



CST CHATTER BOX

The More You Know: What is Autism?

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a general term for a complex disorder of brain development. ASD is characterized by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviors. In the newest version of the DSM-V diagnostic manual, all previous Autism related disorders were merged into the diagnosis category ASD. Previous diagnoses included autistic disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder – not otherwise specified, and Asperger syndrome.

ASD can be associated with intellectual disability, difficulties in motor coordination and attention, difficulties in speech acquisition and communication, and physical health issues such as sleep and gastrointestinal disturbances. Some people with ASD excel in certain areas such as visual skills, music, math and art. ASD appears to be linked to early brain development; however, most symptoms emerge between the ages of two and three.



How common is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism statistics from the CDC identify around 1 in 68 American children on the Autism spectrum. Autism is also four to five times more common among boys than girls. It is estimated that 1 out of 42 boys and 1 in 189 girls are diagnosed with Autism in the United States.

What Causes Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Scientists and researchers have been unable to pinpoint an exact cause of Autism. It is believed that Autism is more than likely a combination of several factors. Most cases of Autism appear to be caused by a combination of genetics and environmental factors influencing early brain development. Advanced parental age at the time of conception (mother and father), maternal illness during pregnancy, and birth difficulties are all considered factors that may increase

the risk of Autism.

What Does It Mean to Be “On the Spectrum”?

Each individual with autism is unique and can have a completely diverse set of abilities. Many of those on the autism spectrum have exceptional abilities in visual skills, music, and academic skills. About 40 percent have average to above average intellectual abilities, or IQ’s. Indeed, many persons on the spectrum take deserved pride in their distinctive abilities. Others with autism have significant disability and are unable to live independently. About 25 percent of individuals with ASD are nonverbal, but can learn to communicate using other means.

Where Can I Find More Information About Autism?

The above information was mostly gathered from www.autismspeaks.org. Autism speaks is a great resource to find out more information regarding diagnosis, symptoms, prevalence, and general facts about Autism. The site also provides current research articles about Autism, support information, as well as ways to become involved as an advocate for Autism.

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Special points of interest:

- ☺ Autism Awareness
- ☺ Book Recommendations
- ☺ Recreational, Social, and Parent groups
- ☺ Behavior Tips
- ☺ Parent Advocacy

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Learning through Literature

Many times, parents can feel disconnected to other families around them because of the special, complex, and specific needs that their children may have in comparison to others. Support can come in various ways, and literature and books are one medium. The following is a list of recommended books that may be helpful to parents of special needs children:

We Said, They Said: 50 Things Parents and Teachers of Students with Autism Want Each Other to Know

by Cassie Zupke. This book guides parents, teachers and school administrators. The book is set up into two parts, with 25 things parents wish they could say and 25 things teachers wish they could say. An easy read

with short chapters. Topics relate to the parties working together collaboratively so they can figure out how best to help a child.

Chicken Soup for the Soul: Children with Special Needs: Stories of Love and Understanding for Those Who Care for Children with Disabilities

by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Heather McNamara, and Karen Simons

Surely an uplifting read for anyone touched by a child with special needs. Real life stories relate to functioning as part of a community, reaching milestones, creating opportunities, as well as fostering appreciation and inde-

pendence. Parents and educators can relate to the everyday challenges and celebrations.

No More Meltdowns - Positive Strategies for Managing and Preventing Out-Of-Control Behavior

by Dr. Jed Baker

Stressful meltdowns happen anywhere- at a store, in a restaurant, at school and in the home. This book offers parents and teachers strategies for preventing and managing meltdowns with a focus on a 4-step process related to managing emotions and using strategies to deescalate a meltdown and prevent future meltdowns.

More Community Resources!

There are plenty of resources available for this fall of 2015 in Morris and Sussex County!



SNAP Sports Clinic (Special Needs Athletic Programs)

aims to ultimately integrate special needs children into the recreational leagues. There are still spots available for yoga classes, soccer sports clinic, and tae kwon do!

Visit www.snapclinics.org for more details and to sign up online!

Pathways for Exceptional Children

is an organization that empowers children of all abilities to find their passions and to maximize their potential, equipping them with the skills to fully participate and be included in their schools, community, and ultimately the workforce. Their fall 2015 program schedule is now available. Some sports programs include bowling, flag rugby, tap & hip hop, and volleyball. They also provide literacy

programs for children in kindergarten to 2nd grade for students who are struggling with reading and comprehension. Life skills programs such as "Learning through life shopping skills" and "intro to being a disc jockey" are also provided. Employment and rock band programs are available for students ages 11-21. Learn more about the children's programs through www.pathwayskids.org.

Youth Advocate Program

in Sparta is running a social skills group and a yoga group for children. The Social Skills Group is for children grades 4-6. The group will be held on Saturdays from 9:30-11 am. The Yoga Group is for children to help with impulse control issues and mindfulness. This group will be on Thursday evenings from 5:30-7 PM. Call 973-729-3617

for more information.

