

PUZZLE PIECES

Spring/Summer 2004



Meryl Lipton, MD, PhD
Executive Director

Powerful, NonRx Way to Help a Child with Neurobehavioral Issues

I'm often asked, "Are there any new tools to help my child (with issues like ADHD, Aspergers, Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities or other social emotional learning disorders)?"

Let me tell you about one that is influential, does not require medication, but too often is overlooked or underutilized. What's particularly interesting is most families recognize this approach's importance in another arena.

Think of the life-long impact on every child when they learn to talk and read. That process begins before a baby can speak as family members naturally talk to infants and toddlers. Instinctively everyone in the household takes on the role of teacher.

Too often parents with a child who has a brain based social-emotional learning issue aren't aware of the importance of being a teacher. Moms and dads tell me that they "leave it to the school or to medication to fix our child." They fear they "don't know what to do" or "don't want to add to the problem – which probably came from my genes to begin with."

I'm reminded of the mother of a five year old with a Social Emotional Learning Disorder known as Nonverbal Learning Disability. Her son didn't know how to interact with other children. When I asked how she helped him learn the social skills he needed, she said with concern, "Aren't those inborn skills; either you have them or you don't?"

Yes, to a degree they are inborn, but it is also true they can be learned. How you set up a child's day, what you expect them to do, which behaviors you model, all of these things also play a huge role. They shape your child's behaviors, their social skills and their sense of themselves.

By now you've guessed, that the major tool to help our children is the family. If you want to take yours to a new level, you can by extending focused parent (and other family member) teaching to each key area of your child's neurobehavioral needs. The family is a perfect place to help children learn self regulation and organizational skills and to develop social emotional abilities.

What does it take to play this role? First, it requires the family to accept their child, challenges included. Next, the family must

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Why TV and kids don't mix

Summary of theory of Jane Healy, author of *Endangered Minds: Why Our Children Don't Think and What to Do About It*, and 2002 Recipient Pearl Rieger Award

"May I have your attention?" With that request made daily in thousands of classrooms across the country, teachers make an interesting assumption: Attention must be given from within the child. The ability to mentally focus, attend, and sustain concentration over a period of time is an internal process developed in early childhood.

All the right ingredients in the external world will ensure that development. The wrong ingredients will hinder it. Can today's children growing up bombarded by fast-paced visual media be receiving the wrong ingredients? Can U.S. children who watch an average of four hours of television daily get enough of the right ingredients? Over the past ten years I have scoured dusty library shelves at universities to find information on what I consider an obvious link to the growing numbers of children who have trouble paying attention.

In her now classic contribution to understanding media's impact on brain development, Dr. Jane Healy states in *Endangered Minds*:

"A 'good' brain for learning develops strong and widespread neural highways that can quickly and efficiently assign different aspects of a task to the most efficient system...Such efficiency is developed only by active practice in thinking and learning which, in turn, builds increasingly stronger connections. A growing suspicion among brain researchers is that excessive television viewing may affect the development of these kinds of connections. It may also induce habits of using the wrong systems for various types of learning." (Healy, p. 183)

A mature attention span comes with a mature brain. As children develop "those widespread neural highways" Healy refers to, they also develop control and focus of higher level cortical function... namely an attention span. Yet, with the continuing over-diagnosis and mis-diagnosis of ADD, it seems as if an attention span were some magical treasure only to mature in a select few, instead of a normal, natural process for all. Recent research at the National Institute of Mental Health conducted by Peter Jensen concluded:

"Extensive exposure to television and video games may promote development of brain systems that scan and shift attention at the expense of those that focus attention." (Jensen, p. 46)

To many parents and teachers this is not a new revelation. In countless homes, child care centers, and classrooms, we see children with more impulsive behaviors, less willing and able to

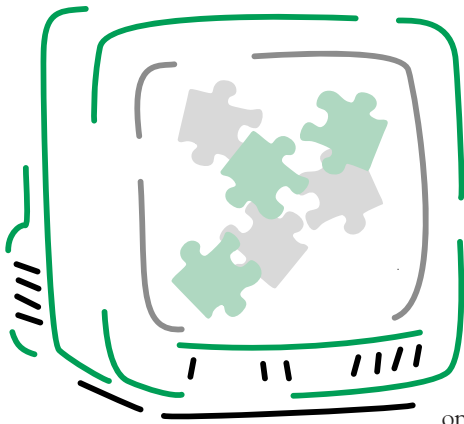
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persevere through challenging mental tasks, hyperactive, reactive, with little or no impulse control. Research confirms that children who watch TV or play video games for more than two hours daily will most likely exhibit one or more of these characteristics.

