



N E B R A S K A
autism spectrum disorders
 N E T W O R K

The Southeast ASD Scoop

December 2010
 Volume 2, Issue 3

A Stress-Free Holiday Season

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The holidays are supposed to be the happiest time of year... right? But if you have a child with Asperger syndrome (or HFA, PDD-NOS, etc), you may find that your child starts having *more* meltdowns. When you think about it, though, it's not really that surprising.

Our kids thrive on PREDICTABILITY—it's what allows them to hold it together day-to-day. But during the holidays, predictability usually goes out the window. On top of that, our kids' sensory systems are being bombarded with unusual stimulation:

- First, school is "messed up," with noisy parties, screwy schedules, revved up students, and sometimes even substitute teachers. THEN school is *closed*, and their daily routine goes completely out the window.
- Home may be decorated or rearranged (to make room for the tree), so it LOOKS different.
- Home may SMELL different,

whether it's from a real Christmas tree, candles burning, or special foods cooking.

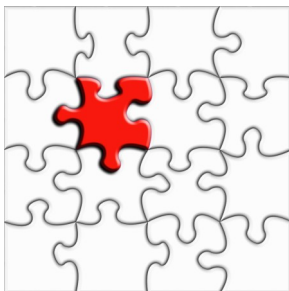
- Home may SOUND different, if holiday carols are being played, new toys are drumming or beeping or growling, or the TV/video games are allowed on more of the time.
- There may be visitors, which makes the whole atmosphere FEEL totally different. And, of course, each extra person adds to the unpredictability of the situation.
- Bedtime schedules may be ignored (especially a problem if the kids still GET UP at their normal time.)
- Kids may get extra "screen time," (TV, computer, video games), which is arousing to their nervous systems.
- Parents may get stressed out, and the kids will sense it and re-

spond to it (even if they can't articulate what they feel).

- For those that believe in Santa Claus. Let's see. Your child's been told there's a big fat stranger who gets to decide whether or not he'll get his heart's desire on Christmas morning, based on some vague, incomprehensible "naughty or nice" standards. Nothing stressful there.
 - And speaking of presents... will he get the one he really wants? Won't he? Will he get something else he really hates? All great subjects to obsess about, if you're a child who's prone to obsessing.
- No wonder our kids are melting down! I feel stressed myself, just reading the above list. So here are a few tips to keep the holidays happier and calmer for everyone.
- **Establish a Routine** that you stick to each year. Christmas tree always in the same place. Presents always opened at the same time

Continued on page 2

Nebraska State ASD Conference Welcomes...



Starting this month, we will highlight the Keynote Speakers for the Nebraska State ASD Conference to be held on April 7th and 8th, 2011.

Michelle Garcia Winner, M.A., CCC-SLP, is the creator of Social Thinking, which is used for individuals with social-cognitive deficits. She first taught Social Thinking in 1995 when she worked as an

SLP for a school district. Several years later, she entered private practice and now runs a Social Thinking Clinic in the San Jose, California area.

Michelle has also started a publishing company, which now publishes Michelle's Social Thinking materials, along with others. Michelle is a widely renown speaker

and presenter. She presents her workshops internationally and across the United States.

Michelle Garcia Winner has a website that provides a variety of information and resources about Social Thinking. Please visit <http://www.socialthinking.com> for more information.

A Stress-Free Holiday Season

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- **Minimize the Sensory Stimulation.** Keep the perfumed candles, the noisy toys, etc. to a minimum. And when you DO add some new element (say, playing a holiday CD), explain to your child what it is and why you're doing it (e.g., "When I play holiday carols, it makes me remember listening to them with *my* mom, when I was a little girl.")
- **Make Predictable Food Available.** If your kiddo usually eats PB&J, don't try to force baked ham on him during the holiday meal. There's nothing that kills the holiday spirit like a child gagging at the table.
- **Make Sure He Gets Enough Sleep.** Nuff said.
- **Make Sure Your Child Can Get Away** from the hustle and bustle. Your kiddo may need extra quiet/alone time during this hectic time of year. **AND THAT'S OKAY.** Don't try to make him be extra social, just because friends or relatives expect it. They don't live with ASD, so they don't get to judge. It's okay to make a deal before company arrives, such as "stay with us in the living room for 20 minutes after the cousins get here. Then you may go to your room if you want."
- **Create a Visual Schedule.** Each day, let your child know what's going to happen, and when. Putting it down on paper makes it predictable, and allows him to check it whenever he needs reassurance.
- **Don't Threaten to Withhold Presents if the Child is Naughty.** For some kids, this is the single most stressful time of year. Don't up the ante with threats—it's sure to backfire!
- **Don't Mandate Signs of Affection.** If your child doesn't want to kiss Aunt Sue or sit on Grandpa's lap, don't force him to. Just say "Oh, he's not a huggy-kissy kind of kid," and leave it at that. They're grownups—they can deal with it.
- **If Your Child is Anxious About Whether He'll Get That One Special Gift, Reassure Him.** It's a bit of a holiday tradition for parents to "torture" our kids by teasing them about whether or not they'll get that one special toy they want so badly. **News flash—THIS IS NOT FUN FOR OUR KIDS.** Sure, you want to have some surprises under the tree. But if your child is worked up over whether he'll get that

one certain gift, it's perfectly okay to say "Yes, you'll get it. I promise. You don't have to worry about it." In fact, telling him that may be a gift in itself.

