



CHANGING MINDS

To educate, inform, inspire and empower people in order to affect positive change in attitudes and treatment for psychiatric illness.

Beyond the Child with ASD *By Robin Marker*

Article featuring Judith Coucouvanis, MA, PMHCNS-BC, a psychiatric nurse practitioner and clinical specialist at the University of Michigan Department of Psychiatry, Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

On September 8, 2010, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center Division of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry hosted a Mental Health Symposium where Judith Coucouvanis, presented *Strategies that Help: Managing Extreme Emotions of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)*. Her presentation objective was to describe the relationship between cognitive rigidity and extreme emotion in children with Autism, and giving strategies that help these children develop more flexible thinking.

Cognitive rigidity is an inability to turn one's attention away from a dominant stimulus or to pay attention to more than one stimulus at a time. Because of this problem, children with ASD often develop "tunnel vision". They are unable to consider all of the possible solutions to a problem, or all of the ramifications of their behavior. Rigidity can cripple the child's ability to develop positive relationships, it affects problem solving abilities, compromises the ability to manage emotion and self control and in some cases can result in serious legal consequences.

Children on the Autism Spectrum love predictability. They like knowing that the same thing is going to happen every single time without question. But in an unpredictable or unfamiliar situation, they are often afraid of making the wrong choice and are often dismayed at being unable to control the outcome. When a child with ASD is placed in an unpredictable situation, attention must be given to the child's verbal or nonverbal cues. These cues can indicate an upcoming meltdown. If the child is going to a new environment, prepare the child ahead of time with pictures and explanation. This preparation can reduce the amount of stress on the child when going into a new environment or place.

When the child experiences extreme emotion, or a meltdown, it is important to note that it always occurs for a reason. It may not be obvious to an adult, as it could be stress that has been accumulating for the entire day. It could be many "small" things that only affect the child. The child may not even realize they are near crisis mode, thus their meltdown seems to occur "out of the blue". It is helpful to assess these extreme emotions by noting the time of day when they occur, the setting and the person who is with the child.

Anxiety is frequently overlooked as a primary cause of extreme behavior challenges for children with ASD. Anxiety can range from mild to severe and children are often unable to recognize, monitor or manage their personal stress reactions. *(continued on page 3)*

Volume 5 Issue 3

Fall, 2010

Special points of interest:

- Beyond ASD
- Respite Services
- Parent Education Series

Inside This Issue

More Than Behavior	2
The Power of Strength	3
Announcement and Events	3
Respite Services	3
Connect the Dots Resource Information	4

Let's Take A Moment *by Julie Daisey*

Becoming a parent changes you forever. Parents connect to their children through hopes, ideas, plans and dreams for the future. Children are seen as the reflection and extension of our very being.

Having a child with a disability or mental illness most always profoundly impacts parents. Hopes and dreams are altered, shortened or forgotten. Parents spend countless hours finding treatment, affording treatment, coordinating schedules and daily life. They spend a tremendous amount of energy going to and talking with therapists, doctors, teachers and other adults, only to go home to their child to



implement in their home what the above energy was spent on. It may seem at times, that having a child with mental illness interrupts life, yet at the same time it is life. The life of a parent is spent teaching, guiding, caring for and nurturing hopes and dreams.

It is said that a child fills a space in your heart you never knew was there. Though the steps may seem tiny and the road long, it is this connection between parent and child that fosters resiliency and promotes growth, turning hopes and dreams into reality.

Let's take a moment to be thankful for those unexpected spaces that bring

unexpected joy.



More Than Behavior by Joy Chadwell

When it comes to changing behavior, sometimes the most basic things can make the greatest impact. In behavior modification, the same techniques are used over and over, but with individual spins designed for each child. In my work as a behavior specialist, I find that adjustments in the following areas can really make a difference between a child who has a problem behavior and a child who succeeds in doing well. Hopefully you can tweak some of these ideas for your child.

What kind of organization does your child need?

Organization can help children to feel safe by making things predictable for your child. Ever lose your car keys? Then you understand what it means to be upset when you can't find something. Organization helps us "find" things like places, times and things. Some kids need organization of space. Some need to see their day in a visual format like a schedule. Some need pictures to aid their communication. In short, organization is a powerful tool to help your child and you have a better relationship. Just think! It may be hard to set up, but once you've done that, it is a lot easier to get through your day!