Let's take a look at how this works inside the brain and what we can do about it. First of all, visual images must be noticed. Do an experiment. In the evening with the lights low, put your head at an angle to the television. Wait for a commercial. Then try not to look. Try as hard as you can. What you will find out is that it is



virtually impossible not to look. The quick change of images on the screen activates the brain's "orienting response," discovered by Pavlov in 1927. We humans are programmed to look at abrupt changes in our visual field—even in our peripheral vision. It's part of our survival mechanism. The colorful, quick images on TV or a video game are difficult for low brain systems to resist.

Secondly, the earlier children acquire a passive TV habit, the more likely attention span will not develop normally. Young children can be entrained to keep watching TV. The faster pace of the images they are watching, the more likely they will keep watching and the more likely the child's attention span will be jerked around. The pacing of the TV program or movie determines that the child will watch one image for 3 seconds, another for seven seconds, another for five seconds, and so on. Since the images change rapidly so does the shift of the child's attention.

Dr. Jerome Singer, a distinguished researcher on children and television at Yale University states:

"...commercial television with its clever use of constantly changing short sequences, holds our attention by a sensory bombardment that maximizes orienting responses... We are constantly drawn back to the set and to processing each new sequence of information as it is presented... The set trains us to watch it." (Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi, p. 139)

Contrast this externalized control of attention with the internal control required while participating in a self-directed play activity. The child, not a scriptwriter or producer, determines how long he or she will attend to individual tasks.

And the last, important point is displacement of self-directed, challenging mental tasks ensures an undeveloped attention span. When youngsters are in self-directed activities exploring their environments, they are talking to themselves, making choices, and directing their own attention. Metacognitive abilities are blossoming along with mindfulness. But, in over 90% of American homes, the television is on for 7 hours and 44 minutes each and every day!! A major distraction from the internal landscape! As young children try to focus their budding attention on a mental challenge in the 3-D world, the 2-D world blares and beckons. It's so easy for the youngsters to continually stop what they are doing and look at the screen. A

constant stream of interruptions disengages the child's inner speech during the self-directed experience. Concentration and sustained attention become more and more fragmented, eventually disappearing. Now the child is no longer constructing personal meaning internally through thinking processes and self-talk—the child's attention has been "captured" by the saliency of the external image. Internal control of the attention span diminishes as the child becomes a spectator. When this happens for hours every day throughout early childhood, the likely outcome is a rambunctious brain.

What We Can Do

1. Limit TV viewing. By age 5, youngsters in the United States have amassed at least 5,000 hours of television viewing. That's the equivalent time it takes for an adult to earn a 4-year college degree! Our youngsters and their brains need much more time doing than viewing! Practicing concentration and attention skills is best done through concrete experiences in the 3-D world. The more self-directed these activities, the more opportunities for the attention span to develop. Time spent as a spectator of the 2-D world of TV and video must be limited, ideally to 5-7 hours a week.

In their book, *Television and the Quality of Life*, Robert Kubey and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi point out:

"A child who is left for hours in front of a television set with nothing else to do, a child who has never been encouraged to independently create information—who does not know how to draw, how to make music, how to pretend, or even how to read—such a child cannot be expected to turn the set off. The child is condemned to develop a viewing habit, the choices determined by the poverty of the environment." (p. 201)

Research demonstrates that the viewing habits of toddlers and preschoolers will likely become their viewing habits as adults. It is imperative to start teaching healthy TV habits early.

2. Provide mental challenges on an on-going basis. These can seem simple to adults but such parental actions as giving youngsters choices, asking them questions, providing materials for play rather than a lot of expensive toys, requires attentive concentration on their part. A puzzle instead of a video game, a trip to an art museum instead of a movie sometimes, an aquarium for the child's bedroom instead of a TV—these are gifts which will nurture the development of an appropriate attention span.

3. Don't fill children's time every minute. Being afraid of boredom won't serve our children. Boredom, or down time, is a necessary part of developing intrinsic motivation, along with deep understanding of one's own creative process. To develop the ability to concentrate, youngsters must be left alone to acquire ingenuity and inventiveness. As the poet Eve Mermaid said, "It takes a lot of slow to grow!"

