming our friend at www.facebook.com/cardalbany.

Conference DVDs Available

DVD copies of the 4th Annual Statewide Autism conference held in Syracuse in April 2010 will be available for purchase soon. You may contact CARD’s office toll-free at 866-442-2574 to pre-order a copy.

DVD copies of The 3rd Annual Statewide Autism Conference held in Buffalo in April 2009 along with CARD’s 8th Annual Conference held in Albany in October 2009 are on sale for a limited time. You can now purchase the DVDs for $10 each! Please visit CARD’s website for more information about the conference sessions at http://www.albany.edu/psy/autism or call CARD toll-free at 866-442-2574.