

F E B R U A R Y 2 0 1 3

Autism Services

Creating School Community to Support Students with ASD



Building Capacity

Multiple programs have developed from the realization that students with autism need more social skills immersion than any one teacher with a full caseload can provide; *and* there is an untapped resource in the form of several hundred peers who surround socially challenged students for hours each day. This newsletter will discuss three such programs and ways to incorporate them into your school routine.

Save the Date!

Autism Eligibility Components Including the CARS-2 Offered Wednesday February 27th, 2013 from 8:30 -11:30. The training will cover the Components to completing an Autism Eligibility (initial evaluation and re-evaluation) and information on administering the CARS-2. *Register on the learning campus.*

Sensory Diet In-service
February 6, 2013 from 12:00 –
3:30. *Register on the CRP Training Calendar.*

ASIEP-3 and CARS-2. April 24th
from 8:30 – 11:30. *Soon to be posted
on the Learning Campus.*

Contact your Autism Consultant

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**Contact your ASD Consultant with any questions, concerns or requests for materials*

Peer Mediated Instruction and Intervention (PMI)

In PMI, typically developing peers are carefully and systematically taught ways of engaging their counterparts with ASD in positive and extended social interactions. PMI has been implemented successfully by a wide range of staff, including : teachers, special educators, SLPs and classroom assistants. Multiple empirical studies provide documentation for supporting peer-mediated instruction as an evidence-based practice.

For younger students, a class wide peer buddy system may be used, where peers have different play partners each day. Peers are prompted to “stay with your buddy,” “play with your buddy,” and “talk to your buddy.”

Peer social networking can be used with older children to promote social interactions and relationships. This networking may include students with ASD participating in extracurricular activities with non-disabled peers, and the peers participating in ongoing teaching, feedback and support.

Neitzel, J., Boyd, B., Odom, S.L. and Edmondson Pretzel, R. (2008) *Peer Mediated Instruction and Intervention for Youth Wide Autism Spectrum Disorders*: Online Training Module. Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence.

Steps to PMI

Autism Internet Modules (www.Autisminternetmodules.org) provides step by step directions AND documents to help you get started with PMI. These are the basic steps (with significantly more elaboration on the website (joining is free and full of many more modules!))

1. Selecting peers
2. Training Peers (and how to do this)
3. Supporting Peers
4. Implementing in Classroom Settings Throughout the Day
5. Extending Initiations Across the Day
6. Putting it all Together

Many other documents are available on the Autism Internet Modules website including checklists, sample scripts and much much more to help you start PMI in your community. The Steps for implementation and checklist for implementation will also be available on the PPS Autism Services Website.

Research Corner

PMI is an Evidenced-Based Strategy in the “Established” category by the National Standards Project from 2009. The project aimed to build consensus among experts on the evidence base of interventions for students with autism spectrum disorder.

Effects of Peer Training

This study looks at 2 social interventions, peer training and written scripts, on the social communication of 5 elementary school students with autism. Each student with ASD was paired with 2 typically developing peers. In the peer training intervention, peers learned out to facilitate 5 social skills interventions over 5 days. After the training, the students with ASD were monitored in their initiations and contingent responses, which both significantly increased for 4 of the students with ASD. However, they all continued to struggle in specific social-communication skills. The second intervention of written scripts was implemented and was shown to significantly increase use of 3 different communication skills in all of the participants. Additionally, social validity outcomes demonstrate improved child-peer interactions and improved acceptance and friendship ratings for the children with autism.

Thiemann, K.S. & Goldstein, H. (2004). Effects of peer training and written text cueing on social communication of school-age children with pervasive developmental disorder. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research, 47*(1), 126-144.