4. The temptation to fill leisure moments with TV should be avoided. One great alternative is to plug youngsters into a story on audio cassette, instead. It can be as convenient as television for most parents and it is so much more effective for developing young attention spans. With the visual image, there is no need to use the imagination. Listening to the symbolic system of language in the form of a great story, however, requires attention. The youngster must conjure up internal visual images, along with sequencing them into a coherent whole, while

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predicting information and actively constructing meaning from what is heard. That's a lot of brain gymnastics which exercise the attention span. Reading aloud to children and talking with them often will have the same effect. In fact, when parents in my workshops ask me: "What's the one best thing I can do to help my child's attention span?" my answer is, "Make sure your child spends twice the amount of time immersed in language activities (being read to, singing, talking, etc.) than he or she spends watching TV."

5. Choose television programs and videos which have a slower pace and mimic real-world rhythms more closely. A steady diet of sensational, fast-paced images will trigger more reactions than responses and can make children at risk for learning and attention problems later. Also, refrain from purchasing any video-game system before the child is 10, if at all possible. By then, children would be much less likely to be conditioned by video games and it will be so much easier for parents to enforce time limits and game choices. Also, they won't be as easily hooked on violent games if they start later. By age 10 most children's brains will have matured enough to enjoy a good mental challenge and trigger-happy violent games will be less satisfying to them.

Our youngsters can develop the mature attention spans they need for effective thinking and problem-solving skills in today's complex world, given the time and space to do so. In a media age such as ours, I think it is important to share this message with parents and teachers we know. When a teacher says, "But the kids don't have an attention span, so I teach in 10-minute bites"...or parents assume their children can't entertain themselves without a TV on, we can point out: "The normal course of human brain development naturally leads to a well-developed attention span." **Let's make sure we give our children brain-compatible activities on a regular basis, no matter how challenging that is for us. It's sure worth our effort.**

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Parent Education Group

6 weeks, beginning June 29, Tues., 7-8:30 pm

Facilitated by Ruth Suth, MA, LCSW, you will learn new information and share with other parents:

- Understanding the paradoxes of Neurobehavioral Disabilities
- Parenting your child (K-5 grade)
- Coping with social skills deficits
- Dealing with anger, frustration, and disappointment
- Understanding family dynamics
- Discovering self-esteem builders and busters

Class size is limited. For more information or to register, call **Cate at (847) 933-9339 ext. 222.**

Parent Connections

As parents of children with neurobehavioral disorders, we often face many challenges unique to having children with these special needs. While a supportive friend or sympathetic family member is always appreciated, it can be helpful to talk with others in similar circumstances. That's why Parent Connections was formed.

Parent Connections is an opportunity to:

- Participate in an informal, parent-led group comprised of other parents
- Share ideas on what has worked for you and your child
- Benefit from the experiences and suggestions of others
- Discuss issues or concerns you may have about your child
- Receive support and network with other parents
- Act as a mentor to a newer parent or be assigned a mentor

Parent Connections meets periodically throughout the year. There is no fee to participate in this program. For more information, contact Cate Gonley at Rush Neurobehavioral Center at (847) 933-9339, ext. 222.



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Why Social Skills Matter

Clark McKown, Ph.D.

For many people, social skills are synonymous with good manners. For those who are socially skilled, nothing could be more commonsensical. For those who struggle, social skills are anything but commonplace. In fact, social skills include a complex of cognitive and behavioral abilities that operate rapidly, automatically, and in coordinated ways across an amazing variety of situations. Social skills include general knowledge of social conventions, as well as the ability to read others' emotions, to interpret others' intentions from their behavior, to define social problems, to respond to flexibly to a variety of social situations, to inhibit inappropriate behavior, and to reflect on the impact one's own behavior has on others. Our social skills are so automatic, that most of the time, we are not aware of our social skills as we use them. But imagine what life would be like if you suddenly were stripped of your knowledge of social convention and your ability to read social cues. Suddenly, the role of social skills in daily life would become painfully clear.

As this thought experiment suggests, having well-developed social skills matters. Children who are socially skilled are able to enter new social situations with ease. They successfully initiate friendships. They interpret others' behavior and intentions rapidly and accurately. They engage others cooperatively and when they talk with others, they demonstrate give and take. Children with these skills are more likely to be well-regarded by their peers and to have friends. In addition, their friendships tend to be more satisfying, trusting, intimate, and lasting. Perhaps most important, peer acceptance and trusting friendships are related to emotional well-being. For many, social skills are also be related to academic success, especially when academic success depends on cooperation with peers and on good relations with teachers. Finally, children with social skills become the adults who are able to negotiate the vast range of social challenges that inevitably accompany adulthood.