Avoiding Struggles

Avoid struggles by practicing planned ignoring. Planned ignoring is a powerful tool. It cannot be used for everything. However, it clearly tells your child that his or her problem behavior is not okay. It is okay to ignore minor misbehaviors like door slamming. Simply turn your body 90 degrees away from your child. Watch your child out of the corner of your eyes. The second your child stops misbehaving, simply turn your body back towards him or her. Your body language alone can turn some behaviors around!

Decode body language. For some strange reason, we tend to take body language for granted. However, a lot of children struggle with understanding the body language of others. In fact,



they often struggle to recognize their own body language. Has your child ever screamed that he or she wasn't angry with clenched fists, red face and defiant posture? Your child probably doesn't understand his or her own body language. Help your child understand body language by telling your child about how different emotions look, breaking down pictures of people in different situations, watching movies and then guessing what will happen next based on the body language of the characters. Flashcards and books are also great tools for this. Have fun with it! Turn it into a game that you can both enjoy.

Have a "Can Do!" Attitude

Recognize abilities and train step by step. Did you learn your alphabet in one day? I bet you were like me and had to repeat it hundreds of times until you had it down pat. Some things are really hard for your child to learn, but it is the practice that helps the learning process. Try breaking down all tasks into smaller and smaller steps until your child can demonstrate success. Every time your child does well with a small step, praise him or her. String a few small steps together and you may have a whole new positive behavior to replace the problem behavior. The important part is to praise your child and offer consistent encouragement (and maybe even candy!) as he or she learns.

Keep a Behavior Log

Make 3 columns. Write down what was happening just before your child's problem behavior in the 1st column. Write down exactly what the problem behavior looked like in the 2nd column. In the 3rd column, write down what happened immediately after your child's problem behavior occurred. This can help you understand the

pattern behind your child's behavior. Most children have problem behavior for 4 reasons: 1) to gain access to an item or a privilege, 2) to get away from something they don't like - especially demands or limits, 3) to gain your attention and 4) because it simply feels good. Your therapist can use the log to discover the patterns underlying your child's behavior and create a specific plan to change the behavior.

Keep Control Over Your Own Emotions

Children look to their parents and other adults as their models for how to operate in the world. For that reason alone, it is important to keep control over your emotions. However, your child may actually try to make people frustrated just to get what he or she wants (ever give in?) or just to feel like they can control something (Ha ha! Made you mad!) Your emotions can actually become the prize they are after. Instead, try to keep your body language from displaying anger. It is okay to state you are upset, but try to keep it from showing in your body so you don't end up with a child who feels better just by making you upset.

Remember that behavior modification is a learning process. Learning takes time! Maybe you have tried a certain technique before. But how long did you try it for? *(continued on next page)*





More Than Behavior *continued*

(Traditionally, 2 weeks of consistent application are needed to see progress) How many variations can there be for that technique? Each technique should be tailored to your child's particular problem. Not every child wants to work for tokens, but Susan might work for time watching TV with you. Maybe Antonio can't tell you what coping skill he wants to use, but can point out a picture of a coping skill he wants to use if the pictures are on a key ring to flip through.

Best Wishes!!

*Joy Chadwell; B.S. Psychology
Behavior Specialist MHS II
Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center*

The Power of Strength

by Yvette Collins



Fall has made its entrance bursting forth; causing summer to dissolve into a memory. For some, the exit of summer was so quick there wasn't time to say goodbye.

Fall is bittersweet as it reminds me of those drives when I would visit my daughter in the hospital surrounded by cascading leaves in brown, red and yellow.

I'm reminded how short life is and how we must take in the beauty of our surroundings to give us strength through the worst times of our lives.

Take the time to step outside of the strain and overwhelming tasks of life long enough to absorb the beauty. Allow these moments to bring forth your strength.

Take a walk, breathe in the air and see the iridescent colors of the leaves freely falling. Experience the freedom from stress, like the leaves flowing in the winds of time.

Beyond the Child With ASD *continued*

Often children are expected to accomplish all three of these tasks yet they may not even be aware of their personal stress reaction, let alone manage it.

To move from rigid to flexible thinking, the child needs help understanding that often there is more than one way, one answer, one opinion, one direction or one choice for every situation. To help the child move to more flexible thinking; we can set the stage, teach flexible thinking, make the unpredictable more predictable when appropriate, and teach emotional regulation. Adults sometimes trigger extreme emotional behavior by giving a child with ASD too much language too fast, giving too many directions at a time, giving directions which are too complex, not giving enough transition time between activities, failing to offer other choices and failing to recognize our own increasing stress level. Sometimes parents hold their children to a higher standard, make assumptions, blame the child or others, are rigid and inflexible and fail to recognize the child's sensory issues.