Enhancing Social Skills

This study evaluated the effectiveness of using peers in inclusive settings. As many school districts and early childhood settings are moving towards inclusive settings, using the argument that these inclusive environments provides beneficial interactions for students with ASD. However, research has shown that typically in these inclusive settings interactions between typical peers and peers with autism do not occur without adult prompting. This study used an ABAB design to implement a peer buddy approach, where peers were training to interact in dyads. The hypothesis was that training peers in a peer buddy system would increase independent (non-adult directed) interactions with peers with autism. Data collected demonstrates that students were more likely to engage in independent interactions with peers with autism, the students with autism had significantly increased appropriate social interactions and follow-up data on one case student demonstrated generalization of appropriate social interactions to a new classroom.

Laushey, K.M. Heflin, L.J. (2000). Enhancing Social Skills of Kindergarten Children with autism through the training of multiple peers as tutors. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 30*, 183-193.

Circle of Friends

Speech/Language Pathologist, Barbara Pallis, created *Circle of Friends* on the campus of Santa Monica High School in Santa Monica, California. This program, or “club,” establishes friendships between students with disabilities (i.e. Autism, Down Syndrome, etc.) and their non-disabled peers through inclusive meaningful participation on school campuses as well as within the community. It provides the opportunity for students to acquire, practice and improve social/conversation skills and problem solving strategies in a real world environment which increases self-esteem, thus leading to more successful adult life.


Family life has been altered by *Circle of Friends* friendships. The phone now rings at homes and parents see their son/daughter interact with non-disabled friends and have experiences like other teens! Their children are included with the rest of the students at lunch, after school, and on the weekend – eating in restaurants, going to movies, shopping, bowling . . . the options are endless.

Information about establishing a *Circle of Friends* club can be found at www.circleofriends.org.

The Path To Inclusion



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Campus Culture**

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Expanding Disability Awareness to Elementary and Middle Schools

By Taylor D'Andrea
 CoF Participant, Santa Monica High School
 Santa Monica, CA

Circle of Friends (CoF) has always been a staple at Santa Monica High School (Samohi), but the organization is now

Circle of friends has a Newsletter with updates on how to support students in their community. You can sign up for the Newsletter on the *Circle of Friend's* website. A link will be provided on the Autism Services Website for your reference.

With Open Arms

With Open Arms is a publication by March Schlieder, MS, which is a compilation of strategies and activities for using *Circle of Friends*, extracurricular activities, and learning teams to create school communities of support for students with social challenges. One strategy is using relationship circles, a group of peer mentors who are good social role models, chosen to interact with a socially challenged student on a regular basis. This strategy, usually most appropriate in elementary grades, can be implemented by general education teachers, special education teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, SLPs, coaches, etc. Regular meetings take place with the facilitator and peers, with the target child attending once a month. Activities discussed/ developed in the meetings are implemented on a daily basis. Book clubs are great circle meeting activities for developing bonding, learning about autism and individual differences, discussing peer social issues and discovering ways to relate to each other.

As students with social skills challenges get older, often natural social connections just do not take place. Training non-disabled peers to interact with their ASD counterparts in extracurricular activities provides an important means of keeping these kids involved, busy and feeling like they belong. Sometimes, the special interest of the student with ASD can be incorporated into a club (e.g. Anime Club, Chess Club, Classic Movie Club, etc.).

Schlieder, Mary (2007). *With Open Arms: Creating Communities of support for Kids with Social Challenges Using Circle of Friends, Extracurricular Activities, and Learning Teams*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing.

A Problem By Cassie Gabel

Cassie was 14 at the time of writing this poem and is a student on the Autism Spectrum.
This poem is borrowed from the book *With Open Arms* by Mary Schlieder.

People don't understand.
They don't know
How someone feels
About having a problem
Called Aspergers.

It's hard,
Socially
And emotionally.

A problem
That screams inside,
"Why can't I be normal?"
"Why?"

I scream,
Holding on,
Onto the ride;
I don't know what's coming,
Or where I'm going.

Will I be slammed
Into a brick wall?
Making a fool of myself,
And of my family?

Making things worse
Than they already are.
I hope not,
I really do.

I have hope
That people will understand
Everything,
And anything,
About me,
And my problem.