In contrast, children who do not have well-developed social skills may have difficulty understanding social situations. They may not know how to initiate friendships, or they may do so in ways that put peers off. They may misinterpret others' intentions, leading to unsatisfying interactions. They may not know how to engage in reciprocal conversation. Children without social skills are have fewer friends, and their friendships are less trusting, intimate and lasting. In addition to reducing quality of life, the social isolation that can result from poorly developed social skills increase the likelihood of anxiety and mood disorders. Social skills problems can affect academic achievement. And social problems can spill over into adulthood, affecting marriage, family, friendship, and work.

There are many reasons that children have social problems. A variety of neurodevelopmental disorders are associated with social challenges. For example, about half of children who are rejected by their peers have conduct problems. About one fifth are anxious or depressed. Many children with attention problems and learning disorders are not well accepted by their peers. Children with Asperger's syndrome and autism also have a very hard time socially. Many children who otherwise are free of neurobehavioral problems have difficulty engaging peers in a satisfying way. While the nature of the social skills deficits is different for these different groups of children, the outcome is similar and very serious.

The good news is that social skills can be taught. Individual, small group, and classroom-based social problem solving skills training approaches are effective in promoting children's social skills. Although there are a great many

variations on this intervention approach, they share several features. First, the therapist or teacher works to teach skills such as reading social cues, identifying social problems, and thinking before acting. Then children are given the opportunity in the group context or in their daily lives to practice these skills. Through direct teaching and guided practice, children can develop the skills to negotiate the social world of their peers with greater success.

When the clinical staff at RNBC hear from parents that their child has social problems, we recommend a formal assessment to evaluate the child's social information processing strengths and weaknesses. If we think the child would benefit from support in developing social skills, we recommend specific ways to help. There is still much to learn about social skills. Improved assessment tools are badly needed. Research on what treatments are best for which children has not yet been undertaken. Still, we know that social skills are critical to mental health and success in life, and we have some useful tools for helping children develop those skills.

Perhaps one of the most amazing thing about children who struggle with social problems is what they teach us about ourselves. The social skill that we employ in daily life makes the complex social structure of human civilization possible. And yet our social nature is so fundamental to daily life that we hardly even notice it. Meeting people for whom these basic social processes are a mystery—and imagining a world in which no one were endowed with social skills—teaches us a profound lesson about the basic foundation of our shared humanity.

Teen Summer Program

June 21-24 and June 28-July 1, 2004
2 pm-5 pm each day • Monday-Thursday

This group experience is designed for high-school aged boys and girls (entering Freshman through entering Seniors), with social-emotional learning issues. Together we will work to create an environment to support self-awareness and personal change in a peer centered space. We will also aim to have fun while engaging in a variety of group experiences.

Joshua Mark, LCSW will lead the program. If this group sounds right for someone you know, please call Cate at (847) 933-9339 ext. 222.

Your Child's Peer Relationships: The Role That Parents Can Play in Helping Their Child Experience Social Success

Michael Balthazor, PhD

Some children seem to make friends effortlessly while other children experience the greatest difficulty in establishing relationships and fitting into their peer group. Thus, despite seemingly typically developing cognitive abilities and a desire and wish to have and make friends, many children continually stumble and bumble their way through social encounters.

Studies have estimated that as many as 10 to 12% of children experience rejection from their peer group. It can be heartbreaking for a parent to watch their child sit on the periphery of the playground, to see their child repeatedly fail to get phone calls, play dates, or birthday party invitations. As described in the preceding article by Dr. McKown, the risks of poor social development are many including poor mental health, dropping out of school, poor employment history, etc. Indeed, the single best predictor of adult adaptation is the adequacy with which a child gets along with other children.

Individual therapy is often not effective for socially marginalized children. Simply providing advice in a clinician's office about desirable social behaviour seldom leads to change. Children need to develop skills in actual situations where they lack them. However, children with social difficulties do not learn by osmosis--it is not enough to simply put them in a group of children and hope for the best. It is also not enough to simply change schools or neighborhoods in the hopes that by giving your child a fresh start with a new peer group, that this will help correct their social difficulties. Indeed, studies have shown that children who are unpopular in one setting quickly reestablish their social status with unfamiliar peers. Time alone is also not a sufficient recourse to addressing a child's social problems--studies have shown that a child's social status tends to be stable over months and years. For many children experiencing social difficulties, they need to be explicitly taught social skills in much the same way that someone would learn a foreign language.

The following are suggestions for parents that are designed to help their child who is not fitting in socially. The suggestions are not meant to take the place of a comprehensive social skills group, but rather, are designed to be ways that parents can play a role in fostering their children's social success.

