

# Autism Update

C H R I S T I A N   S A R K I N E   A U T I S M   T R E A T M E N T  
C E N T E R ' S   Q U A R T E R L Y   N E W S L E T T E R

## TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS

### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Learn some ways to address social skills!
- Discover how to help get your child with autism ready for school!
- Learn what our fall/winter HANDSmades will cover.
- Find out about exciting research opportunities.

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As you think about school starting, you are likely thinking about the many academic skills your child will learn. But school is actually a great place to work on all areas of need, not simply academic skills. One major area that can be addressed through the schools is social skills. Just as it is important to provide your child with support for communication or educational skills, it is also important to teach your child better social skills.

Social skills can be taught in many settings and through a variety of methods. Given the difficulty many children with ASDs have in generalizing their skills, it will be helpful to use a variety of meth-

ods and settings to help your child learn the material.

With social skills, as with nearly any skill that you teach your child, a specific sequence of steps should be taken. First, teach the skill one on one with the child. In this setting, an adult and a child can focus on mastering the skill in a very controlled environment. It may be necessary to break the skill down into smaller steps and teach each of those first before putting them all together. Because social skills are best taught when the child can practice the skills, even if skills must be taught one-on-one, the child should also practice the skills in a group setting. Once the child can successfully do the skill

one on one, begin to slowly incorporate other children



into the teaching sessions. Begin by adding in just one other child, then a couple, then a few more. Once your child has mastered the skill in teaching sessions with other children, begin incorporating the skill into natural settings and incorporating other people. For example, to teach a child to take turns using toys, begin by having one toy sitting between you and the child. Using any supports necessary (e.g., visual prompts, modeling) practice each taking a turn and then giving the toy to

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## AUTISM TIP: GETTING READY FOR BACK TO SCHOOL

Children with autism often find comfort in routines and repetition. As a result, transitioning from one thing to another can be a difficult process.



Even small transitions, such as from snack time to recess, can cause struggles for a

child with ASD. It is therefore not unlikely that larger transitions, such as from being at home all summer to starting school in the fall can certainly be a difficult process.

The following tips are provided to help you support the transition process for a child with autism. Keep in

mind that each child is unique and not all strategies will be effective for all children. Consider these tips a starting place, you may need to individualize or alter these tips to meet your specific child's needs.

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## TOPICS FOR FALL / WINTER HANDSMADE

The HANDSmade series is a monthly series made possible by a grant by Autism Advocates of Indiana in which professionals from the Christian Sarkine Autism Treatment Center lead one-hour discussions on topics relevant to those who live and work with individuals with autism. Some discussions are geared towards parents, others towards educators, and others towards health care professionals. No direct or individual consultation will be provided at this event. Additionally, in that childcare will not be provided, we ask the children not attend. Please contact Naomi Swiezy at 317-274-8162 with any questions about these event. Registration is required for these events and space is limited. Registration for fall/winter sessions will open in August. The fall/winter dates and topics

are listed below.

September 27, 2006 - 5:30pm

Partnering with your School for Parents/Caregivers Only

October 25, 2006 - 4:30 pm

Ongoing Behavioral and Educational Assessment in ASDs for Educators Only

November 22, 2006 - 8:00am

Behavioral Reduction in ASD: Functional Assessment to Repetitive Behaviors for Health Care Providers only

December 20, 2006 - 5:30pm

Reading Comprehension in ASD for Parents/Caregivers and Educators

January 24, 2007 - 4:30pm

Partnering with the Families of Children with ASD for Educators Only

February 28, 2007 - 5:30pm

Communication and ASD for Parents/Caregivers and Educators

All Parent and Educator sessions are held at Clarian North Hospital Learning Center, 1st Floor. All Health Care Provider sessions are held at Riley Outpatient Center, Ruth Lilly Conference Center, Lower Level. You can register online at our website: [www.HANDSinAutism.org](http://www.HANDSinAutism.org) Please check online or call Melissa Maynard at 317-274-1091 in August to register for fall/winter sessions.

## AUTISM TIP CONTINUED

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**Tip 1: Start the transition process early.** Give your child at least 1-2 weeks, possibly much more time, to understand what will happen.

**Tip 2: Provide the child with a visual image of where s/he will be going.** This can either be done by physically taking the child to visit his/her new room and teacher OR by showing pictures of the new setting to the child.

**Tip 3: Use visual supports to explain the transition process to the child.** This could be done any one of a number of ways. For example, pictures of the new room and teacher could be incorporated into a social story that explains when the child will start going to the new school and what will happen there. Another option would be to use a large calendar that indicates the day when school will start. Have the child check the calendar each day and mark off days as they pass

so s/he can see when the new placement will begin.