Visual supports are a great asset in teaching a child with ASD flexible thinking. They can help provide predictability and build consistency for the child and the entire family. Help the child set up a "new" routine by developing a new routine for the problem/situation (visual if possible). Make sure everyone in the family goes along with this new routine and give your child some control over the routine. For example, job cards give the child some control over decisions. If you give the child a note card for every job, such as homework, getting dressed, brushing teeth, etc., the child can put these cards in whatever order he/she chooses, thus adding predictability. This child will be in control and can make his/her own predictable routine.

A visual schedule is also another great tool for children who have rigid thinking. The schedule can change from day to day, but the child has a specific place to check and see what is happening for the day, thus lowering stress levels.

Remember to tell the child that there is always more than one right way and there is always another way. We can model flexibility to children by practice. Help the child anticipate and plan for the unexpected, by setting up "what if" situations and continue discussing "what if's" in multiple circumstances.

As a parent, learn to recognize the signs of stress which may be subtle or obvious that signal an extreme emotional reaction. Make a list of behaviors, compare notes with others, discuss the list with your child when calm and develop a monitoring plan that the child can use. Use schedules, new routines, and visual supports until the child decides they're no longer needed. It is not up to you to decide when supports are no longer needed; it is up to the child. The most common reason for failure is failing to develop a successful plan and to stick with it.

Lastly, Ms. Coucouvanis challenged attendee's with a bit of wisdom that works for parents of all children. When addressing actions to correct the behavior of a child, use the 5 year rule. If the behavior will not impact the life of the child in 5 years, don't expend energy in a battle with the child today. Only address those behaviors today that will impact the child tomorrow socially and interpersonally. (*see Connect Dots for links*)



UPCOMING EVENTS

Parent Education Series—Cincinnati Children's Hospital Division of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
5642 Hamilton Ave / 6:00pm—8:00pm ; RSVP 513-636-7808 or FRC@cchmc.org

December 1st **Ask-A-Doctor Night**—Learn about DSM, diagnosis and treatments from a psychiatrist

December 8th **Developmental Disorders**—Learn how to cope when your child has a development disorder

December 15th **Holiday Preparation**—Tips and ideas to keep everyone safe during the holidays

January 5th **IEP Night**—Understanding and writing an IEP and the parents' role in the process

January 12th **Behavior Management 101**—Learn behavior coping skills and techniques

January 19th **Bipolar Disorder**— Learn the signs, symptoms, and treatment of pediatric Bipolar Disorder

January 26th **Ask A Pharmacist Night**—Have a discussion regarding psychiatric medications

December 2, 2010— **Peaceful Parenting**—A workshop for parents on a mindfulness-based approach to Peaceful Parenting.
Call Kim Chapman at 513-231-6630

As we're approaching **FLU SEASON**, please be aware that Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center Visitor Policy restricts visitors under the age of 17. Expect this policy to take effect by the beginning of December.

"We need your stories" Parents, families and practitioners all benefit from sharing knowledge of and emotional insight to the myriad and complex facets of mental health. Please consider sharing your story with us. E-mail the editor at yvetta.collins@cchmc.org

Changing Minds Editorial Staff

Editor: Yvetta Collins, Clinical Reviewer: Sergio Delgado, MD
Contributing Editors: Julie Daisey and Robin Marker

This newsletter is a free, parent driven publication. Nothing contained in this newsletter should be substituted for a professional's diagnosis, advice, or treatment. Reading this newsletter constitutes an agreement to hold harmless all contributors for anything contained in this newsletter. To receive electronically or hard copy please contact editor at yvetta.collins@cchmc.org

Hamilton County DDS
Support Services for children with disabilities
513-794-3300

The PGC's Regional Respite Care Summit III—
Options, Services and Supports
December 1, 2010— 12:30—3:30p
RSVP: janet@dsagc.com or
513.761.5400

Bulding Blocks for Kids
Meeting health needs of children that are not met due to lack of insurance, assistance or resources
www.bb4k.org

Connect The Dots

Connection to Resources and Respite Services



Reference Links from
"Beyond The Child With ASD"

Tools and tips for designing your new behavior plan
http://www.challengingbehavior.org/do/resources/teaching_tools/ttyc_toc.htm

<http://www.asperger.net>
<http://www.FHautism.com>

CITE Partnership for Children Respite Care
Brianna Meader
513-619-2931

Camp Alyn Stepping Stones
Respite & year round services for children with disabilities
513-831-4660
www.steppingstonescenter.org

DDS Autism Respite Program
<http://www.hamiltonmrdd.org/services/autismrespite.aspx>