- Encourage your child to invite one or two other children over for an activity. These play dates can be arranged with other peers from the local neighborhood or school.
- When arranging play dates, encourage your child to select peers that match his or her academic and nonacademic strengths and interests.
- Structure the play dates initially so that they revolve around a defined fun activity. This will help the other peer build in a positive association with your child. Some activities will lend themselves more to opportunities for your child to practice social skills (e.g. going bowling, going to a waterpark) than others (e.g. going to a movie or watching a video).
- Initially it may be helpful for parents to focus on one or two behaviours that need improving. As your child becomes competent with those behaviours, more can be added.

- During the structured play dates or in other peer interactions, try to catch your child engaging in prosocial behaviours, especially those behaviours that need improving such as taking turns or sharing.
- If you see that your child has mishandled a situation, it will be more helpful if they were given information about how he or she should handle it rather than being punished or told to stop the inappropriate behavior. For example, there may be times when your child hasn't shared or let a child take a turn. Rather than telling him or her to stop, it would be more helpful to tell them, "children don't like it when _____, they like it when you _____."
- Initially when arranging play dates, invite just one or two children over initially rather than a larger group of peers. Children don't need to be popular to thrive. They just need one or two best friends. Research has shown that having even just one important friendship within the peer group is sufficient to provide a child with a sense of social acceptance and to buffer them against feelings of loneliness and perceptions of low acceptance. So, the message is to focus on having your child develop a relationship with one or two special peers rather than trying to fit in with the peer group as a whole.
- After a play date, briefly discuss with your child the things that went well during the get-together. This can be especially helpful in changing their social self-perceptions regarding their popularity and effectiveness in social situations. Children who believe that their peers do not like them can be adversely affected by their perceptions. These negative self evaluations may lead to avoidance or a reluctance to exert the effort necessary to interact successfully. Studies have shown that when children with social difficulties are led to believe that they were liked by a group of peers, they are better received by their peers and behave more competently than children who were not given information about their popularity.
- Because your child will have a much easier time with concrete information in the social realm, it would be very helpful to videotape some of the social interaction activities and then let him or her watch the videotapes. While the videotape is being watched, you can point out those interactions that went well and talk about more appropriate ways to interact when things did not go particularly well.
- Let your child know that some of their initial attempts at making friends may not be entirely successful. Unpopular children who acquire a reputation or "negative halo" may not initially receive positive feedback for the prosocial behaviours they dispense. When children use skills appropriately, but get a bad response, they need to be encouraged to try again rather than being discouraged.



Social Development Groups

Social development groups are available for children ages 4-17. Children are grouped with others in the same age group who have similar needs in terms of social development. Social development groups are available throughout the year. Groups are run by RNBC psychologists, social workers and educational consultants. Each group typically consists of eight one-hour child sessions and two parent consultations. For information on current social development groups, call Nadine at (847) 933-9339, ext. 235.



Executive Function Checklist

One of the leading contributors of academic and behavioral problems in children today is the increasing demands placed upon their executive function skills, and to compound the problem there is often no supports in place at home and school to develop these functions. Executive functions are the brain processes that underlie planning, organization, decision-making, attentional, and behavioral regulation. Keeping up with the demands of academic productivity can seem a daunting task for children, especially children just learning executive control behaviors and for children with executive dysfunction. Knowing that all children's executive function skills are on a continuum and developing into early adulthood has important implications for interventions. Establishing environmental supports that will help children fully develop their executive functions, ultimately may help them reach their full potential by turning supports into behaviors that become routines.

Here are some typical behaviors found in children with executive function issues:

- Starts projects or assignments without necessary materials
- Does not leave enough time to complete assignments
- Skips steps in multi-step task
- Has difficulty relating a story chronologically
- "Jumps the gun" socially
- Wastes time doing a small project and fail to do the big project
- Has difficulty identifying what material to record in note-taking
- Written work is poorly organized
- When given three things to do, remembers only the first or last
- Loses important papers or possessions
- Fails to turn in completed work
- Has difficulty getting started on tasks, which may appear as oppositional behavior
- Appears distractible and/or impulsive
- Picks smaller, immediate reward over larger, delayed reward
- Runs out of time before completing assignments
- Has good ideas but doesn't get the job done
- Has difficulty making transitions and/or coping with unforeseen
- Doesn't check to insure that each step is completed
- Under- or Overestimates the time needed to finish tasks
- Doesn't check work before submitting it
- Exhibits inappropriate or over-reactive responses to situations
- Starts tasks but may not finish
- Cannot find clothes, shoes, toys, book, pencils, etc.
- Doesn't realistically evaluate performance in school

Meet Our Tutors

RNBC is committed to creating effective interventions for students with Executive Function Deficits. Executive Functions are the mental processes that underlie goal setting, planning, sequencing, prioritization, and organization skills essential for school and life success. RNBC's goal is to intervene multi-dimensionally with the child, the school, and the family to establish regular behavioral and cognitive routines that maximize planning, organization, and decision-making thus building the brain basis for success.