**Tip 4: Adjust the morning routine BEFORE the first day of school.** A frequent difficulty for any child at the beginning of the school year is having to adjust to an earlier bedtime, and earlier wake time, and a busier, more time-crunched morning routine. These adaptations may be especially difficult for a child with autism. To ease the transition process, it often helps to slowly alter the child's routine over the course of a few weeks. Begin putting your child to bed earlier and earlier each night, until s/he is going to bed at the time necessary for school nights. Begin waking him/her earlier and earlier each morning until s/he is waking up at the time necessary for school mornings. In the weeks before school begins, have your child follow the morning routine s/he will need to follow for school, even if s/he doesn't need to go anywhere that



day. Practice getting up on time, getting dressed, eating breakfast, brushing teeth, and being ready to walk out the door by the appointed time. You may want to plan some morning errands for those weeks so that you actually leave the house once your child is dressed and fed, so s/he gets used to leaving the house after breakfast.

**Tip 5: Practice patience.** Despite all your best efforts, the beginning of the school year still may be a hectic, stressful time for your child (and therefore you!). Remember that as time passes, your child will adjust to his/her new routine and things will get easier. If necessary, on a hectic day, take a few seconds for yourself. Count to ten, take a few breaths, walk out of the room. Although some mornings may be chaotic and difficult for your child, eventually you will work out a system to make mornings work for you and your family. Be willing to adjust the morning schedule or to provide additional supports for your child as needed.

## U P C O M I N G E V E N T S

There are always lots of activities going on here at the Christian Sarkine Autism Treatment Center. This section of the newsletter will help you know what is planned over the next few months. You can also check our website for up-to-date information about all of our events!

### J U L Y , 2 0 0 6

4 – Clinic Closed

17-21 – HANDS in Autism Training for Professionals;  
Hands on training for professionals working  
in educational environments  
There is a fee for this event, see page 5.  
Advance registration is required, see below\*

24 – Next Steps Workshop for **Grandparents Only!**  
5:30–7:00pm  
Advance registration is required, see below\*  
Clarian North Learning Center, 1st Floor

26 – HANDSmade Series: Positive Behavior  
Supports/Behavior Reduction in ASD  
5:30–6:30pm  
For **Parents/Caregivers and Educators!**  
Advance registration is required, see below\*  
Clarian North Learning Center, 1st Floor

### A U G U S T , 2 0 0 6

26 – HANDSmade Series: Role of Educators in ASD  
4:30–5:30pm  
For **Educators Only!**  
Advance registration is required, see below\*  
Clarian North Learning Center, 1st Floor

\* You can register for these events on our website:  
[www.HANDSinAutism.org](http://www.HANDSinAutism.org) No phone registrations  
will be accepted. **It is critical to cancel prior to the  
event if you will not be attending. Space is limited  
and you may be preventing another from attending  
if you do not relinquish your spot.** Please contact  
Melissa Maynard at 317-274-1091 with questions  
about these events.

### S E P T E M B E R , 2 0 0 6

4 – Clinic Closed

6 – Make It Take It: Visual Schedules  
5:00–7:00pm  
Advance registration is required, see below\*  
Riley Outpatient Center, Ruth Lilly Learning  
Center

27 – HANDSmade Series: Partnering with your School  
5:30–6:30pm  
For **Parents/Caregivers Only!**  
Advance registration is required, see below\*  
Clarian North Learning Center, 1st Floor

### O C T O B E R , 2 0 0 6

4 – Make It Take It: Visual Schedules  
5:00–7:30pm  
Advance registration is required, see below\*  
Riley Outpatient Center, Ruth Lilly Learning  
Center

25 – Next Steps Workshop for Parents  
6:00–7:30pm  
Advance registration is required, see below\*  
Clarian North Learning Center, 1st Floor

25 – HANDSmade Series: Ongoing Behavioral and  
Educational Assessment in ASD  
4:30–5:30pm  
For **Educators Only!**  
Advance registration is required, see below\*  
Clarian North Learning Center, 1st Floor

## SOCIAL SKILLS CONTINUED

(Continued from page 1)

the other person. Once the child can successfully do this, bring in another child to practice the skill, and then a few children. Once the child can share toys in structured situations, begin practicing the skill during leisure activities and other settings where it might naturally occur. This system of teaching the skill in small steps can help the child not only learn the basic skill, but also generalize it.

When teaching social skills, it is often useful to include typically developing peer buddies in the process. Peer buddies are more likely to respond to a social bid than another child with autism, thus encouraging the child with autism to initiate social bids again. They can also model appropriate behaviors for the child with autism.

Skills can also be practiced through role plays. A role play looks a lot like actors reading a script. Pick a common situation that is difficult for the child (e.g., asking another child to play) and write out what each child would say. Then, have the child and either a peer or an adult read the script together. Encourage the children to talk about the role play and what else they could have said or done. An advantage to using scripted role plays rather than simply



having the child act out what he or she wants to is that the child rehearses the skill appropriately rather than practicing it incorrectly. By rehearsing role plays repeatedly, the child can learn an appropriate response to a situation and be more likely to use those practiced responses when faced with a similar real-life situation.

Social stories can also help support the child. These are comprised of simple sentences that describe a situation. They begin with information about why the situation occurs and include information about appropriate response options from the child. An advantage to using social stories rather than simply discussing the event with the child is that a social story is much more concrete than a conversation. Because it is written down, the child can read the exact same description of the situation each time rather than hear an adult tell a slightly different explanation each time. A social story should be provided and rehearsed with the child prior to the situation known to elicit difficulties. By reviewing the story in advance, the child will be better able to appropriately respond when the situation actually occurs.