Sussex Family Success Center at Project Self-Sufficiency is offering free parenting classes. Participants will learn about the different stages of physical and emotional development through childhood, as well as techniques for positive discipline and communication. All classes will take place from 6-8 PM. The sessions are free and open to the public. Registration is required. Contact 973-940-3500 or visit www.projectselfsufficiency.org.

The Montgomery Academy in Basking Ridge is offering a support group for parents raising children with developmental or intellectual disabilities. It is held the second Tuesday of each month from 6-8 PM.

RSVP: 908-223-1191 or aruiz@fso-hsw.org

Five Key Tips in Refining a Child's Behavior at Home

All parents can have that moment of feeling at a loss as to how to deal with behaviors. The question “What do I do now?” arises. Here are some tips:



1) A stopwatch or giving a child a warning can help decrease tantrums during transitions. A child will begin to realize that once the warning or the stopwatch goes off then the next step will take place. For example: “In ten minutes we are leaving the park to go home.” After five minutes you can say, “You have 5 more minutes to finish playing.”

2) Tantrums are also caused by a

child demanding something right away. You can say to your child, “First you will finish your dinner, then you can have ice cream.” You can even use a visual guide so your child can see what will happen first and then what will take place next.

3) When your child demonstrates

positive behavior, they should be rewarded. For example: “Good job putting your toys in the bucket.” This helps to reinforce the positive behaviors from happening again.

4) Focus on telling your child what you want them to do. For example: “Walk next to me in the store” versus “Do not walk away from me in the store.”

5) Stay composed and relaxed when redirecting behaviors.

Obtained from “<http://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2015/01/05/five-tips-helped-improve-my-childs-behavior>”

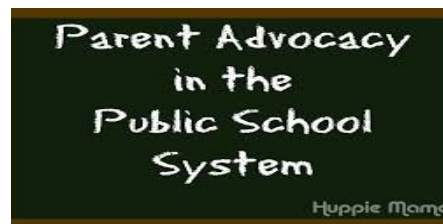
What is Parent Advocacy?

The educational system can be difficult to understand. It brings forth new programs, terminology, structure, criteria, and expectations to name a few. There are parent advocacy groups which can help you navigate the system. One of them is P.A.C.E.

ABOUT P.A.C.E.

P.A.C.E. (Parent Advocacy Council for Education) is a parent-to-parent support and advocacy group founded by Morris School District parents in 2008 but is open to all parents of children in all surrounding districts. Their goal is to work towards the understanding of, respect for, and support of optimum education for all children with learning differences. **P.A.C.E.** is a registered non-profit in the State of New Jersey. They plan district-wide presentations on topics of interest pertaining to children with special learning needs. They host discussion groups, maintain an online discussion board, and connect parents and caregivers with similar concerns and experiences.

They invite anyone interested in the education and welfare of children to join **P.A.C.E.**, both from within the Morris School District and from communities beyond.



CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Parents supporting parents is at the heart of PACE organization. Parents learn from each other, by sharing common experiences, advice, compassion and support. If you are interested in meeting others who share similar experiences and challenges, let PACE know and they will help you make a connection. If you have a question for other parents, please send it to:

PACE.msd@gmail.com

Shared Services Child Study Team

Wharton Borough Schools
973-361-3010

Mine Hill Township School (CAS)
973-366-0590

Rockaway Borough Schools
973-625-8605



The Shared Services Child Study Team has made it a goal to increase communication and Special Education knowledge with parents as well as teachers and administration within the three school districts. As part of this goal, you will now be receiving newsletters from the team three times a year filled with information on special education practices/law, community resources, special needs tips, etc. We hope you find this helpful!

Leslie Mozulay, LDTC
Stephanie Dzikowski, LDTC
Stacy McCoy, School Psychologist
Alexa Mignone, School Psychologist
Armi Clancy, School Social Worker

Get to Know Your CST

My name is Marie Giantomasi. I am an educational consultant who supervises the Child Study Team for Wharton, Mine Hill and Rockaway Borough.

I received a Bachelor's Degree from Montclair State University and a Master's Degree from Seton Hall University. I am licensed by the state of New Jersey to teach English and Spanish, to supervise instruction and to be a building or district administrator.

I started my career in education as an ESL/English teacher in Newark.

In 1998, I became an Assistant Principal at Morris Hills High School in Rockaway. Prior to supervising the Shared Services Child Study



Marie Giantomasi, Educational Consultant to the CST

Team, I served as the Director of Special Services for the Morris Hill Regional School District.

Outside of school, I enjoy spending time with my husband, two adult children and my two grandsons who are 3 and 1. I also enjoy walking, reading and spending time at the Jersey Shore (even in the winter).

I have enjoyed my time working with your children. If you need to be in touch with me, please contact the CST Office in the district where your child attends schools.