Anthony G. Vandarakis joined Rush Neurobehavioral Center as a tutor in January. With five years of teaching experience in the Chicago Public School System, Mr. Vandarakis has taught

students ranging in age from eight to seventeen; his concentration in middle school and high school was in Reading/Language Arts and English. He is a Golden Apple Graduate, an accredited gifted educator as well as a S.T.A.R.S. team facilitator. Mr. Vandarakis completed his undergraduate degree with Honors at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois, his master's degree in education with Distinction from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Currently he teaches at William B. Ogden Elementary School.



Tara Montgomery recently joined RNBC as a tutor in Executive Functioning. Prior to joining RNBC, she worked for 6 years in the Learning Development Department at Lake

Forest Country Day School. Her previous experiences include teaching in a self-contained setting for students with learning and behavioral disabilities, and tutoring in private practice. She earned her Undergraduate degree and M.A. in Learning Disabilities from Northwestern University. She is also certified as a tutor by the Wilson Language Training program. Tara lives in Skokie with her husband David, and their son, Christian.



Susan Gustavson began tutoring for Rush Neurobehavioral Center in September 2003. She earned her B.S. in Special Education as well as Mathematics from

Boston University. She is presently working on her Master's in Computer Science at Loyola University. Susan taught for three years in Fort Worth, Texas at an inner city technical high school. She then moved to Chicago and taught for five years at Englewood High School. Presently, she is teaching Mathematics at Whitney M. Young Magnet High School and has been for the past three years. Through the years she has worked with students with a wide range of behavioral as well as learning disabilities. She has developed curriculum and assessments to meet each of these students needs.

William Eric Calderón teaches at the William B. Ogden Elementary School. He was graduated from a Chicago Public School, continued his education at NEIU and obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Education, majoring in Social Science and Bilingual Education. He currently teaches eighth-grade students in the Pre-International Baccalaureate Gifted Program. He also facilitates new teachers in The Golden Teacher's Mentor Program. He teaches Executive Functioning in conjunction with Rush Neurobehavioral Center (RNBC) under the supervision of Ms. Shartrina Amato and Principal Kenneth M. Staral as well a tutoring students utilizing Executive Functions at RNBC in Skokie, Illinois, enhancing student's organizational skills and ensuring academic success.



RNBC's belief is that our work has only begun when we see, evaluate, and make recommendations for a child. Implementation of our recommendations and interventions with the child, their school and their family is fundamental. So is continuing to work with our patients until we've helped them maximize their potential and the improvements that are possible. As a part of this process, RNBC trains teachers to work with students who have executive function deficits. Shartrina Amato, Director of Educational Programs, works with the teachers on a weekly basis. We would like you to meet our team of dedicated teachers.

Steve Onorati teaches Reading and English Language Arts to 6th, 7th, and 8th grade regular education students and the Pre-International Baccalaureate program at William B. Ogden

School, 24 West Walton Street, in Chicago. Mr. Onorati began his educational career under the direction of Mr. Kenneth M. Staral, Principal, in 1996. Steve earned his degree in Elementary Education at DePaul University with endorsements in Middle School, Language Arts, and Social Science. He is working closely with Ms. Shartrina Amato-Robinson incorporating Executive Functioning skills within Ogden School's upper grade curriculum. Mr. Onorati also mentors new teachers and facilitates teacher leadership courses with the Golden Teachers Program of the Chicago Public Schools.



Seth Raman has been working at RNBC as an executive functions tutor since September. He received his undergraduate degree in political science from Northern Illinois

University and his Masters Degree in education from Loyola University Chicago. He has taught for Project Upward Bound, a federally funded college prep program through Loyola University for Chicago area high school students. Seth has also worked with Glencoe McGraw-Hill, editing and correlating multi-state standards to education textbooks. He has extensive experience teaching special education students, having taught at Proviso Area Exceptional Children High School in Maywood for three years. For the past three years, he has worked in Roscoe Village for Chicago Public schools as a junior high teacher.





Summer Success Skills

Ed Dunkelblau, PhD

Ahh, summer. Pencils, books and bone chilling cold are replaced by picnics, ice cream and hours more of daylight. Children make the transition from the highly regimented activities of school to the opportunity for more freedom, more “at home” time and the flexibility to do activities out of doors.