Regardless of the strategies you use with your child, keep in mind that most children with autism have a strength in visual processing. Although children with autism may have difficulty processing

and understanding words, information that is visually presented is much more easily understood. You can use pictures in addition to words in the social stories and role plays discussed above. You could also provide visual prompts to remind the child what to do or say (e.g., a card that reminds the child to wait, a "help please" card that the child can give to an adult). By using pictures in addition to words the child is more likely to fully understand what is expected of him or her.

Whenever you decide to teach your child a new skill, it is important to individualize the material to your child's needs. If your child avoids social settings, you may need to start by working on basic skills such as saying hi and bye. If your child has a great deal of social interest but lacks the skills to have a conversation, it may be useful to work on issues like starting and maintaining conversations. You could also focus on how to take turns, why to share toys, or even how to order food in a restaurant. Nearly everything people do is social in some sense, so there are many areas that could be addressed. While you can work on many of these skills at home, it is also important to consider which skills could be taught at school. Although you may initially think of school as a place to learn academics, remember that it is a place to learn all functional skills: including social skills.

## CHECK OUT OUR NEWEST RESEARCH STUDY!

### Recently Diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

You are invited to participate in a research study looking at the short- and long-term effects of receiving a diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in one's child. With your help, we can learn more about the process families go through to get a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder for their child as well as better understand the different variables that can help a person adapt to his or her situation.

If you choose to participate, you will complete a survey packet now and again one year from now.

The packet should take approximately 40 minutes to complete. You will receive a \$10 Wal-Mart gift card after completing each survey packet. All personal information will be kept confidential. You are eligible to participate if:

-Your child has been formally diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (Autism, Asperger's disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder,

Not Otherwise Specified [PDD-NOS])

-This is your first child to be diagnosed with an ASD

- Your child was diagnosed less than 6 months ago

You can complete the survey packet online at:

<http://mypage.iu.edu/~mlstuart>

Or request a paper copy from

**Melissa Maynard at (317) 274-1091, [mlstuart@iupui.edu](mailto:mlstuart@iupui.edu)**

WE'RE ON THE WEB:

WWW.IUPUI.EDU/~PSYCDEPT/AUTISM/

CHRISTIAN  
SARKINE  
AUTISM  
TREATMENT  
CENTER  
QUARTERLY  
NEWSLETTER

702 Barnhill Road Room 4300  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
Phone: 317-274-8162 Fax: 317-278-0609



Riley Hospital *for* Children  
Christian Sarkine Autism Treatment Center  
A Clarian Health Partner

### Mission Statement

The Christian Sarkine Autism Treatment Center at Riley Hospital for Children is committed to helping children and adults with autism and related disorders to achieve their potential and to participate as fully as possible in family, school, and community life. Interventions are based on the individual goals and objectives of the family. Interventions typically involve medication management, behavioral strategies, special education consultation, and/or counseling and reflect the most recent and empirically supported approaches to treatment. There is frequent coordination with the occupational therapy services in the hospital. Individuals and families may be offered participation in research projects. Services may be provided in a time-limited or ongoing fashion.

**If you would like to receive this newsletter by email, please contact Stacie Pozdol by phone at 317-278-4888 or by email at [spozdol@iupui.edu](mailto:spozdol@iupui.edu)**

## DON'T MISS THESE ONGOING RESEARCH STUDIES THAT ARE CURRENTLY ENROLLING:

### Caregivers of Children Novel Pharmacological Strategies in Autism

The Christian Sarkine Autism Treatment Center at Riley Hospital for Children is conducting a Research Study for children and adolescents aged 6 - 17 years old who have Autism. If your 6 - 17 year old has Autism, he or she may qualify for a research study involving study medication and clinic visits with a child psychiatrist and qualified research staff at no charge. The purpose of this study is to find out if the medication, aripiprazole, is helpful for the treatment of irritability, aggression and/or self injurious behavior as

well as to determine if adding the medication, D-cycloserine, improves social behavior in children and adolescents with autism. Participation requirements and risks involved in this study will be disclosed prior to study enrollment. If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please call **(317) 278-9766**.



### A Randomized Controlled Trial of D-Cycloserine in Children with Autism

The Christian Sarkine Autism Treatment Center at Riley Hospital for Children is conducting a Research Study for 3 - 12 year old children who have Autism. If your 3 - 12 year old has Autism, he or she may qualify for a research study involving a new study medication and clinic visits with a child psychiatrist and qualified research staff at no charge. This study is looking at this new study medication as a treatment for improving the core symptoms of autism including social responsiveness. Participation requirements and risks involved in this study will be disclosed prior to study enrollment. If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please call **(317) 278-9766**.

### IN OUR NEXT ISSUE:

- \* Information on our November Conference
- \* Details on our winter events
- \* Tips for the holidays!
- \* Information about our new grants
- \* Reports on our recent presentations