So pick a few simple traditions that you can keep from year to year, and strive to have a quiet, little holiday, instead of a big, noisy one full of surprises. You'll be surprised how much nicer it can be for everyone in the family.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Lisa Barrett Mann, M.S.Ed., is the owner of Asperger's Interventions in Overland Park, KS. She is also the author of *More Than Little Professors: Children with Asperger Syndrome: In Their Own Words*, from Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

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Sensory Suggestions, Part 2

Sensory needs are very common in students on the autism spectrum. If sensory needs are not addressed, students are not able to regulate their bodies, thus increasing the likelihood of behaviors. Starting with this issue, each month a sensory system will be highlighted and explained. Activities to address these sensory needs will be included. Please consult with your Occupational Therapist before implementing any of these sensory activities with your student.

Sensory System: Vestibular

Location of this system: Inner ear and body

Function: The vestibular system provides

feedback about when our body is in motion. This system also gives us feedback about coordination and balance as we move.

Activities to address this system: (Because spinning activities can be harmful, consult an experienced OT before incorporating any of these suggestions.)

- Sit and spin toys
- Swings that allow for spinning
- Rocking in a rocking chair
- Using a glider chair

- Climbing stairs
- Using a stair stepper
- Doing wall push-ups
- Doing chair push-ups
- Jumping rope

** Often times vestibular and proprioceptive systems overlap.

Suggestions taken from: "Practical Solutions for Stabilizing Students with Classic Autism to Be Reading to Learn: Getting to Go!" by Judy Endow, MSW. (2010) Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

What Is Social Thinking?

Social Thinking is the process of considering point of view, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, prior knowledge and intentions of others.

We know that most individuals with ASD struggle with perspective taking. They are unable to put themselves in situation and see it from another point of view. Social Thinking helps address those critical perspective taking skills.

When we teach Social Thinking, we want kids to learn the following skills:

- Learn why they react to specific situations and respond the way they do

- Understand the behaviors that will receive positive reactions and those behaviors that will get negative reactions.
- Understand how their behavior affects their emotions.
- Learn how to have positive relationships with others across social environments.

Social Thinking also uses different terminology to teach individuals with ASD the appropriate skills they need to navigate the social world.

For example, traditional social skills programs focus on teaching individuals to make eye contact

with others. Social Thinking teaches eye contact by using the terminology “thinking with your eyes” and relates eye contact to the ability to scan an environment and look for social cues to help understand the social interaction that is taking place.

Social Thinking can be used with preschool age children to adults. There are several resources targeted towards younger children *The Social Detective* or the *Superflex Curriculum*, are both great resources by Michelle Garcia Winner. *Socially Curious and Curiously Social* is a resource that is available for older adolescents and young adults.

Make sure to check out these resources from the ESU 6 ASD Library!



Word Scramble



Welcome to the Southeast ASD Scoop version of Word Scramble. Try to guess the given word by rearranging the letters given. This version centers around words related to the topic of Autism Spectrum Disorders and the Southeast ASD Scoop Newsletter. Answers to this month's Word Scramble will be posted in January's Newsletter.

- I S M U T A = _____
- S N I T A T I N O R S = _____
- A I E S L P C = _____
- A R E N V L B N O = _____
- E W E L R S N E T T = _____
- V A B R L E = _____
- S R E S E R C O U = _____
- G U A G N L A E = _____
- O L N U C N I I S = _____

GOOD LUCK!

Website Resources

Here are some websites that are great resources when working with individuals on the Spectrum!

⇒ Kansas ASD Website - <http://kansasasd.com>

This website is full of free, downloadable visual supports, social narratives and visual tasks. Each social narrative or visual support is in either a pdf, Microsoft Word or Microsoft Power Point version for downloading.

⇒ MCHAT Information — http://www2.gsu.edu/~psydlr/Diana_L_Robins_Ph.D.html

The Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers is available to download and print at this web address. Instructions for scoring, along with different language translations is available.



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Check Us Out on the Web !

<http://unl.edu/asdnetwork>

http://www.esu6.org/services/asd_home.htm

<http://seasdnetwork.wordpress.com>

Upcoming Trainings

Transition: Middle School, High School and Beyond

Date: January 26th, 2011

Place: ESU #3, Omaha

Time: 8:30 to 3:30

Presenter: **James Emmett**

Fee: \$15.00

DEADLINE TO REGISTER: JANUARY 19TH, 2011

For more information visit the Nebraska ASD Network website, ESU 6 Autism website
or the Southeast ASD Network blog.

REGISTRATION FOR THE **NEBRASKA STATE ASD CONFERENCE** OPENS ON JANUARY 5TH,
2011.

PLEASE JOIN US APRIL 7TH AND 8TH, 2011 AT THE EMBASSY SUITES, PAPILLION, NE