Just recently, I was at a friend’s house for dinner. His young teenage son, Drew asked to be excused from the dinner table. As he was leaving I asked where he was headed and he responded “I’m going to hang out with my friends”. Now being the emotional intelligence advocate that I am, I thought “that’s great”. “He is getting out of the house, he’s meeting his friends and he’s developing those all important social interaction skills.”

Drew then proceeded to walk upstairs to his room and loudly shut the door. It seems that when he “hangs out” with his friends, it constitutes playing a game on the computer with three or four of his buddies sitting in their rooms at home playing the same online game concurrently.

I have nothing against computer games. In fact I have frittered away a few hours playing Tetris and Sim whatever myself. But I am aware that children are spending less and less time in unstructured free play together with others of their age group. This means that they have fewer and fewer opportunities to learn how to meet others, how to join in, how to develop relationships, how to resolve conflicts and to generally learn the skills necessary to get along well with other groups of people.

While it is important that children learn social emotional skills at school, it is equally important that they continue to learn and practice these skills at home. Summertime provides a multitude of opportunities for parents to encourage, teach, and help their children practice these skills.

The social emotional abilities that are so important to our children’s success include:

- the ability to identify and express feelings
- the ability to handle ones impulses
- the ability to deal with others’ reactions in the context of a positive relationship
- the ability to work together as part of a team and
- the ability to make good decisions and problem solve.

In their book *Emotionally Intelligent Parenting*, Elias, Tobias and Friedlander describe a method for helping children problem solve effectively. The method includes:

- Identifying your feelings
- Identifying the problem
- Setting a goal
- Thinking of possible solutions
- Weighing the pros and cons of each solution
- Picking the best solution
- Planning out the solution and scanning for problems
- Doing the planned solution

When your child presents a difficulty that he or she is having, rather than solving the problem for your child, it can be very helpful to help them work through this problem-solving methodology.

Summertime can be prime social time. Try to have your family take advantage of all that our beautiful Chicago summers have to offer.



Save the date

Wednesday, October 6, 2004, will be RNBC’s eighth annual benefit dinner to be held at the Four Seasons Hotel, Chicago, Illinois for information call 847-933-9339.

The 2004 Pearl H. Rieger award will be given to **The Landmark School**, for the significant difference it has made in the lives of children with neurobehavioral disorders.

This year, the Center will present **Harvey Alter** with the Living Proof Award. This award honors an individual with neurobehavioral differences, who has successfully over come such challenges.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

RNBC presents...

Interventions for Children with Social Emotional Learning Disorders (SELD): Helpful Approaches for Children with Nonverbal Learning Disability, Asperger’s Syndrome, and High-Functioning Autism

Oakton Community College
1600 East Golf Rd., Des Plaines

Friday, November 12, 2004
8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Info: 847-933-9339, ext. 222

(continued from front page)

Non-Rx Way

become students themselves. (You need to learn about your child's issues are before you can teach them.) Then, you're ready.

As an example, children with limited social competence seldom get major help from their family. It is a foreign concept for the family to think that they teach their youngster to identify facial expressions to learn if people are happy or sad. Yet, you can be that teacher, and you can have fun in the process.

Each day take out a few photographs of family, friends or people your child recognizes from the movies, sports or TV. Talk about the pictures and teach your youngster to recognize how the person in the picture is feeling. You will be amazed at how fast you and your child make progress and the fun you have in the process.

There are numerous other ways that you can develop the skills your child needs, and it is an exciting journey to figure out how to help them grow. **(For a starting point, read the list of issues and resources that accompanies this column.)**

In summary it is vital for the family to see themselves as having a primary role in teaching their children with neurobehavioral issues. We all teach our youngsters. Now, we must realize that taking on that role is a powerful tool. No one but you can have your impact to use it for the good of that special child you love.



READINGS

- Wilens, T. E. (1999) Straight Talk about Psychiatric Medications for Kids. New York, New York: The Guilford Press
- Duke, M. P., Nowicki, S., Martin, E. A. (1996) Teaching Your Child the Language of Social Success Atlanta, Georgia: Peachtree Publishers, LTD.
- Thompson, S. (1997) The Source for Nonverbal Learning Disorders. East Moline, Illinois: Lingui Systems, Inc.
- Kranowitz, C. S. (1998) The Out-Of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Integration Dysfunction. New York, New York: The Berkley Publishing Group
- Tanguay, Pamela B. (2001 and 2002) NLD at Home: A Parents Guide and NLD at School London/Philadelphia. Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Klass, Perri and Costello, Eileen (2003) Quirky Kids. Ballantine Books
- Faherty, Catherine (2001) Asperger's: What Does It Mean to Me? Future Horizons

VIDEOS

- Lavoie, R. (1994) Last One Picked...First One Picked On: Learning Disabilities and Social Skills. PBS Home Video: WETA, Washington, D.C.
- Rothbart, C. (1999) A Celebration of Differences. Northbrook, Illinois: Ceil Rothbart and Associates/Video Fx

WEB SITES

- NONVERBAL LEARNING DISABILITIES: <http://www.nldline.com>
- NLD ON THE WEB: www.nldontheweb.org
- LD ONLINE (section on NLD)
www.ldonline.org/id_indepth/general_info/general.html
- ASPEN of AMERICA: www.asperger.org
- Dr. Mel Levine: http://www.allkindsof_minds.org
- The Schwab Foundation for Learning: <http://www.schwablearning.org>
- Tony Attwood: <http://www.tonyattwood.com>
- My School Days: www.socialskillbuilder.com
- Subtle Expression and Micro Expression Training Tools: www.emotionsrevealed.com



Founded in 1997 the Rush Neurobehavioral Center brings together professionals from multiple disciplines to address the diagnosis and treatment of children with neurobehavioral issues. RNBC's unique contribution is the understanding of each child's strengths and weaknesses within the context of the family and school. From this knowledge individualized interventions are developed, implemented, and monitored.

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Our Take

Melissa Buckles-Haley

Last summer I called L.D.A. United because I wanted a support group. I wanted to go out and do things like other people my age did, but that is that is difficult for me because of my nonverbal learning disability. They did not have one, but they told me I could write for their website.

I started the web page ldaunited.com/teen_connection.htm in an effort to find a place to network with other students who have L.D. On the web page I have written my story, resources for social opportunities, and books I have found helpful. The website itself has pages for parents, elementary school children, college information and books.

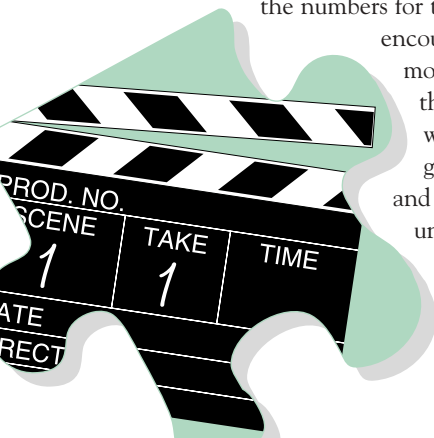
I am not a take charge person, and maybe you aren't either. I just thought about something I wanted to happen. Then I found the numbers for the LDA Association. My tutor encouraged me to get involved and my mother coaxed me to call, something that is hard for me. It took a lot of work, though, and my success came gradually. I had to go to a meeting and then write the web page. I did not understand what to do but a teacher in the group gave me advice. Writing was difficult for me. I had to redo the piece many times. Now I am waiting for

people to share their stories with me on the L.D.A. United website.

In addition to producing the web page, I am the founder of a social club for learning disabled students. Nancy Miner, Outreach Manager of Western Dupage Special Recreation Association helped me start it last summer. The purpose is for students in grades 9-12, who have a learning disability and are going to college, to socialize with others and have fun in a safe environment. Sometimes we discuss problems we are having at school and our plans for college. We share our fears and joys. We do activities that our peers might otherwise do on a weekly basis, but that we don't do because of our difficulties with social cues.

Activities are decided by the group on a quarterly basis. Some of the things we have done are: movies, Starbucks, board games, school functions, Christmas shopping, mosaics, miniature golf, dinner, and rubber stamping. This summer we plan to go paddle boating, to a drive-in movie, skating, on a cabin camp out and maybe sailing. Even if Western Dupage is not your Special Recreation Association, you can still join. For more info contact Nancy Miner at Western Dupage Special Recreation Association, (630) 681-0962 ext. 21, or email her at nancym@wdsra.com.

So to you I say, above everything else, work hard, don't give up, and don't let someone prevent you from doing something just because you are learning disabled. Reach for the stars and keep your dreams in sight!



Data regarding children's fears and behavioral problems were obtained with the Revised Fear Survey Schedule for Children, the Child Behavior Checklist, and NBF was assessed using a computerized neurobehavioral evaluation system. Significant correlations between childhood fears and NBF measures and somatic complaints were found.